A Postmodern Framework for Quranic Hermeneutics

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Abstract : Post-Islamism assumes that the Quran should not be viewed in terms of what Lyotard identifies as a 'meta-narrative'. However, its socio-ethical content can be viewed as critical of power discourse (Foucault). Practicing religion seems to be limited to rites and individual spirituality, taqwa. Alternatively, can we build on Muhammad Abduh's classic-modern reform and develop it through a postmodernist frame? This is the main question of this study. Through his general and vague remarks on the context of the Quran, Abduh was the first to refer to the historical and cultural distance of the text as an obstacle for interpretation. His application, however, corresponded to the modern absolute idea of authentic sharia. He was followed by Amin al-Khuli, who hermeneutically linked the content of the Quran to the theory of evolution. Fazlur Rahman and Nasr Hamid abu Zeid remain reluctant to go beyond the general level in terms of context. The hermeneutic circle, therefore, persists in challenging, how to get out to overcome one's own assumptions. The insight into and the acceptance of the lasting ambivalence of understanding can be grasped as a postmodern approach; it is documented in Derrida's discovery of the shift in text meanings, difference, also in Lyotard's theory of différend. The resulting mixture of meanings (Wolfgang Welsch) can be read together with the classic ambiguity of the premodern interpreters of the Quran (Thomas Bauer). Confronting hermeneutic difficulties in general, Niklas Luhmann proves every description an attribution, tautology, i.e., remaining in the circle. 'De-tautologization' is possible, namely by analyzing the distinctions in the sense of objective, temporal and social information that every text contains. This could be expanded with the Kantian aesthetic dimension of reason (critique of pure judgment) corresponding to the i'gaz of the Coran. Luhmann asks, 'What distinction does the observer/author make?' Quran as a speech from God to the first listeners could be seen as a discourse responding to the problems of everyday life of that time, which can be viewed as the general goal of the entire Qoran. Through reconstructing koranic Lifeworlds (Alfred Schütz) in detail, the social structure crystallizes the socio-economic differences, the enormous poverty. The koranic instruction to provide the basic needs for the neglected groups, which often intersect (old, poor, slaves, women, children), can be seen immediately in the text. First, the references to lifeworlds/social problems and discourses in longer koranic passages should be hypothesized. Subsequently, information from the classic commentaries could be extracted, the classical Tafseer, in particular, contains rich narrative material for reconstructing. By selecting and assigning suitable, specific context information, the meaning of the description becomes condensed (Clifford Geertz). In this manner, the text gets necessarily an alienation and is newly accessible. The socio-ethical implications can thus be grasped from the difference of the original problem and the revealed/improved order/procedure; this small step can be materialized as such, not as an absolute solution but as offering plausible patterns for today's challenges as the Agenda 2030.
Keywords : postmodern hermeneutics, condensed description, sociological approach, small steps of reform
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