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Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî and Syrian Reformism

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a. Introduction

The Enlightenment brought about many multifaceted developments in Islamic world in political, intellectual and social fields. In this process, the assertion that Muslims are superior to the West in every aspect was seriously damaged. For the first time, the intellectual superiority of the West came to be recognized. Technological advancements achieved after the Industrial Revolution were the concrete signs of Enlightenment Thought and this gave the West a privileged position in the eyes of other countries. This was a physical and spiritual challenge and found its most powerful response in Muslim countries. Furthermore, the West played for Muslim countries the function of mirror. Muslim peoples find in this cheval glass an opportunity to see their faces closely. The picture that many intellectuals who travelled or went to various cities of Europe for education saw in the mirror was big many times more. Now everybody was in agreement on their underdevelopment and weakness in front of the West. While the West was making progress in military and technological fields, Muslims could keep up with this progress and fell behind. What remained was the question “why Muslims fell behind. This question was answered by many persons in different ways.¹

The question of how Muslims would get rid of this underdevelopment constituted the basis of new reformist movement² arising in the late 19th century and the early of 20th century. They were the main questions over which Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghânî, Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashîd al-Ridâ thought that why the

Ottoman State was defeated by the West in military and technologic fields, why it broke up and invaded. To their minds, the question was lying in the traditional understanding of religion, and to overcome this problem a religious understanding was needed which was purified from innovations (*bida'*) and superstitions, and compatible with the developments of the age. Therefore, the new reformists did not pose a reactionary attitude that saw the West and Western thought unconditionally as enemy. Associating the underdevelopment of Muslim world in the face of the West with the errors and deficiencies, they argued that the solutions to this problem should be produced in line with the internal dynamics of Islam instead of importing from outside. According them, the tension between the Islamic beliefs and modern values was not a genetic problem arising from Islam itself, on the contrary, it was merely a historical accident. Modern process was both requiring to repair this accident and making this possible.³ They showed, in this sense, an activist, modernist and eclectic appearance.⁴ This approach that is much more evident in the countries with colonial experience manifested itself under the different names varying from region to region such as Reformism,⁵ Islamicism,⁶ Jadidism⁷ or Salafism⁸. It never displayed an organized and homogeneous character structure and did not follow a linear development.⁹ Nevertheless, the common purpose of all was to seek an answer to the question how Muslims could make use of Western civilization, while maintaining their self-identity.

The discourse of reformists had a revivalist and reformist viewpoint rather than being a directly protest and fundamentalist one. This required the reinterpretation of tradition in line with the needs of time, instead of excluding it. What should be done was to produce solutions to some problems, which the tradition carried to the present day, in accordance with the spirit of the age, to activate the actual aspect of Islam and to make reformation in the present understanding of religion and scholarly tradition.¹⁰ Therefore, in their discourse, mainly an emphasis on reason became dominant which was inspired from the enlightenment philosophy. Accordingly, Islam was a religion attaching importance to the reason and determining it as a vehicle in understanding revelation. Any contradiction was not possible between reason and revelation, since the Quran, as the revelation itself, was calling man to use his mind and thus to understand the real message.¹¹ However, the tafsirs composed in the Islamic history caused, with a great deal of unnecessary information, the deviation from the message of the Quran and the break of the Quran from the social life. Therefore, the Quran had to be read as an activity of understanding.¹² Based on the Quran and Sunnah, Islam had to regain its former dynamism once again. This emphasis on the reason also gave rise to the different results such as the rationalization of faith. Debates of imitative faith-critical faith whose examples were amply seen in Islamic thought flamed up again in this process.¹³ This caused new interpretations to be made about the Unity of God (*Tawhîd*). The social and political crisis and fragmentation Muslims fell into was tried to overcome through the unifying and inclusive spirit of tawhid. Sectarian differentiations and polarizations

was attempted to eliminate through the social connotations of tawhid.¹⁴ This was unavoidably necessitating reviving the *ijtihād*, the legal independent judgment, without considering sectarian difference. *Ijtihād* was the lifeblood of religion and the claims that the door of *ijtihād* was closed from the 4/10th century onward was nothing but a fabrication.¹⁵ Islamic Law had a feature of changing without compromising its main principles and this dynamic perception of Shariat entailed the door of shariat to be opened again.¹⁶

The influence of reformism of which general outline is tried to describe did not only remain restricted to Egypt, but also played a stimulating factor for the reformist movements that simultaneously arose in many parts of Islamic world. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1866-1914)¹⁷, who lived at the same period in Syria, took part, with his original approaches, among the representatives of reformism in Syria. In this article, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and his reformist views will be dealt with in the context of Syria.

Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and Syrian Reformism

Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī spent almost all his life in Syria where from the very beginning of Islam was an important centre of learning. Syria in general, Damascus in particular continued to play a very significant center where the school of Hanbalism, which one way or another provided a basis for all reformist movements in the history, and Ibn Taymiyya and his disciples appeared. However, the amount of Hanbalites in the time of Qāsimī failed to fill the shoes of their predecessors.¹⁸ Thus, however Hanbalism did not have a direct influence on the birth of Qāsimī's and other Syrian scholars' views, in the formative period of their views, Hanbalism made a relative contribution to them through the works of Ibn Taymiyya and his disciples. In fact, the reformist movements of this region were nothing more than a distinctive reverberation of reformist movement in Egypt led by Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashīd al-Ridā.¹⁹ This, of course, arose from political and social reasons. In the period when Qāsimī lived, Syria witnessed many political, social, cultural and religious changes. This period was an extremely troublesome period not only for Syria but also for all of Islamic world. Some practices that the Ottoman rule embarked upon to maintain its boundaries and achieve the modernization led to the strengthening of local governments outside Istanbul. Particularly, the administrative, judicial and educational reforms put into practice in Damascus during the period of Reorganization (*Tanzimât*),²⁰ reduced the reputation and prestige of Muslim scholars (*ulamâ*). The reforms in question strengthened the control of central authority over Damascus, thus increasing the power of representation of people on the one hand, the laicism and some pro-western ideas that provided a basis for reforms caused the status represented by *ulamâ* to be criticized on the other.²¹ This pulled the *ulamâ*, who all along constituted the highest point of society, to the secondary rank, while putting ruling class one-step forward.²² Corollary to this, the ruling class fell out with the *ulamâ* and they criticized each other severely.²³ Religious and social loss of prestige of *ulamâ* of Damascus led

them to make self-criticism and criticize the common religious beliefs and inclinations. These developments were of the most important domestic factors triggering the rise of reformist thought in Damascus. As for the external factor, it was the ulama's relations with the reformists outside Syria, particularly with those in Egypt.

Relationship of ulamâ of Damascus with Egyptian reformists first began with correspondence. Afterwards, this relation strengthened through their works and writings. For instance, *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqâ* issued by Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghânî and Muhammad 'Abduh was a magazine that was seriously followed and curiously read in Damascus.²⁴ This magazine was later replaced by *al-Manâr* which was issued by Muhammad 'Abduh and his disciple Rashîd al-Ridâ. The influence of *al-Manâr* became much more than other, since it was not only read, but also played a role of intermediary vehicle through which Syrian reformist could issue their views and approaches.²⁵ In the second half of the 19th century, a social and cultural differentiation began to be observed between the ulamâ of Damascus and local notables and central administration. Simultaneous approval of 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Jazâirî's eclectic understanding of Islam by the ulamâ of Damascus instigated this. His international position, enormous wealth and liberal views gathered a number of ulamâ around him, thus an outstanding group who would lay down the foundations of reformism in Damascus came into existence.²⁶ Ahmad al-Jazâirî, brother of 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Jazâirî, 'Abd al-Razzâq al-Baitar, 'Abd al-Ghanî al-Ghunaymî al-Maidânî, Tâhir al-Jazâirî, Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî, his brother Salâh al-Dîn al-Qâsimî, Sâlim al-Bukhârî, 'Abd al-Hakîm al-Afghânî and 'Abd al-Qâdir b. Badrân were the prominent figures of this formation. They nor held the official positions, neither performed the most reputable duties, on the contrary, they were appointed more ordinary and local jobs.²⁷ Redefining the role of ulamâ on the one hand, redefining Islam on the other hand, they attempted to restrain the fall of the ulamâ. 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Jazâirî, 'Abd al-Razzâq al-Baitar and particularly Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî were the most remarkable figures. Apart from a few short works, nearly all reformists of Damascus did not leave behind the works in which the reformists views were elaborated. Qâsimî was the only exceptional of them, and with many works that he wrote during his short life, Qâsimî was the most important prime mover of reformism in Damascus.²⁸

Qâsimî was one of the most important representatives of a social class in Damascus whose all family were busy with learning, and thus he was the direct addressee of all of these developments. Accordingly, his early reformist views took on shape mostly on the basis of society in which he lived.²⁹ Starting his education at an early age, he was taught by the prominent figures of his time. He began teaching early in life and gathered many students and a considerable amount of people around himself.³⁰ He soon became a distinguished name among the intellectual figures of Damascus. Therefore, this caused Qâsimî to come under pressure of rulers. The "Event of Mujtahids", which he experienced at the age of thirty, was the first sign of this pressure. This event took place since

those around him misunderstood the scholarly meetings of higher rank held by Qâsimî and ten-odd friends of his. This intellectual togetherness was perceived as an attempt to establish a new *madhhab* called *Madhhab al-Jamâlî*", thus the local governors questioned its members.³¹ On the other, some prohibitions and restrictions put on press under The Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II further increased the tension of political atmosphere in Damascus. It came into question to ban the usage of many words implying the new views. Thereupon, many persons of different parts of scholarship of Damascus began to move to Egypt where the freedom of thought was more than that of Damascus.³² In the face of the hostile attitude of official ulamâ, reformists of Damascus, above all Qâsimî came to contact with the reformists outside Damascus and thus seeking consolation. They set up a reformist network that pursued the same aims through correspondence and travel. These contacts helped Qâsimî and his friends break their solitude and emerge an intellectual movement covering most part of Islamic world.³³ Nevertheless, these contacts did not relieve the pressures, but increased them. Voyages of 'Abd al-Razzâq al-Baitar and his friends to Egypt in 1903 and 1913 made important contributions to the intellectual world. The observations of Qâsimî and his meeting with such reformers as Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashîd al-Ridâ had a direct influence on the formation of his reformist views.³⁴ His intimacy with Rashîd al-Ridâ did not remain only restricted to Egypt, but he also played a leading role in inviting him twice to Damascus and making speeches to arouse indignation among people. During these speeches delivered at the Umayyad Mosque, since people accused him of being a wahhabî, they wanted to lynch him. In fact, in these speeches he drew attention to the fact that the Ottoman state and Muslims must be powerful and prepared in every aspect in the face of western powers' attempts to disintegrate the Ottoman state.³⁵ For these developments, Qâsimî who was charged with inviting Rashîd al-Ridâ to Damascus was held responsible.³⁶

Having a highly tempestuous life, Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî fit a bright career into his 49-year life. He was a person who paid much attention to learning and knew no bound in this matter. His venture of learning he began from his early life onward stepped him forward in his prime of life compared to other counterparts. However, he did not content himself merely with learning, on the contrary, with his analytic approach, he thought over the main problems that preoccupied Muslims and tried to produce solutions beyond the patterns of any *madhhab*. He left behind many disciples who after him would be the prominent representatives of reformism in Damascus, as well as a great number of works.

The Reformist Views of Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî

He effects of some practices the Ottoman state put into force as a consequence of westernization attempts found a strong response in Damascus just as it was the case in all centers in the early of the 20th century. The reforms revealed themselves as transport, communication, health and public works and financially made a great contribution to Damascus. Reformists had nothing to say for

such activities of modernization. Their concern was about the fact that such an uncontrolled innovation would paved the way for a cultural Westernization which would radically undermine the classical system of law and education.³⁷ Even though this situation seemed parallel with their reformist views, it was not the case. Such a process was leaving them completely out of the social structure. Their reaction to this situation differed from that of *ulamâ* who completely opposed the modernization and Westernization. They underlined that Islam is a rational religion and meets the needs on the one hand, they draw attention to the fact that the decline of Muslims in the face of the West stemmed from the misunderstanding of Islam on the other.³⁸ The understanding of Islam as required did not only play a natural driving force that would carry Muslims ahead of the era, it would also save Muslims from inferiority complex in the face of Western challenge. Owing to the reason-centered interpretation of Islam, the anti-religious, materialistic and atheistic discourses of Positivism would not be left in abeyance.

Such kind of discourse found a wide range of support in a society where the West continually underestimated attempts of modernization, although it turned its face to the West. Answers given by al-Afghânî to Ernest Renan's criticism of Islam³⁹ were not only followed closely in all over the Muslim world, they also encouraged other Muslim scholars. In this sense, among the reformists of Damascus the most systematic and comprehensive response to the Materialistic and atheistic discourses was given by Qâsimî. Using the main reference points of Islamic Philosophy, he moved the subject to the context of Tawhid, the unity of God. His work "*Dalâil al-Tawhîd*",⁴⁰ he composed in this connection, had a wide influence in the Muslim world. Referring to many theologians and philosophers including al-Ghazâlî, Ibn Taymiyya, Mollâ Sadrâh, Ibn Rushd, well-known in the West as Averroes, he attempted to ground the existence and unity of God.

Qâsimî placed the reason at the centre of his views of unity. To him, the reason was a vehicle to understand the unity, to put society in order and to control the nature.⁴¹ Muslims mustn't remain uninterested in this world, on the contrary, through this blessing, they must try to understand and discover his unity and evidence of his existence. However, in this point there was a traditional problem Qâsimî had to face, i.e. the nature of relationship to be established between the reason and revelation. Acting bravely, he put the philosophers' viewpoint at the center of his standpoint that regards the reason and revelation as two convenient realities with each other. It was impossible to see a controversy between reason and revelation; they were in need of each other. While the reason had a feature that establishes transfers and protects revelation, the revelation was introducing the basic codes of behaving, i.e. moral teaching, necessary for the public order to the service of reason. Accordingly, the points seen as controversy were not so in reality. This was merely an accidental case arisen from the fact that religion and philosophy dealt with the different aspects of truth.⁴² Thus, Qâsimî based the solution of probable disagreements to arise between the reason and revelation on the interpretation of revelation with the help of reason.

Qâsimî's all these argumentations concerning the relationship between reason and revelation were not of course in vain. With this, he aimed to show that Muslims should also learn natural sciences without being contented merely with religious sciences. According to this, to get information about the nature and learn about natural sciences, actively participation in developments in astronomy, physics, geology and anatomy would not decrease the faith of Muslims, rather would increase it. Therefore, it was unnecessary, while examining the nature and producing technology, to draw boundaries to the reason.⁴³

This point of view constituted the framework of Qâsimî for the answers he gave to the materialistic discourses, and instead of speaking through narratives; he made use of the rational argumentations. In his opinion, since the materialistic discourses were basing only upon the ideas produced through hypotheses, they had no reality. For instance, it was not possible to prove their views that an atom is the smallest substance that cannot be divided into pieces, and the space and matter are infinite. Likewise, it was impossible for Materialism or any ideology opposing religion to explain on its own the creation of the matter and its reasons.⁴⁴ Anti-religion discourse of these ideologies were not acceptable, rather they were potentially so dangerous that they could paralyze the social life. Religion was the most important insurance for the social order and security.⁴⁵

Qâsimî did not restrict the unity to the existence and oneness of God, on the contrary, in a wider framework; he saw it as the basis for Islamic union. According to this, the division of Muslims at present-day into smaller groups was the most important factor in Muslims' failure to form a social and political power. And this fact was contrary to the Islamic ideal of bringing Muslims together as "the faithful brothers". According to him, by putting differences aside, the Muslims should come together in a metadoxical creed. This creed should be an umbrella creed that, remaining within the limits of tolerance, could change the minor diversities into richness. People should not be accused of infidelity due to their different ideas, on the contrary, their wrong in the matter subject to *zann* should have been forgiven as long as they adopted *al-Ka'bah* as their *kibla*, and the shariah as their law.⁴⁶ According to him, *takfir*, declaring one an unbeliever, was one of the most significant diseases that at present surrounded Muslims and deepened the differences among them. It was a social requirement of *tawhîd* that Muslims see themselves as brothers, setting their chronic conflicts aside. In this sense, the first and urgent conflict to be brought to an end was Sunnite-Shiite conflict. In this, the *ulamâ* had important duties to do. The *ulamâ* had to act more positively and foresightedly instead of provoking conflicts. Qâsimî was calling Muslims to follow, for example, the way of al-Bukhârî who, without making any sectarian discrimination, reported hadiths from many persons of different madhabbs, as long as they were *reliable*, and saw no harm in doing this, and the way of al-Muslim who used in his *Sahîh* the narratives of many Shiite scholars.⁴⁷

Qâsimî saw the imitation (*taqlîd*) as the source underlying many conflicts among Muslims, therefore he showed, as other reformists did, a fierce opposition to the blindly imitation. He was of the opinion that imitation was the most important obstacle in using mind properly and thinking soundly. Imitation was a disease that made faith into a superficial fanaticism, and took the tawhid away from the level confirmation. According to Qâsimî, due to the disease of imitation, the heart of most people fell to pieces. Most people were first believing, and then reasoning. However, what should be done was otherwise. It was hardly to see those first reasoning, then believing. Upon this, after believing in something and confirming blindly, people were trying to seeking its argumentation. This was naturally led them to fanaticism and not to show tolerance toward the realities apart from what they believed in.⁴⁸

According to Qâsimî, imitation had also an institutional aspect, a firmly obedience to the practices of four legal schools. Such an imitation including in itself a sectarian fanaticism, was blocking the path of progressive legal interpretation, causing the endless innovations (*bida'*) to be introduced in worships.⁴⁹ What should be done was to make use of the main sources, i.e. the Quran and Sunnah that provided a basis for the formation of the views of imams of madhhabs, instead of accepting their views as they were.⁵⁰ Though he originally belonged the Shafite school, his arguing that every mujtahid's view, no matter which madhhab he belonged, could be accepted, and thus paying the way for *talfiq* arose from this viewpoint of his.⁵¹ On the other hand, according to Qâsimî, imitation was an event that took place independently of imams of madhhabs, since it had never seen that any imam called Muslims to accept only his views and reject the views of other imams.⁵² If any imitation had to be necessarily referred to, the former imams' method of *ijtihad* should be imitated, thus new things could be produced. Discourses that the door of *ijtihad* was closed were not also realistic, to say nothing of their being wrong, since the ways of solution put forth by *ulamâ* for the recently arisen problems were a sort of *ijtihad*. The fact that these solutions were not called *ijtihad* did not mean that they would not be regarded as *ijtihad*. As long as new *ijtihads* and technological advancements took place, the new problems would arise and attempt to solve them would not come to an end.⁵³

Conclusion

Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî was the most important figure who, with his works and disciples, shaped the intellectual frameworks of Syrian reformism. The main point that distinguished him from others was his classical education he gained at early age. In this sense, he played the role of a powerful bridge between the past and his time. He continually struggled with the intellectual dullness and deadlock of his age, but he did this with the language of past. Though he was aware of the problems of his age, he did not speak the language this age.⁵⁴ Therefore, in elaborating his reformist views, he did not use as much modern style as Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashîd al-Ridâ did.⁵⁵ A religious understand-

ing based upon the Quran and Sunnah, the primary sources of religion, was the main point of reference for the reformism of Qâsimî. Therefore, he is a salafî both in classical and modern sense. According to him, the Muslims of today deviated from this framework and jammed in a dead-end street where innovations and false thoughts prevailed. It is the duty of ulamâ to warn them about this matter and make it a part of process, which will stimulate the free Islamic thought. It is also a part of this duty to remove the dullness of thought that captured brains of most Muslims, thus deviated them from the pure way of Islam.⁵⁶ Because of this point of view, Qâsimî is also an activist and reformist.

REFERENCES

- 1 This matter was discussed with its different aspects in the following works written in this process to analyze the underdevelopment of Muslims compared to the western civilization. Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ, *al-Islâm wa al-Nasrâniyya ma'a al-'Ilm wa al-Madaniyya*, (Cairo, 1973); 'Abdurrahman Kawâkibî, *Umm al-Qurâ*, (Beirut, 1982); Shakîb Arsalan, *Li mâdhâ Taahhara al-Muslimûn wa li mâdhâ Taqaddama Gayruhum*, (Cairo, 1930); Muhammad 'Omar, *Hâzir al-Misriyyîn wa Sîr Taahhirihim*, (Cairo, 1902).
- 2 Although it is possible to find revivalist movements related to the terms *islâh* and *tajdid* in different ways in various periods of Islamic history, until the modern period, it found the strongest manifestation through Ibn Taymiyya and his pupil Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya in the 14th century. In a crisis era when the Mongol invasion broken out and surrounded Islamic lands all around, they maintained that Islam had to be turned back to its original form, by having been purified from all superstitions and innovations; in this sense they were the reference sources for the reformists in the modern period. So, many reformists in various Islamic regions took a special interest in providing and publishing Ibn Taymiyya's works. For the further information about the relation between Ibn Taymiyya and the new reformists, see. Zafir al-Qâsimî, *Jamâl al-Dîn Qâsimî wa 'Asruhû*, (Damascus, 1965), pp. 585-591; Also for the role of Ibn Taymiyya and his pupils to understand the reference framework of *islâh* thought see. A. R., Gibb, *Islam*, (London, 1975), p. 114.
- 3 Charles Kurzman, *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*, (Oxford, 2001), p. 4.
- 4 Ramazan Altıntaş, "Teolojik Sekülerleşmenin Neden Olduğu İnanç ve Davranış Problemleri", *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* (2002), vol. VI, pp. 70.
- 5 For the further information on the new reformism reflected in Egypt in particular and all over the Islamic world in general see. Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashîd Ridâ*, (Berkeley, 1966)
- 6 For the further information about Islamism and its political experience see: Mümtazer Türköne, *Siyasal İdeoloji Olarak İslamcılığın Doğuşu*, (Istanbul, 1991); İsmail Kara, *İslamcılığın Siyasi Görüşleri*, (Istanbul, 1994)
- 7 For the further information see. Edward A. Allworth, *Tatars of Crimea: Their Struggle for Survival*, (Durham, 1988); Ahmet Kanlıdere, *Reform within Islam: The Tajdid and Jadid Movements among the Kazan Tatars (1809-1917)*, (İstanbul, 1997); İbrahim Maraş, *Türk Dünyasında Dini Yenileşme (1850-1917)*, (Istanbul, 2002)
- 8 Salafism that arised in the second age of Islam in connection with the term of Salaf, corresponds to those who opposed to theology and hold a concept of religion firmly attached to the utterance of Quran and Sunnah. Though subjected to a lot of semantic change in course of time, it has occasionally been used to define the contemporary reformist movements, since they adopted in principle to oppose *taqlîd*, to imitate someone blindly, and return to a new concept of religion based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. See. John O. Voll, "Salafiyya", in R. C. Martin ed., *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, (New York, 2004), II/608-610.

- ⁹ The Modernist Islam was never monolithic, on the contrary there existed many variations, even deep disagreements virtually in all subjects. (Curzman, *Modernist Islam*, p. 5) There was also a confusion and misconception on the terms used to define the contemporary reformist movements, i.e. *islâh*, *tajdîd*, *ihyâ*, *tajaddud*. (For the further information on the historical background of these terms and their contemporary reflections, see. John I. Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: Tajdid and Islah", in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, (New York, 1983), pp. 32-47.) It must also be noted that since such terms reflected only one aspect of the renovation, sometimes it will be more correct to use all of them, rather to make a choice among them. (see. Itzhak Weismann, "Sa'id Havva and Islamic Revivalism in Ba'athist Syria", *Studia Islamica* (1997), vol. 85/1, p. 131-132) But some terms chosen by western scholars to define the fact raise some problems all on their own, since they contain some connotations produced from their self-context. (For the comprehensive analyses of this problem see. Sönmez Kutlu, *Çağdaş İslami Akımlar ve Sorunları*, (Ankara 2008), 88-92, also Alexander Knysh, "Orthodoxy and Heresy in Medieval Islam: an Essay in Reassessment", *The Muslim World* (January 1993), vol. 1, pp. 66-67.)
- ¹⁰ The then reformists were aware of the fact that the classical model of education underlay the problem of backwardness in religious understanding. Accordingly, they held out that the classical model of education based on the learning by heart should be replaced by a new model education established on the basis of reason and thought. For example, following his teacher Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghânî, Muhammad 'Abduh who drew attention to this necessity made an effort to reform the education in al-Azhar and improve its quality. As a result of his efforts, the rational intellectual discipline i.e. math and geography were included in curriculum of al-Azhar. (See A. Bazli Shafie, "Conceptual and Circular Dimensions of Abduh's Educational Reform", *al-Shajarah* (1999), IV/2, pp. 199-230) On the other hand, their struggle for a new model of education raised a conflict to come into with the classical scholars and the scholars in al-Azhar divided into two groups as traditionalists and modernists. (For the further information about the discussion on this point see. Muhammad Rashîd Ridhâ, *al-Manâr wa al-Azhar*, (Cairo, 1934); also see A. Chris Eccel, *Egypt, Islam, and Social Change: al-Azhar in Conflict and Accommodation*, (Berlin, 1984), pp. 176-189.)
- ¹¹ Because of their emphasis on the intellect, the new reformists were sometimes considered as neo-Mu'tazilis by some researcher. (Khalid Detlev, "Some Aspects of Neo-Mu'tazilism", *Islamic Studies* (1969), VIII/4, pp. 319-347). For instance, Abduh's criticism of Hanbalî view, according to which Quranic text is not literally created, were in harmony with Mu'tazilî view. (See Muhammad 'Abduh, *Risâla al-Tawhîd*, ed. R. Ridhâ, (Cairo, 1366), p. 47) Similarly, his view of *kasb*, acquisition, that men could act with their own will and choice, was closer to that of al-Mâturîdî than that of Ash'arî. (See, *Ibid*, pp. 61-65.)
- ¹² In this respect, it is particularly interesting to see that Reformists intentionally argued that the Quran included the *mutashâbih* verses, with which made the classical religious thought highly busy, and thus was naturally open to the ta'wîl. (See 'Abduh, *Risâla al-Tawhîd*, pp. 7-8.) Nevertheless, Rashîd al-Ridâ who put the reformism in post-'Abduh period into a harder and stricter framework opposed the *ta'wîl* and regarded it as a typical example of innovation. See Rashîd al-Ridâ, *Tafsîr al-Manâr*, (Beirut, 1935), III/166, X/141
- ¹³ 'Abduh defines this case as the freedom of thought from the chain of imitation and understanding of religion through the method of salaf in a time when disagreements had not yet arisen and on the basis of the early sources. See. Rashîd al-Ridâ, *Târîkh al-Ustâdh al-Imâm al-Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh*, (Cairo, 1925-31), I/11.
- ¹⁴ 'Abduh, who emphasized that the focus on the doctrinal disagreements of theological schools was unnecessary, pointed out that what Muslims needed was not the attributes of God, but the discussion of his creatures. See 'Abduh, *Risâla al-Tawhîd*, 48-58.
- ¹⁵ Rashîd al-Ridâ, *Tafsîr al-Manâr*, II/339.
- ¹⁶ The fatwas of Muhammad 'Abduh that he gave when he was a mufti of Egypt without abiding by rules of a single madhab, and were subjected to the criticism of many conservative scholars were

- important in that they showed up a dynamic dimension on *ijtihād*. For instance, such approaches that generally centered on the interest as the woman's having the right to divorce, the removal of polygamy by the rulers, the eating of what the People of the Book cut were only a few fatwas of his numerous ones. See Muhammed 'Abduh, *al-A'māl al-Kāmila*, ed. M. 'Imāra, (Beirut, 1979-80)
- ¹⁷ For further information on the life of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī see Zafir el-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa 'Asruhū*, (Damascus, 1965); Nizār 'Abaza, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī: Ahad 'Ulamā al-Islāh al-Hadīth fī al-Shām*, (Dimeşk, 1997); Mahmūd Mahdī Istanbūlī, *Shaykh al-Shām Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, (Dimeşk, 1405); Muhammad Mut'ī el-Hāfiz-Nizār 'Abaza, *Tārīkh 'Ulamā Damascus*, (Damascus, 1406), 1/296-308.
- ¹⁸ Considering the fact that Hanbalites in Damascus did not support Wahhabism that emerged nearly a century ago and depending on the same school of thought, it seems that the Hanbalism here was a moderate Hanbalism, not a marginal one. John Voll, "The Non-Vahhabi Hanbalis of Eighteenth Century Syria", *Der Islam*, 49 (1972), 277-291.
- ¹⁹ Indeed, the intellectual concerns of 'Abduh, Ridā and Qāsimī concentrated on issues such as establishing Islam's compatibility with reason, returning to the sources of the faith as a means to purify and strengthen Islam, and enhancing the adaptability of Islamic law to the conditions of the time. See Felicitas Opwis, "Chances in Modern Islamic Legal Theory: Reform or Reformation?", in M. Browsers-C. Kurzman (ed.) *An Islamic Reformation?*, (Oxford, 2004), pp. 37.
- ²⁰ For further information about the developments during Tanzimat in the central government of Ottomans and countryside see Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, (Princeton, 1963), pp. 3-51; for the role of ulama in this process see Richard L. Chambers, "The Ottoman 'Ulama and the Tanzimat", in Nikki R. Keddie (ed.) *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions Since 1500*, 1972, 1978, pp. 33-46; Moshe Ma'oz, "The Ulama and the Process of Modernisation in Syria During the Mid-Nineteenth Century", *African and Asian Studies* (1971), vol. VII, pp. 77-79.
- ²¹ Commins, David Dean, *Osmanlı Suriyesi'nde Islahat Hareketleri*, trans. S. Ayaz, (Istanbul, 1993), 26-27.
- ²² Commins, "Religious Reformers And Arabists in Damascus, 1885-1914", *Journal of Middle East Studies* (1986), vol. 18, pp. 407
- ²³ Khoury, Philip S., *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus: 1860-1920*, (Cambridge, 1983), 1-53.
- ²⁴ Commins, *Islahat Hareketleri*, 64-65.
- ²⁵ Commins, "Al-Manar and Popular Religion in Syria, 1898-1920" in *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World* (2006), ed. by S. A. Dudoignon-K.Hisao-K.Yasushi, vol. I/2, pp. 40-54.
- ²⁶ Commins, "Abd al-Qadir al-Jazairi and Modern Islamic Reform," *The Muslim World* (1988), vol. 78/2, pp. 121-131.
- ²⁷ Commins, "Religious Reformers and Arabists", 408-409.
- ²⁸ For further information on Syrian Reformists and their main views see Commins, *Islahat Hareketleri*, 69-98
- ²⁹ In the shaping of Qāsimī's reformist views, the social context in which he lived played a part and his first reformist views took on a shape upon the actual situation in Damascus. On his views in this context see. Commins, "Social Criticism and Reformist Ulama of Damascus," *Studia Islamica* (1993), vol. 78, pp. 169-180.
- ³⁰ In al-Qāsimī's house, a separate meeting was being held one or twice a week whose participants were of elite persons. Here the previously determined books were being read thoroughly, and meanwhile, some matters were being discussed in an intellectual way (Istanbūlī, *Shaykh al-Shām*, 37). Such leading representatives of reformist thought in Syria after him as Bahjat al-Baitar, Muhammad Jamāl al-Shattī, Hamid al-Takī, Ahmed al-Jabbān, 'Abdallah al-Fāsī, Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Kattānī were attending his lectures. Hafiz-'Abaza, *Tārīkh 'Ulamā Damascus*, II/299.
- ³¹ Zafir el-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 48-56.

- ³² Hudûr, Adîb, *al-Sifahât al-Sûriya: Nash'atuhâ, Tasawwuruhâ wa Wâqî'uhâ al-Rahîh*, (Damascus, 1972), 77.
- ³³ Commins, *Islahat Hareketleri*, 100.
- ³⁴ During his days in Egypt, al-Qâsimî attended the lectures of 'Abduh with great enthusiasm and met many persons including such scholars as 'Alî al-Bailawî, Muhammâd Mahmûd al-Shanqitî, Ahmad al-Husainî. For further information about his visit in Egypt see Zafir al-Qâsimî, *Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî*, 134-135.
- ³⁵ Rashîd al-Ridâ, *al-Majalla al-Manâr*, c. XI, s. XII, sh. 936 vd.
- ³⁶ Abaza, *Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî*, 140-145
- ³⁷ Weismann associates the intellectual motivation of Syrian Reformism with the social coorruption in which they lived, rather than with the challenge of the West. See Itzchak Weismann, I. "Between Sufi Reformism and Modernist Rationalism-A Reappraisal of the Origins of the Salafiya from the Damascene Angle" *Die Welt Des Islams* (2003), vol. 41/2, p. 235.
- ³⁸ Commins, *Islahat Hareketleri*, 140-141.
- ³⁹ Keddie, Nikki R., *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani": A Political Biography*, (Berkeley, 1972), 65-75.
- ⁴⁰ al-Qâsimî, Jamâl al-Dîn, *Dalâil al-Tawhîd*, ed. H. A. el-'Ak, (Beirut, 1991). This work composed in 1908 as an answer to the criticism directed at Islam from the various centers in the West and Islamic world had, according to Commins, a style that brought the classical theology and Islamic Neo-Platonism to the agenda. Commins, *Islahat Hareketleri*, 134-135.
- ⁴¹ Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Qâsimî, "Te'aruzu'l-'Akl ve'n-Nakl", *al-Manâr*; XIII (1910), 613-614.
- ⁴² Qâsimî, *Dalâil al-Tawhîd*, 38, 40, 108-109.
- ⁴³ Ibid, 118.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 77-85.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, 107.
- ⁴⁶ Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Qâsimî, *Risâlah fî Iqâmah al-Hujjah*, (Damascus, 1924), 4-6;
- ⁴⁷ Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Qâsimî, *Mizân al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dîl*, ed. Muhammad A. al-Qâdî, (Cairo 1408), 13; Qâsimî's disregard for the total opposition to sufism often seen in reformist discourses, and his call for calmness is possible to regard as one of reflections of this view on him. See. Mehmet Günay, *Cemalüddin el-Kasimi ve Fikhi Görüşleri*, Master Thesis, Marmara University, Institution of Social Sciences, (Istanbul, 1991), p. 30.
- ⁴⁸ Zafir al-Qâsimî, *Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Qâsimî*, 357-358.
- ⁴⁹ Commins, *Islahat Hareketleri*, 141.
- ⁵⁰ Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Qâsimî, *al-Mash'âlâ al-Jawrabayn wa al-Na'layn*, (Damascus, 1914), 4.
- ⁵¹ Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Qâsimî, *al-Fatwâ fî al-Islâm*, ed. Muhammad A. al-Qâdî, (Beirut, 1406), 148-149, 155-159; 170.
- ⁵² Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Qâsimî, *Qawâid al-Tahdîth min Funûn Mustalahât al-Hadîth*, (Damascus, 1931), 281.
- ⁵³ Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Qâsimî, *Irshâd al-Khalk ilâ al-'Amal bi Khabar al-Barq*, (Damascus, 1911), 4.
- ⁵⁴ It is pointed out that his work entitled *Mahâsin al-Ta'wil* was completely a product of this point of view. See. Sayyid Muhammad 'Alî Ayâzî, *al-Mufasssîrûn: Hayâtuhum wa Manhajuhum*, (Tahran, 1378), 620.
- ⁵⁵ It is known that, for this reason, Qâsimî was sometimes accused of not being reformist. However, Rashîd al-Ridâ pointed out that though he did not used in his works a reformist style in modern sense, he should have been regarded as one of distinguished reformists. It would be wrong, al-Rida said, to expect a person who lived fifty years and left behind more the seventy works to write all of his works on reformism. see. *al-Manâr*, vol. XVII/8, pp.630-631; Günay, 34.
- ⁵⁶ Ahmad Mu'âdh 'Ulwân Haqqî, "Shaykh al-Shâm Jamâl ad-Dîn al-Qâsimî wa Athar Rihlatihî ilâ al-Hijâz fî Shakhsiyyatihî", *al-Nadwa al-Islamiyya li al-Hajj Makka al-Mukarram al-Islamiyya II: Buhuth wae Dirâsât*, (Riyad, 1424), 9