Tajdid ad-dīn: Islam and the Question of Renewal in the Thought of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī

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Abstract

One of the core debates of the Muslim scholars and thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth century was centered upon the question of whether Islam is reconcilable with modernity. It’s an ongoing debate, which is still being led today. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī is arguably one of the most important and most popular Sunni Islamic authorities in the contemporary Muslim world who intensely devotes himself to this issue. He considers Islam to be comprehensive and eternally valid. By virtue of its continuous validity, Islam allows for life being subject to change, thus endorsing the renewal (tajdid) of its teachings in order to respond to emerging questions of modern life and to be applicable to all eras and contexts. How should tajdid be implemented, and can the teachings of Islam be reconciled with modernity? Can Islam embrace changes and new challenges created by modernity and globalization? Can the aspired tajdid meet current challenges, while staying faithful to the primary principles of Islam? This essay deals with the abovementioned questions and tries to answer them by referring to al-Qaraḍāwī’s concept of tajdid ad-dīn. The following examination is meant to point out al-Qaraḍāwī’s understanding of tajdid and his opinion on the relationship between the Islamic legacy (turāth), modernity and the West.

Keywords: Al-Qaraḍāwī, tajdid, turāth (Islamic legacy), as-salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ (pious Predecessors), ijtihād (independent reasoning), wasaṣṭīya (middle way), west, ṭawābit (unchangeable rulings), mutaghayyirāt (variable rulings).

1. Introduction – Brief Biographical Note

Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī is one of the best known Islamic scholars in Sunni Islam today. He was born in Egypt in 1926 and has been living in Qatar since 1961.² He studied Islamic theology (uṣūl ad-dīn) at al-Azhar University where he obtained a PhD degree in 1973. Since his early twenties, he was a member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and was involved in the struggle for independence from colonialism. However, he suffered political suppression from the later nationalist Nasser regime in the 1950s. In 1997, he announced his independence from any Egyptian-based organization, including the Muslim Brotherhood. Both in 1976 and in 2004 he was requested to take the lead of the Brotherhood, but he declined, explaining that he preferred to serve all Muslims, not only one group.³ Despite declaring his independence from all religious movements, legal, theological schools and political institutions, he is still regarded as a leading figure and the “spiritual father” of the Muslim Brotherhood. Accordingly, Gudrun Krämer describes his relationship to the latter since the early 1960s as “ambiguous”.⁴

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⁴ Krämer, Gudrun, “Preface”, in Gräf/Skovgaard-Petersen (eds.), Global Mufti, p. x. For more details see Tammam, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, pp. 55-83.
The most telling sign of his ongoing strong connection with the Brotherhood is his appearance on Cairo’s Tahrir Square to lead the Friday prayer on 18 February, addressing an audience estimated to exceed two million Egyptians, after being banned from leading weekly Friday prayers in Egypt 30 years ago. Notwithstanding, al-Qaradāwī is the author of over 170 monographs and was a regular guest on al-Jazeera for their Shari’a and Life broadcast as well as on other TV programs. His last appearance on the show asb-Shari’a and Life was in August 2013. Specific reasons for the discontinuation of this program are not known. However, it can be assumed that this is due to the political context in Egypt during and after the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: As a result of al-Qaradāwī’s support of the Muslim Brotherhood and his opposition against as-Sisi’s government, which he often articulated on al-Jazeera, the program was stopped, after as-Sisi’s winning Saudi Arabia’s and the United Arab Emirates’ support.

Today, he is, inter alia, the chairman of both the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) and the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS). As such, he enjoys world-wide popularity and increasing authority not only among Muslims in the Middle East, but also among European Muslims. He has been referred to as the “Media Mufti” or the “Global Mufti”. Qatar, his adopted country, is considered “of the utmost importance for Qaradāwī’s activities.” From its capital, Doha, he began to preach, to give religious lessons and to appear on Qatari Radio and on TV, i.e. on al-Jazeera channel. Thus, he could be globally seen and heard, which earned him followers all over the world. His understanding of the media as a tool to spread the Islamic message propelled him onto the world stage. As Krämer states, “What marks him out among the scholars-cum-activists of his generation is his early involvement with the new media.”

By using a variety of media platforms such as books, radio, television and internet, al-Qaradāwī has attracted the attention of both Arabic and Western academics. He has become a highly popular scholar and a controversial figure at the same time. In reaction to his approach of tajdid ad-din (“Renewal of the Religion”), he has been criticized by Salafi oriented scholars, on the one hand, and has been called as mujaddid (“renovator”) of the contemporary age, on the other hand.

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10 Gräf, Bettina/Skovgaard-Petersen, „Introduction“, in: Gräf/Skovgaard-Petersen, Global Mufti, p. 3.
The present article aims to shed light on his understanding of *tajdid ad-din* in order to answer the following questions: What does he mean by *tajdid*? How does he evaluate the relationship between traditional legacy (*turāth*) and the aimed renewal (*tajdid*)? In how far is his concept compatible with the needs and challenges of today’s age? How does he see the relation between the West and the Islamic world? To answer these questions I will first provide an overview of the main features of al-Qaṣāwī’s thought(215,186),(817,639). Subsequently, I will set out his understanding of *tajdid* in respect of the abovementioned questions.

Al-Qaṣāwī’s monograph *Min aṯr ẓahwa rāšida* (“For a Right Guidance of the Awakening Movement”) is his first contribution relating to *tajdid ad-din* in which he explicates the main characteristics of his aspired renewal. This book was essentially devoted to the “Islamic Awakening movement” (ḥarakat aṯr-ṣahwa al-islāmiyya) in the 1980s, as will be demonstrated in the following.14 In his booklet entitled *Tajdid ad-din al-ladhi nanshubi* (“The Renewal of Religion which we aspire”), which was published in 2011, he discusses the subject of Islamic-religious renewal.15 These two publications are the main sources, upon which the present article relies.

2. An Overview on al-Qaṣāwī’s Thinking

Al-Qaṣāwī considers the Qur’ān and the Sunna (teachings, deeds and sayings, silent approvals or disapproval of the prophet Muḥammad) as the basis for dealing with religion-related issues. The particular importance which he attaches to the Qur’ān and the Sunna is obvious in his different publications. Almost in all his works, he uses verses of the Qur’ān and/or sayings of the prophet to justify a theory or his position towards a specific theme.16 As they do not give a detailed set of rules, he, thereby, supports the application of reason (*’aqīd*) by means of other methods such as analogy and public interest for the deduction of practical rules.17 However, *’aqīd*, he said, must demonstrate the truth of the Qur’ān and the Sunna, though never permitted to go beyond these foundational sources.18 In this regard, he fully recommends the adoption of the methods of the ‘pious predecessors’ (*minhāj al-salaf as-sālīh*) in dealing with the divine texts.19 The adaptation of Islam to the modern world should be based upon the legacy of the past. Accordingly, contemporary scholars must have a broad picture of the knowledge of earlier generations, an immense wealth that illuminates the way. When dealing with divine texts, they should take note of ideas and legal methods which have been passed on by former generations. To remedy contemporary problems it is necessary for them to also take into consideration, the change of time, place, and living conditions.20

Al-Qaṣāwī refuses the notion of *taqlīd* (“blind imitation”) and points out the necessity of independent *ijtiḥād*21 as the first and most important condition for Shari’a to be successfully reestablished. In this context, he continues to underscore the importance of the divine sources and the role of the Muslim scholars performing *ijtiḥād*.22 A main characteristic of his thinking is his call for *at-taḥarrur al-madhabī*, which translates into being free from any intellectual dependence upon a specific traditional school of law (*madhhab*).

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14 Al-Qaṣāwī remarks in the introduction of this book that a part of this monograph was already published in the 1950s. Al-Qaṣāwī, *Min aṯr ẓahwa rāšida* tujaḍid ad-din wa-tanḥad bi-d-duniya, Cairo 2001 (1st edition 1987), p. 5.
18 Al-Qaṣāwī, al-Marqūjaʾiya, pp. 341.
19 This term is often used to refer to the first three generations of Muslims: the generation of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (*ṣaḥabāb*), their successors (*ṭābiʿīn*), and the successors of the successors (*ṭābiʿi at-tābiʿīn*).
His appeal for transcending the boundaries of the established schools of law is not only directed to the Sunni schools such as the Ḥanafi, Mālikī, Shāfiʿi, and Ḥanbali. It is aimed at all Muslim schools; Sunni, Shiʿi, Jaʿfari, Ḥaḍīthi and Ṣāḥībi schools.23 Not being bound to any particular madhab makes it possible, according to Krämer, “to bridge the gap between the existing schools, sects and branches of Islam, and more specifically between Sunnis and Shiʿis (taqrib).”24 However, al-Qaraḍawi fails to act upon his own claim for emancipation from a particular school of law into practice. When dealing with a legal opinion, he only refers to Sunni scholars.25

Al-Qaraḍawi’s thinking is furthermore guided by the objectives of Islamic law (maqāsid asb-shariʿa).26 He insists that Shariʿa in all aspects is predicated on benefits and common good, as they pertain to the individual and the community. Its rulings are designed to protect these benefits and to facilitate the improvement and perfection of human living conditions. According to al-Qaraḍawi, taking into account maqāsid asb-shariʿa as well as living conditions, (fiqh al-waqiʿ) is a prerequisite to solving new problems which are accompanied by modernity and globalization.27

Another main feature of al-Qaraḍawi’s thought is the concept of Wasatiyya,28 the middle course.29 Salvatore describes him as “[...] the leading theorist of the centrality of values of moderation [...]”.30 Wasatiyya means according to al-Qaraḍawi steering away from both the radical, extremist and fundamentalist stream (muzammilīn) as well as the stream of neglect and looseness (mntaḥallīn). It is a middle ground between Muslims who blindly follow traditions and refrain from independent and creative ijtihād, and Muslims who blindly imitate the West way of life (al-gharib).31 Based upon this concept, he seeks to find practical and flexible solutions to daily questions faced by Muslims in order to make their life easier and to make Muslims fond of their religion. Accordingly, he usually tends in his fatwas to the middle course.32

As has already been mentioned, from al-Qaraḍawi’s point of view, Islam can provide an all-encompassing system of life. Its teachings have a universal message for all human beings and have an absolute and universal validity, regardless of time and place.33 Islam as a holistic, all-embracing system regulates all aspects of life, whether political, social, economic or intellectual, and must be considered as a way of life. The wellbeing of the Muslim society lies alone in the comprehensive application of the teachings of Islam.34

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24 Krämer, Drawing Boundaries, pp. 196.
29 See for example Gräf, The Concept of wasatiyya, pp. 213-239.
30 Salvatore, Qaraḍawi’s Maṣṭaḥa, p. 239.
31 Al-Qaraḍawi, ath-Thaqāfa al-ʿarabiyya al-islāmiyya, pp. 89-93.
34 This conviction of al-Qaraḍawi has been emphasized several times especially in his writings on aṣ-ṣalāhwa al-islāmiyya (“Islamic awakening”) and al-ḥall al-islāmi (“the Islamic solution”). See for example al-Qaraḍawi, aṣ-Ṣalāhwa al-islāmiyya wa-humām wa-watan al-
Al-Qaraḍāwī therefore proclaims relentlessly – strongly influenced by the Salafi movement of the reform theologians Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897), Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905), Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), and Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1949) – Islam and life are completely suffused with Islamic law as the only solution (al-islām bawā al-ḥall) to the complex problems. Due to internal decadence in the Islamic world and the increasing challenges of modernity coming from the West, particularly resulting from European colonialism, the Islamic community (ummah) finds itself in a situation of deep crisis: on the one hand, external pressure, especially from the West, on the other hand, the decadence within the community and the unresolved challenges of dealing with modern age. For al-Qaraḍāwī, the reasons for this decay are not only certain phenomena in Muslim countries, such as authoritarianism, poverty, injustice and globalization. Rather, this decay stems from the lack of dynamic understanding of Islam and its law system in the modern world. Guided by this conviction, he dedicates himself to the renewing of the Islamic religion (tajdid ad-dīn) in general and the Islamic law (tajdid al-fiqh) in particular. He considers tajdid not only as a “demanding necessity”, but also as “a religious obligation”. The following section is intended to present his understanding of renewal and the main features of his inspired renewal in order to answer the abovementioned questions.

3. The Debate on Tajdid al-dīn

Islamic renewal (tajdid) or reform (išlāḥ) is a controversial theme running consistently through academic studies. Western and Muslim academics deal with the question whether Islamic teachings are compatible with modernity. They discuss aspects such as the meaning, history of tajdid and whether the teachings of Islam can be reconciled with modernity, human rights, secularization or democracy. As a result, we have a number of studies on the subject of tajdid. There is a sizeable body of Arabic literature which deals with this issue regarding the Islamic-religious renewal, its relation to tradition or theories of the main advocates of tajdid. An example of this genre is ʿAbd El-Muta’al aṣ-Ṣaʿīdī’s book al-Mujaddidūn fī l-islām (“The renewer of Islam”), in which he mentions the most prominent renewers in Islamic history and discusses their renewal approaches from the first to the fourteenth century (AH).

Western academics have also produced a large number of studies in which they discuss the meaning, roots, history, trends and characteristics of tajdid in different periods of Islamic history. Here some examples of publications about tajdid: “Voices of Resurgent Islam”42, “New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition”43, “Tajdid al-Dīn: A Reconsideration of its Meaning, Roots, and Influence in Islam”44 and “The ’Cyclical Reform’: A Study of the mujaddid Tradition”45. In these studies a number of preachers and scholars are described as mujaddidūn (“revivalist or reformer”). This is the case for ash-Shāfiʿī (d. 820), Ibn Taimiya (d. 1328), Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (d. 1729).

In the nineteenth and twentieth century many other thinkers and activists were referred to by their followers as muqaddid as well. Muhammad 'Abduh, Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghâni, Abû 'Alâ Mau'dûdî (d. 1979) and Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989), among others, were described as such.46 Yusuf al-Qarâḍâwî is also one of the most admired and prominent representatives of Sunni Islam today. He has been called muqaddid as well.47

In his work on tajdid, al-Qarâḍâwî establishes a strong connection between the šahwa movement and his approach of tajdid ad-dîn. As a result of the encounter with modernity due to the European colonialism, many reformist Islamic scholars and Islamic movements advocate the renewal, i.e. reform of Islam in order to face the challenges coming up with modernity. Al-Qarâḍâwî understands “The Islamic awakening” (as-Šahwa al-Islâmiya) as one of the most important Islamic movements of the twentieth century, which seeks reconciliation between Islam and modernity.48 From his point of view this resurgence signifies “a natural, healthy phenomenon which is clearly indicative of a return to inborn nature (jitra), to the roots which – for us in our Muslim homeland – is simply Islam: the beginning and the end, into which we seek refuge from difficulties, and from which we derive the strength of spirit, of hope, and of guidance.”49 His aspiring šahwa should include all Muslims worldwide regardless of gender, social status or race. The primary purpose of šahwa is, in al-Qarâḍâwî’s opinion, to bring back Islamic principles and teachings so that they guide the Islamic community, particularly after all non-Islamic solutions imported from either the West or the East have failed to solve the problems of Islamic societies.50 Consequently, he strongly supports the šahwa movement and calls for its revival in Islam in order to rid Islamic societies of their ills.51 The šahwa after which he strives should be able to “[...] renew Islam and to return with it to the guidance of life again [...]”. The thinking of the šahwa-movement believes in independent interpretation and adopts the renewal. It rejects imitation and dependency. It considers the inflexibility (jumûd) as a death. Rather, it accepts renewal in law, education, politics and all different areas.52

Making the case for tajdid, al-Qarâḍâwî relies on Qur’anic references, even if the term itself cannot be found in the Qur’ân. He refers to the following Qur’ânic verses 16:125, 39:55 and 67:2.53 According to his interpretation, these verses include the meaning of renewal and require the change from one state to another.54 In the quoted verses the comparative form a h s a n (“better”) of h a s a n (“good”) is used in different contexts. For example, it says in 16:125 “[...] and argue with them in a way that is best”. (wa-jâdhibum bi-l-latî biya ahdii). By referring to this verse, al-Qarâḍâwî claims that Qur’ân itself calls on all Muslims to improve and change themselves and their life in all aspects. He defines tajdid as “[...] a transformation from a low to a higher status.”55

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48 For more details on šahwa from al-Qarâḍâwî’s point of view, see Wardeh, Nadia: Yûsuf al-Qarâḍâwî and the Islamic awakening “of the late 20th century, Montreal: Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University 2001.
50 Ibid., pp. 157.
51 Al-Qarâḍâwî supports this appeal with a number of books and treatises relating to the guidance (tasbih) of šahwa. In this regard, he has written a “Series of Guidance of the šahwa Movement” (tisâîlat tasbih as-Šahwa). This category includes for example Anlawiyyat al-’urasa al-islamiya fi l-mu’affaq al-qâdima, Cairo1990, p. 2, Anlawiyyat al-’amal al-islami fi qill al-mutaghajjirat ad-daniya ar-râbiha, Cairo 2011 and Bayyinat al-’abîn al-islami wa shubhât al-’almînîn wa al-mutagharrîn, Cairo 2003 (1st edition 1987).
52 Al-Qarâḍâwî, Anlawiyyat al-’urasa, p. 4 and 24.
53 Qur’ân 16:125: “[...] and argue with them in a way that is best.”, 39:55: “And follow the best of what was revealed to you from your Lord [...]” and 67:2: “[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed - and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving”.
54 Al-Qarâḍâwî, Fiṣḥ al-waṣâfiya al-islamiya, p. 186.
Moreover, he refers to a well-known prophetic tradition which states that at the beginning of every century, God will raise for this community (umma) a blessed person to explain the facts of the religion according to the necessities of the time. Specifically, he argues that the debate of renewal has traditionally been a constant occurrence throughout the Islamic world, stretching over centuries. Generally speaking, there are three positions towards ṣaḥīḥ (1) the ultra-conservative position, which rejects any reform attempt and considers Islamic law and values immutable. Representatives of this position, the so-called Salafism, advocate a return to the Qur’an, Sunna, consensus of the companions and traditions of the ṣaḥaba (as-salaf). From their standpoint, any other sources of guidance beyond these and any effort aimed at reforming Islam constitute a bid’a („undesirable innovation“), which will lead Muslims away from the straight path because they do not represent the original revelation or the prophetic model. The general view propagated by Salafists is that Sharia law is “divinely ordained” and is valid anytime and anywhere. They typify the fossilized Sharia literalism, which treats man-made laws as divine and unimpeachable. Followers of Salafism are more attentive to the appropriate religious and social behavior. This behavior is deduced from the Sunna and traditions of the salaf. Following this strategy, they do not pay attention to the ongoing changing circumstances of life in order to be able to treat new emerging problems.

Therefore, their legal opinions are usually out of touch with reality. (2) By contrast, the second stream views the Islamic scripture as a message from God which requires interpretation and understanding before being put into practice. However, advocates of this approach draw a line, inasmuch as they distinguish between two categories of Islamic principles: those which are changeable according to time, place and condition and those which are ahistorical. The latter are holy and forever valid, as will be shown below. (3) The third position exhibits different voices of reform. Scholars and activists who belong to this tendency in contemporary Islam are developing new concepts and paradigms dealing with the question of Islam and modernity. Some do not take the aforementioned differentiation into account and argue for a shift from verses attributed to the Medina phase of the revelation of the Qur’an (622–632) to those revealed during the Mecca period (610–622), as far as the social and political aspects of Shari’a are concerned. Other approaches by prominent authors extend the above consideration of historical conditions to what is called the ‘historicisation’ of Islamic scripture. A representative example of such is Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zaid (d. 2010). He claims that Qur’an will become a ‘historic document’. Jasser Auda speaks against this approach: This would lead to the complete abrogation of the ‘authority’ of the scripture. He further argues that such a ‘historicist’ approach connotes that “our ideas about texts, cultures and events are totally a function of their position in their original historical context as well as their later historical developments.” Applying this method to the Qur’an implies from his point of view that the Qur’anic text is a ‘cultural product’ of the culture which produced it and which is only helpful to those who wish to become acquainted with a specific historic community that existed in the prophetic era. Al-Qaraḍāwī reflects on these schools of thought and positions himself in the middle.

56 “God will raise for this community (umma) at the beginning of every century someone who will renew its religion (ṣiṣḥā‘īh),” Abū Dāwūd, as-Siṣīstānī, Sunan abī Dāwūd. Al-Arnaʿūtī, Shuʿaib (ed.). Damaskus 2009, Vol. 6, p. 349. Although this hadith does not exist in the six books containing collections of authoritative Hadith (al-kutub as-sittah), al-Qaraḍāwī considers this Hadith as authentic (ṣahih). He argues that this hadith was mentioned in many other collections of Hadith such as Sunan of Abū Daūd (d. 889) al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-ṣahihayn of al-Ḥākim (d. 1014). Al-Qaraḍāwī, Tajdid ad-din, p. 4 and idem., Fiqh al-wasaṣṭī al-islīmiya, pp. 188.

57 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Min al-ṣaḥūṭa rāṣida, pp. 9.


59 See for more details the following section of this article.

60 Ramadān, To be a European Muslim, pp. 249.


He differentiates between three ideal-type positions which are engaged in the debate of tajdid: secular modernists, traditionalists and a middle position between both, which is called wasatīya. These groups widely differ from one another in terms of base, structure and further composition. Al-Qaraḍāwī identifies the first group as duʿāt al-junūd (“the callers of solidification”), aḍāʾ at-tajdid (“enemies of renewal”) or al-mutāṣarānātīyūn (“the strictly-minded”). According to him, their advocates consider the return to the roots of Islam in their purest form as the one and only solution to the crisis and problems of Islamic societies. They do not see a need for a new reading or reinterpretation of the divine texts in order to consider the new issues of life and the changed necessities of humanity. Moreover, they venerate the traditional heritage of convictions and Islamic legal opinions. They want to retain all of it and to practice it regardless of time, place and modern life circumstances, which are liable to undergo changes. Al-Qaraḍāwī divides the adherents of this group in two sub-groups: “imitators of the schools of law” (muqallidī al-madhdhibī) and “literalists” (harfīyūn). Both revere the sacred texts (Qurʾān and Sunna) and are fiercely opposed to any idea of development or renewal. The former group only relies upon the traditional opinions of law into and rejects a free, independent interpretation of the texts. The latter, literalists, are according to al-Qaraḍāwī very strict in adhering to the wording of the revelation texts and do not pay any attention neither to the higher objectives of Shariʿa (maqāṣid ash-shariʿa) nor to current living conditions.

The second trend undertakes an absolutely free renewal (tajdid mutlaq) and builds their renewal procedure on a strict secularist ideology. Their advocates do not call for modernization, according to al-Qaraḍāwī, but for Westernization. They strive after a renewal which accepts the culture, knowledge and all values from the West, without paying attention to Islam’s cultural and religious pillars. Furthermore, their program of tajdid is, according to al-Qaraḍāwī, based primarily upon the abolition of the Qurʾān and the Sunna of the prophet. This trend is represented especially by educated people who have gained knowledge and methods of modern sciences and western philosophy such as Mohammad Arkoun. Al-Qaraḍāwī labels the representatives of this genre as al-ghulā ḵī t-tajdid (“the exaggerators of renewal”) and duʿāt at-tajdid aw at-taḥdīth (“Callers of renewal or modernism”). He claims that they want a free life without Islamic faith (ʿaqīda), laws (shariʿa), morals (akhlāq) nor virtues (ṣaʿādaʾ). Regardless of the cultural, political and economic differences between the East and the West, the representatives of this tajdid-school intend to import European ideas and values in order to implement them within the Arab-Islamic societies. However, al-Qaraḍāwī does not define explicitly what he means by “the West” in this context. In an interview, he speaks precisely of the US and claims that “the US government wants us [Muslims] to reform ourselves. There is no doubt, however, that a US-envisaged reform will only serve US championed interests. Is there any doubt that reforming according to the US would guarantee us a role in the back of the caravan to always trail behind as a nation that is weak, ignorant and fragmented?”

Al-Qaraḍāwī bitterly criticizes both groups which have been described above. On the one hand, the modernists who blindly imitate the West and ignore all of the teachings of Islam, and on the other hand, the literalists who blindly imitate earlier Muslim scholars, ignoring the new developments that Muslims are confronted with. Even if the first group does not exclude the religion and the value structure of Islam, as the latter group does, both fail to give adequate answers to numerous contemporary issues. Considering these deficits, al-Qaraḍāwī has claimed to position himself in the middle and calls on others to follow his understanding of the middle way, wasatīya.

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64 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Min ʿajl ṣaḥwa rāshida, p. 51.
65 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Dirāsa fī fiqḥ muqāṣīd, pp. 45.
67 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Bayyināt al-ḥall, pp. 127.
68 Ibid., p. 101.
69 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Min ʿajl ṣaḥwa rāshida, p. 52 and idem., Bayyināt al-ḥall, pp. 99.
71 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Taḥdid ad-dīn, pp. 25 and idem, Min ʿajl ṣaḥwa rāshida, pp. 45.
Following this concept, he seeks a contemporary renewal, which balances between modernity including its emerging new questions, on the one hand, and the universal validity of the Shari’a and its teachings by preserving its unchangeable elements, on the other hand. He strives after a middle way between the retrograde literalists and the fanatical devotees of the rigid adherence to the past on the one side, and the blind worshippers of the new teaching coming from the West on the other side.72

3. Al-Qaraḍāwī’s Concept of Tajdid

Al-Qaraḍāwī’s desire for tajdid is a reaction to both sides. He pleads for a compromise which consists in considering Qur’an, Sunna and the inherited Islamic traditions besides being attentive to life changes and the development of various disciplines.73 For this purpose, he appeals to Islamic scholars to release themselves from blind following of antecedent authorities and their imitation. Furthermore, they should reinterpret the divine texts in the light of maqāṣid ash-shari’a and the new context of life. Only this way is, according to al-Qaraḍāwī, the authentic and right path to relieve the life of Muslims today. This procedure was – in his opinion – the practice of the prophet as well as the ‘pious predecessors’ (as-salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ). In this regard, he remarks: “[T]his recourse should not cause anxiety, as some people fear. It is in reality a return to facilitation, not to the difficulty, to the joyful proclamation (tālalloh) and not to the deterrence (tāṣir) […].”74 This postulation should not be understood as a return to the forms and the life style of the salaf. Rather, it means the adoption of their method of dealing with the naqs:

“Their method means – as it can be seen from their circumstances, words and actions – the concentration on the essence of the religion, not on its form, on the objectives of the Shari’a, not on its letters, on the spirit of the acts not on their materiality, and the preference of the relief before the complication […]. Following the method of the salaf does not mean at all that we have to sit on the floor as they sat and that we eat as they ate […]. The compliance of the method of the salaf commits us to undertake endeavor (naqtabhid), as they did at their time, that we think with our mind about our life, as they did with their mind about their life. We should take our time, our milieu, our habits and our circumstances into account, when we give fatwas, judgments, make research, or even when we act with ourselves or with the other, as they [salaf] did […].”75

Although al-Qaraḍāwī is appealing to return to the method of the salaf he underlines at the same time that the bequeathed heritage of Islamic legal and theological opinions should be considered within this procedure. To renew din does not mean that Muslims must deny their legal heritage. Taking the requirements and questions of modernity into account is not equivalent to giving up all material and intellectual traditions of the former salaf. In his view, “the true renewal is such, which is building up based on the principles of Islam, remains with its roots in connection, inspires from its [intellectual] heritage (turāth) and, at the same time, it welcomes everything new as long as it is usable […].”76 Therefore, for him, Muslims must have a broad picture of the knowledge of earlier generations and their traditions. They should take special note of the ideas and legal methods of the salaf. So, they will be able to know how this traditional knowledge can be applied to their problems today and how it can be used to achieve the goals of the Sharī’a: “We can only reform the tools and strategies we use to achieve our objectives, but the objectives themselves must not be reformed.”77 The heritage of Islam, which he describes at this point as Islamic-Arabic, does not only comprise legal and theological sciences such as the law methodology of ash-Shāfi‘i, the theology of al-Ash’ari, the Qur’an interpretation of al-Ṭabarī or the hadith traditions of al-Bukhārī and Muslim etc. But, it is offering also more richness and variety. It includes a whole range of other areas such as the medicine of Ibn Sinā (d. 1037), the optics of Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040), the arithmetic of al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), the philosophy of Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), the mysticism of al-Ghazālī, the asceticism of al-‘Arāhīya (d. 825), the calligraphy of Ibn Muqla (d. 940) and the tunes of al-Mawṣūlī (d. 867).79 In this context, al-Qaraḍāwī remarks that not all bequeathed heritage is usable and of equal value.

72 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Min ajīl šaḥīṭa rishida, p. 52.
73 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Tajdid ad-dīn, p. 25.
75 Al-Qaraḍāwī, ath-Thaqāfa al-‘arabīya, pp. 58.
76 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Fiqh al-wasaṭiy al-islāmiyya, p. 185.
77 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Madkhal, pp. 240.
79 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Thaqāfatunna baina al-insīfah wa-l-inghilāq, Cairo 2000, pp. 21.
Some could have been time-bound and, therefore, they are no longer suitable for present life. Others could be outdated due to the new circumstances of modernity. He argues that large authorities like al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taimiya could also have been wrong in one case or the other. Consequently, he calls urgently for the “right understanding” (al-faḥm as-sahāḥ) of this heritage. Criticizing all of the Islamic culture and heritage at the outset or having a negative attitude towards it can only be in, al-Qaṣādāwī’s opinion, the result of ignorance. With the support of the reason (‘aql), – at this point he calls it “the scale” (al-mizān) – Muslims should take advantage of this heritage. To assess the standard of this procedure and the received heritage, he adduces a number of factors from the Qurʾān and the Sunna.

Accordingly, al-Qaṣādāwī is seeking a method of renewal which takes all that is profitable from the past and welcomes anything new from the present provided that it is in accordance with the rules of the Qurʾān and the Sunna. His aspired renewal must be consistent with the conditions of modern life and with Islamic principles. Therefore, his appeal of renewal is much more about the change of method and about the understanding of religion and its sources. A new methodology of interpretation of the divine texts offers new perspectives of understanding which helps to face the challenges of the present age and enables the application of Sharīʿa law. This method must be based upon the texts of revelation, must consider maqāṣid asb-sharīʿa, the traditional heritage, as a guide and must keep aloof from the abovementioned extreme literalist or secular modernists. Moreover, it should take into account the basic principles of Islam such as universality (ḥumūl), equilibrium (iʿtīdād) and facilitation (taʾṣīr) and balance between time-related changeable regulations and time-independent, immutable regulations of Islam. In this regard, he writes:

“Renewal does not mean at all that we have to bring a new revised version of Islam or to add changes in it according to the mood of the people, so that the Islam will be like a flexible dough which can be shaped at the discretion and inclination of the ruler on the one hand and of the people on the other […] Moreover, [Renewal means] that we understand the religion in the shadow of the divine texts and in the shadow of the general objectives of the Shariʿa.”

This understanding requires learned and competent scholars to practice ījīhād. It is of fundamental importance for contemporary jurists to practice a new form of ījīhād, based upon the divine texts, maqāṣid asb-sharīʿa, and the traditional heritage. They must not think with the heads of the salaf, because today’s problems and needs are different from theirs. The salaf’s and leaders of the schools of law often changed their personal opinions even within their lifetime. In this context, al-Qaṣādāwī points out the necessity to maintain the limits of what is renewable and what is not. He primarily distinguishes between three different categories of the teachings of Islam: “firm foundations” (thawābit), “variable” regulations (mutaḡayyirāt) and the “free zone” (al-minṭaqā al-ḥurrā):

(1) The first category includes a series of doctrinal foundations and legal rules which are immutable. According to al-Qaṣādāwī, these do not hinge upon a local or temporal context. This category comprises provisions of “Islamic doctrine” (ʿaqīda), “worship” (ʿibādah) and “moral obligations and prohibitions” (akhlāq). Al-Qaṣādāwī adds to this category of unchangeable basic principles other elementary rules and considers them as unmodifiable and eternally valid as well. These rules encompass criminal law (ḥudūd), inheritance questions between men and women, and family law. All of these listed genres constitute the principles of Islam which are fixed and unchangeable under whatever circumstances. Principles based upon clear and definitive evidence constitute the “backbone of the dogmatic, intellectual and practical unity of the (Islamic) Community (umma).”

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80 Al-Qaṣādāwī, Bayyināt al-ḥall al-islāmī, pp. 113-115.
81 Al-Qaṣādāwī, Min aṭ-ṣahwī, pp. 30 and idem., Thaqāfatunā, p. 28.
83 Al-Qaṣādāwī, Fiqīḥ al-wasaṭīy al-islāmīyya, pp. 199.
84 Al-Qaṣādāwī, Tajdid ad-dīn, pp. 23.
86 See for more details El-Wereny, Islamic Law, pp. 8.
87 Al-Qaṣādāwī, Min aṭ-ṣahwī rāshīda, pp. 44.
88 Al-Qaṣādāwī, Tajdid ad-dīn, p. 26 and idem., Min aṭ-ṣahwī rāshīda, p. 28.
89 †Imād al-waḥda al-iṭtāʿalīya wa-l-fikrīya wa-l-ʿamalīya li-l-umma.” Al-Qaṣādāwī, al-Ījīhād, p. 91.
(2) The second category includes, in contrast to the one mentioned above, variable provisions which are interpretable depending on the context, i.e. they allow for changing living conditions. Al-Qaraḍāwī identifies this area as ẓanāniyāt. He argues that their Qur'anic or prophetic references are presumptive (ẓanā'īn) in terms of authenticity (thubūt) and/or meaning (da'lālā). They can be reinterpreted according to changes in time and place. The interpretation and exploration of these pieces of evidence on the basis of ijtiḥād is supposed to be the task of the professional religious scholars. It is their duty to deduce from these references adequate solutions in compliance with the contemporary life circumstances. Even if al-Qaraḍāwī is propagating a new reading of this kind of texts, he underlines the inviolability of the qaṭ' iṣā'ī zone. Nevertheless, it remains in the dark who has set this boundaries and what criteria have been used. It should be noted at this point that this differentiation between thawābi' and muntaghāyyāt has already been performed by other scholars such as aBū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Ibn Qayyim al-Jauzīya (d. 1350) and Abū Isḥāq ash-Shaṭībī (d. 1388). They differentiate between two categories of Sharīʿa norms: These which are immutable and eternally valid and those which are flexible and interpretable depending on location and time. Accordingly, al-Qaraḍāwī consciously or unconsciously transfers the concept of medieval scholarship and presents it in today's world as valid without paying attention to the fact that times have changed.

(3) The third category of renewable teachings of Islam includes questions whose lawfulness or unlawfulness cannot be proved by Islamic sources. Al-Qaraḍāwī calls this area the “free zone” (mintaqat harārā) or “the zone of mercy” (mintaqat al-'ṣafī). It comprises, as the ẓanāniyāt field, cases whose interpretations are dependent on the time or the place. For such cases God had left the finding of appropriate solutions to the human mind, so that the competent scholars could deliver adequate judgments according to the permanent changes of life. According to al-Qaraḍāwī, God consciously left this zone opened in favor of mercy and indulgence of the human beings. Thereby, he refers to the following sayings of the prophet: “God has drawn borders, so do not exceed it, and He has prescribed certain rules, so do not neglect it, and He has forbidden things, so do not commit it, and He remained silent about certain things out of His mercy not from forgetfulness, so do not look for it.” Muhammad shall also have said: “What God has allowed in His book that is allowed, what He has forbidden that is prohibited and what He has kept silent, that is a grace.” In quest of answers to questions related to this field al-Qaraḍāwī lists a number of methodological tools with which to find legal opinions, such as analogy (qiyāṣ), legal preference (istīhsān), common good (maṣlaḥā) and custom law (urf).

Al-Qaraḍāwī's approach of tajdid ad-dīn does not only relate to Islamic religious issues (al-'ilm ad-shur'rā'). Renewal for him should simply cover all areas of life; spiritual, scientific and technical. Indeed, he claims that Islam embraces scientific progress and research, for throughout Islamic history there has been no evidence of conflict between Islam and science. Therefore, he accepts to adopt the developments and achievements of different disciplines which originate from the West. The West, in this case, offers a lot of advantages for the wellbeing of humanity as a whole.

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91 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Tajdid ad-dīn, pp. 26, and idem., Shari'at al-islam šābiya, pp. 111.
94 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Tajdid ad-dīn, pp. 26f. and idem., Madkhal, p. 152f.
95 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Madkhal, p. 152f.
97 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Min ajī ṣalāha rābiḍa, pp. 32-35.
98 Al-Qaraḍāwī, al-baʿtha al-ʿarabiyya al-islamiyya, pp. 89-93.
Furthermore, it has nowadays a strong influence on the Islamic world in terms of military, political and economical strength.\(^9\) Even if it is obvious here that al-Qaraḍāwī is open to ideas from the West, one ought not to be mistaken into thinking that he accepts everything coming from it. He insists that Islamic societies should not adopt everything useful in the name of renewal and modernity. The prerequisite to adopting new issues in general and from the West in particular remains fidelity to the teachings of Islam. Al-Qaraḍāwī concludes, a renewal in any form, which comes from other cultures, but bears the danger of Muslims losing their identity and culture, should not be accepted. Under no circumstances should Muslims be steered towards or be dependent on other cultures.\(^10\)

Since the acceptance of achievements and renewals from the West can only take place within an Islamic framework, al-Qaraḍāwī assigns the Muslim scholars a special role within the renewal process. They are those who guide the community to the right path and call upon them to follow the divine commandments. The responsibility to lead the renewal process by using their knowledge and skills belongs to them. Only they are able to provide the community with wisdom on the way of God.\(^10\) In this regard, he notes that the Islamic universities and academic institutions play an important part as well. They have to develop their curricula and learning materials, in order to educate highly qualified scholars in the different fields of research and to enable them to perform the religious renewal.\(^10\) Over and above, he claims that it is not a specific person or a scholar who should implement the process of renewal alone. The term “whoever” (man) in the above mentioned hadith could refer to many people appearing in different places at once. Each Muslim may be active in his own field, whether it is theoretical or practical. Nothing speaks against the idea of a group or several groups of scholars working together on behalf of Islam and assuming the responsibility for the renewal.\(^103\) He writes: “[…] We all shall participate in the movement of renewal, because it is not going to take place by only one person, but by a mobile group to which each one can contribute […]”\(^10\) If the opinion is right that only one person is going to perform the renewal, then Muslims would have to wait passively for a savior to appear, al-Qaraḍāwī argues.\(^10\)

4. Conclusion

The essential character of al-Qaraḍāwī’s thought is his vision of an Islamic community in which Muslims can live according to Shari’a rulings regardless of time and place. Since he argues that Shari’a regulations have universal validity, he considers its renewal as an inevitable issue in order to face the new challenges of modern times. His approach of renewal is aimed at establishing a connection between the šahīna movement and renewal. In his point of view, harakat šahīna al-islāmiya is the one which will realize the Islamic solution. He looks at this movement as the only way to overcome the crisis of the Islamic world.

Al-Qaraḍāwī’s main objective behind the renewal is to present Islam as a religion compatible with modernity and Islamic law; as an applicable system beyond political and geographical boundaries. Hence, his effort of tajdid does not only relate to Islamic religious issues, but it includes all spiritual, scientific and technical areas. In this perspective, he welcomes the adoption of material and intellectual values and accomplishments from the West, on condition that they not run counter to the basic principles of Islam. Thus, his intended renewal should be able to deal with new issues and offer appropriate answers in accordance with Shari’a.

In his understanding of tajdid, there are two groups dealing with this issue: (1) a secular position, which wants to change all teachings of Islam and adopt everything from the West irrespective of the basic teachings and values of Islam and (2) a conservative position, which declines any kind of renewal attempt and adheres precisely to the reference texts, interpret them literally and follow blindly the opinions and the traditions of previous generations, ignoring contemporary living conditions.

\(^9\) Al-Qaraḍāwī, Thaqāfatunā baina al-infitāh, pp. 30.
\(^10\) Al-Qaraḍāwī, Min ajl šahīna rishida, p. 56.
\(^101\) Ibid., pp. 32.
\(^103\) Al-Qaraḍāwī, Tajdid ad-dīn, pp. 12-18.
\(^104\) Ibid., p. 15.
As a scholar of wasafiyā, al-Qaraḍāwī takes a position in between; he advocates a renewal which accepts new issues emerging from modern life and takes the teachings and values of Islam into account, considering all Islamic principles and regulations. Therefore, tajdid al-dīn, for which he strives, does not entail a change in the sources and principles of Islam, but only in the way the religion is understood and lived according to the circumstances of life. A new reading and understanding of the divine sources by competent scholars and thinkers helps to find solutions to problems with which Muslims are faced today. Within this process, the reference texts of the Qurʾān and the Sunna play a vital role in evaluating all new issues as well. These sources are, for al-Qaraḍāwī, the assessment scale which decides about acceptance or rejection of new matters. His model in this respect is the salaf as-salāḥ. The recourse to the salaf does not mean a blind transfer of their statements or traditions. Rather, it implies a contemporary interpretation of the Islamic sources as the salaf proceeded according to their time. As a framework of this process, he postulates the objectives of the Shariʿa (maqāṣid ash-shariʿa), the common good (maṣlaḥat al-khaliq) and facilitation (taṣīr).

While al-Qaraḍāwī seeks to offer a modern concept of renewal and calls for a new reading of the Islamic sources, he draws a clear line between changeable (muttābihayrāt) and constant (thawābit) provisions of Shariʿa. Referring to the first category – the so-called al-minṭaqa al-mafṣūha (“opened zone”) and minṭaqat al-ʿāf (“the zone of mercy”) – he endeavors to show the flexibility and adaptability of the Shariʿa, because this era includes issues which are interpretable and ijtihād-accessible in compliance with time or local conditions. The second field, however, encompasses a specific number of principles and provisions of the Islamic religion which remain from his point of view immutable and ijtihād-inaccessible regardless of time and place. Hence, his dealing with various questions which belong in his view to the latter category such as the ḥudūd penalties and inheritance between men and women are contrary to the values of modernity and are incompatible with the current age. Against this background, al-Qaraḍāwī’s image as a renewer of Islam who tries to reconcile Islam with modernity, as he is perceived by his fans, remains utterly questionable, especially when comparing his concept of tajdid with the concepts of other authors such as Naʿīm and Abū Zaid. However, when compared with the views of the so-called Salafists, his approach appears to be one step ahead. For one thing, he strives for a certain dynamic interpretation of the sources of the text; for another thing, he remains ultimately eclectic and largely conservative.

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