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Revitalizing Islamic Theology in a Modern Paradigm: An Integrative Approach between Classical Doctrine and Contemporary Challenges

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims to analyze in depth the concept of revitalizing Islamic theology in a modern paradigm with an integrative approach between classical doctrine and contemporary challenges. This research uses a qualitative-philosophical method through hermeneutic, historical, and textual analysis approaches to explore the dynamics of Islamic theology in facing the crises of modernity, secularization, and spiritual disorientation. The results of the study indicate that the revitalization of Islamic theology requires a shift from apologetic theology to reflective-transformative theology that integrates revelation, reason, and social reality. This integration process gives birth to a new theological paradigm that is rational, inclusive, and contextual, without losing its transcendental dimension. An important finding shows that the concept of tawhid needs to be re-actualized as a principle of universal human ethics, while theological rationality must be directed towards creative dialogue with science and the humanities. In the Indonesian context, the revitalization of Islamic theology serves as the ideological foundation for Islam wasathiyah, which emphasizes the balance between faith, knowledge, and humanity. This study concludes that the revitalization of theology is not merely a conceptual renewal, but an effort to build a new awareness of the harmonious relationship between God, humans, and nature within the framework of modern Islamic civilization.

Key words: *Revitalization of Theology, Modern Paradigm, Tawhid, Islamic Philosophy, Moderate Islam*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic theology or ‘ilm al-kalām has, since its inception, served as an intellectual discipline that bridges revelation and reason, faith and social reality. It arose from the Muslim community's need to understand the nature of God, His will, and humanity's relationship with Him in a rational and systematic manner. In the history of classical Islamic intellectual thought, kalam debates were not only theological in nature, but also philosophical and political. It became an arena for dialectics between rationality (*‘aql*) and textuality (*naql*), as well as between the authority of revelation and human experience (Nasr 2015).

Theological schools such as Mu‘tazilah, Asy‘ariyah, and Maturidiyah sought to answer fundamental questions such as human free will, God's justice, and the nature of faith. Mu‘tazilah emphasized rationality and human freedom, while Asy‘ariyah emphasized God's absolute power and the subordination of reason to revelation. Maturidiyah sought a middle ground by accommodating the role of reason within the limits determined by revelation. This debate gave rise to extraordinary intellectual wealth in classical Islamic heritage, but with the passage of time,

many of these classical theological ideas are no longer considered capable of responding to the complexities of modernity (Rahman 2017).

Modernity has brought about a wave of social, political, and epistemological changes that have shaken the foundations of traditional thinking. Secularization, globalization, and value relativism have changed the way humans understand religion and truth. In this context, classical Islamic theology faces a crisis of relevance. The structure of kalam thinking developed in the Middle Ages is no longer adequate to explain new issues such as religious pluralism, human rights, gender equality, democracy, and the ecological crisis (Abdullah 2021).

This theological crisis is not only because its teachings are “outdated,” but also because its epistemological methods are unable to respond to the dynamics of modern human knowledge and consciousness. The old paradigm tends to emphasize the apologetic dimension defending beliefs, rather than reinterpreting the meaning of faith in a changing world. As a result, Islamic theology is often trapped in dualism: between maintaining orthodoxy or adapting to the demands of modernity. In this situation, two extreme poles have emerged: conservative groups that reject change in the name of purity of faith, and liberal groups that interpret religion freely without limits. Both fail to build an epistemological synthesis capable of bridging text and context (Hallaq 2019).

Modern Islamic thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Mohammed Arkoun have sought to revitalize Islamic theology in order to bring it into line with scientific developments and universal human values. Fazlur Rahman (1982) proposed the double movement method, which is a dual movement from the historical context of the Qur'an to the universal moral context, then to the current reality. Meanwhile, al-Jabiri emphasizes the importance of Arab-Islamic rational criticism to free Islamic tradition from the dominance of mythological thinking and foster critical rationality. Arkoun even calls for the deconstruction of classical epistemology to free theology from the ideological burdens of the past and open space for new hermeneutics.

Meanwhile, Nasr (2015) and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (2016) warn of the danger of losing the spiritual dimension in modernity. According to them, modernity tends to reduce humans to merely material and rational beings, whereas Islam views humans as spiritual entities that are integrated with the cosmic order. Therefore, the revitalization of Islamic theology must not be done by imitating Western secularism, but through the strengthening of divine wisdom (ilham) that is capable of restoring the balance between faith, reason, and social reality.

In Indonesia, the discourse on Islamic theological renewal finds its own unique context. Islamic theology functions not only as a belief system, but also as a foundation for social and political ethics. After the 1998 reform, various theological discourses emerged that attempted to

link faith with democracy, pluralism, and social justice. Figures such as Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Harun Nasution introduced a new paradigm that Islamic theology must free humans from backwardness and fear of change. Harun Nasution even initiated “rational theology” which opens space for the role of reason in understanding faith (Azra 2020).

However, social reality shows that religiosity in Indonesia is still dominated by an exclusive and legalistic theological approach. Religious radicalism, ideological polarization, and the commodification of religion in the digital space are indications of a theological deficit namely, the loss of a transcendental vision and social ethics in religion. This phenomenon shows that the revitalization of Islamic theology in Indonesia is not merely an academic matter, but also an urgent social need.

In a global context, modernity has given rise to various crises that require theological answers: identity crises, ecological crises, and spiritual crises. The modern world has succeeded in creating remarkable technological advances, but has failed to maintain spiritual balance and human morality. Therefore, contemporary Islamic theology needs to emerge as a liberating and healing force, not as a frightening dogma.

An integrative approach in modern Islamic theology presupposes the integration of classical doctrine and contemporary challenges. Theology should not stop at metaphysical explanations of God, but must be present as a moral and ethical reflection on the condition of humanity and nature. This requires a reinterpretation of basic concepts such as tawhid, divine justice (*al-'adl*), and destiny, so that they can be understood contextually in the modern world.

The revitalization of theology means carrying out *tajdid al-fikr al-dini* (renewal of religious thought) while maintaining the substance of revelation. It is not merely modernization, but an epistemological reconstruction that is capable of integrating spiritual, rational, and empirical dimensions into a single theological framework. Within this framework, revelation becomes a source of values, reason becomes a tool of interpretation, and social reality becomes a field of actualization.

This kind of integrative theology paves the way for the formation of a cosmopolitan Islamic ethic that values diversity, fights for justice, and maintains ecological balance. Thus, Islamic theology can once again become a moral and spiritual force that builds civilization, rather than merely a tool for legitimizing power or group identity.

This article critically analyzes the idea of revitalizing Islamic theology through an integrative approach between classical tradition and contemporary reality. This study not only aims to reexamine Islamic theology in its doctrinal aspects but also to present a new model of theology that is more humanistic, reflective, and responsive to the challenges of the times.

Thus, the revitalization of Islamic theology is not an attempt to abandon the past, but rather to revive its scholarly spirit so that it can engage in dialogue with modernity. This integrative approach is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of Islamic theology in the global era, especially in the pluralistic, democratic, and multicultural context of Indonesia.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative-philosophical approach with a library research method. This approach was chosen because the issues examined are conceptual and normative in nature, rather than empirical. The focus of this research is on tracing, interpreting, and re-criticizing the epistemological and ontological basis of classical Islamic theology to then contextualize it with the challenges of modernity and the contemporary crisis of spirituality (Rahman 2017).

The qualitative-philosophical approach places classical texts and modern thought as hermeneutic objects, namely sources that must be interpreted through historical awareness and social context. This method is in line with Gadamerian's view that understanding is always a dialogue between the past and the present (Gadamer 2004). In the context of Islamic theological studies, this method means rereading the classical Islamic intellectual heritage with the awareness that each text was born in a specific historical horizon but remains open to reinterpretation in accordance with the dynamics of the times.

1. Type and Approach of Research

This research is library-based research with a philosophical-critical orientation. The main objects of study include classical Islamic theological works (such as *al-Ibanah* by Abu Hasan al-Asy'ari, *al-Mughni* by Abdul Jabbar, *Kitab al-Tawhid* by al-Maturidi) and the works of contemporary thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, Mohammed Arkoun, and Harun Nasution.

A philosophical hermeneutical approach is used to interpret classical and contemporary texts dialogically, taking into account the historical context, language, and horizon of meaning of today's readers. In addition, a critical analysis approach is used to evaluate epistemological assumptions in classical theology and its potential for revitalization in a modern context.

2. Data Sources

The data sources in this study consist of two categories:

a. Primary sources, classical and modern texts directly related to the theme of Islamic theology, such as:

1) *al-Milal wa al-Nihal* by al-Syahrastani,

- 2) *al-Iqtishad fi al-I'tiqad* by al-Ghazali,
 - 3) *al-Mughni fi Abwāb al-Tawhid wa al-‘Adl* by al-Qadi Abdul Jabbar,
 - 4) as well as modern works such as *Islam and Modernity* (Fazlur Rahman 1982), *The Concept of Nature in Islamic Thought* (Nasr 2015), and *Critique of Arab Reason* (al-Jabiri 1990).
- b. Secondary sources, research, journals, and contemporary books that discuss the relationship between Islamic theology, modernity, and the philosophy of science, such as the works of Abdullah (2021), Azra (2020), and Hallaq (2019).
3. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out through three main stages:

- a. Descriptive-analytical, which systematically describes classical and modern Islamic theological concepts to understand the differences in their orientations, approaches, and epistemological assumptions.
- b. Critical-comparative, which compares basic concepts in classical theology (such as tawhid, divine justice, and human freedom) with more contextual and humanistic reinterpretations of modern theology.
- c. Integrative synthesis, which builds a new conceptual framework that combines the theocentric dimension of classical theology with the humanistic orientation of modern theology, as a form of revitalization of Islamic theology in the contemporary era.

This analysis does not aim to negate tradition, but rather to place it in a position of dialogue with modernity. Thus, Islamic theology is no longer apologetic, but becomes reflective and transformational, capable of responding to global issues such as identity, ecological, and humanitarian crises (Hallaq 2019; Abdullah 2021).

4. Data Validity and Reliability

To maintain the validity of the analysis results, this study uses the principle of conceptual triangulation, namely cross-source and cross-time comparisons between classical texts, modern interpretations, and contemporary contexts. This approach also takes into account the critical-historical reading methodology, as used in contemporary Islamic thought studies by Rahman and Arkoun.

In addition, the validation process was carried out through contextual analysis: how Islamic theological thought can be operationalized in the plural and dynamic Indonesian context. In this way, the research results are not only conceptually relevant,

but also have an applicative contribution to the development of Islamic theology in modern Muslim societies.

5. Analytical Framework

This study departs from the basic assumption that the revitalization of Islamic theology can only be achieved if there is epistemological interaction between classical tradition and modern reality. Therefore, the analysis is directed at three main pillars:

- a. The normative-transcendent dimension: theology as a reflection of divine values sourced from revelation;
- b. Rational-interpretive dimension: the role of reason and hermeneutic methods in interpreting theological doctrines;
- c. Practical-humanistic dimension: the actualization of theology in the form of social ethics, justice, and ecological responsibility.

Result

1. Reactualization of the Concept of Tawhid as a Universal Humanitarian Principle

The study found that the concept of tauhid, which has been understood in a theocentric manner in classical theology (especially in the Asy'ariyah and Maturidiyah schools of thought), needs to be revitalized into a principle of universal human ethics. Tauhid does not only mean the metaphysical oneness of God, but also contains the values of human unity, social justice, and moral equality.

Thus, tauhid must be understood as the basis of public ethics and social responsibility, not merely a metaphysical doctrine. This concept is in line with Fazlur Rahman's (1982) view that tauhid is essentially a moral principle that guides humans to uphold justice in social life (Rahman 1982).

The revitalization of tawhid in the context of modernity means affirming that faith is not separate from social praxis. The separation between theology and social ethics that occurred in Islamic history must be reconstructed through an integrative paradigm that places faith, reason, and action in a mutually reinforcing unity.

2. Transformation of Theological Rationality: From Dogmatic to Dialogical Hermeneutics

The second finding is the need for a transformation in theological rationality. In classical theology, rationality is often apologetic in nature, defending the truth of dogma logically but closed to philosophical dialogue. Meanwhile, modern theology demands a more hermeneutic-dialogical model of rationality, open to the realities of science, cultural plurality, and the dynamics of humanity.

The hermeneutic approach allows Islamic theology to no longer be a closed system, but rather a space for dialogue between revelation and reality. The thoughts of Mohammed Arkoun and Abid al-Jabiri show that the crisis in Islamic theology is caused by a stagnation of rationality, namely when theology stops reflecting on social reality (Arkoun 1994; al-Jabiri 1990).

With the hermeneutic method, classical doctrines such as *qadha-qadar*, divine justice, or human freedom can be creatively reinterpreted without negating their theological meaning. This transformation restores the function of theology as an enlightening discipline, not merely an affirmation of established doctrines.

3. Integration of Transcendence and Humanization Dimensions in Islamic Theology

The third finding shows that the revitalization of Islamic theology requires the integration of the dimensions of transcendence (divinity) and humanization (humanity). The two cannot be separated, because theology without humanization will fall into religious exclusivism, while humanism without transcendence will lose its moral and spiritual direction.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2015) emphasizes the importance of sacred knowledge in maintaining a balance between modern rationality and divine spirituality. Meanwhile, Nurcholish Madjid (1992), in the Indonesian context, asserts that true faith must bear fruit in the form of a just and civilized humanity.

The integration of these two dimensions results in an inclusive, reflective, and contextual Islamic theology that is capable of responding to modern crises such as dehumanization, extreme secularization, and moral disintegration. In other words, the revitalization of Islamic theology is not merely a renewal of concepts, but the formation of a new paradigm that places humans as God's caliphs with balanced spiritual and social responsibilities.

4. The Concept of Islamic Theology Revitalization (Integrative Model)

Based on the three main findings above, this study produced an integrative-transformative model of Islamic theology revitalization, with four basic principles:

- a. Epistemological openness: recognizing the plurality of sources of knowledge (revelation, reason, and empirical reality).
- b. Theological contextualization: interpreting doctrines of faith in accordance with the social and cultural dynamics of today's Muslim community.
- c. Integration of faith and practice: emphasizing that *tawhid* must have implications for social responsibility, environmental ethics, and gender justice.

- d. Critical spirituality: combining spiritual depth with social sensitivity, so that theology does not stop at the doctrinal dimension, but becomes a movement of moral awareness.

This model is expected to become a new conceptual framework in the development of Islamic theology that is responsive to the challenges of the times, both in the global and Indonesian contexts.

Discussion

1. The Paradigm of Islamic Theology Revitalization: From Traditionalism to Intellectual Integration

The revitalization of Islamic theology in the context of modernity is not merely a cosmetic effort to update terminology, but rather a paradigm shift from normative traditionalism towards intellectual and spiritual integration. In classical Islamic history, theology developed within a systematic framework, including Kalam Asy'ariyah, Maturidiyah, and Mu'tazilah, each of which emphasized different aspects of rationality and the power of God.

However, as noted by Harun Nasution (1986), classical Islamic theology tended to be trapped in rational-metaphysical debates that were far removed from social reality. In the modern context, this condition has become a major challenge: theology must be able to address the concrete problems of humanity, such as moral crises, poverty, social inequality, and environmental degradation.

The integrative approach referred to in this study is an effort to connect the normative-doctrinal dimension of Islamic theology with the reflective-contextual dimension, through a synthesis between classical heritage (turats) and modern consciousness (hadatsah). This process requires an epistemological reorientation: from apologetic kalam to reflective-transformative theology, which dares to reexamine the meaning of faith in the light of rationality and universal humanity.

2. The Relevance of Contemporary Thinkers in the Revitalization of Islamic Theology

The process of revitalizing Islamic theology cannot be separated from the contributions of contemporary Muslim thinkers who attempt to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity.

- a. Fazlur Rahman and the Ethics of Tawhid as a Principle of Social Morality

Fazlur Rahman (1982) reinterpreted the concept of tawhid not only as a metaphysical dogma, but also as a basis for social and political ethics. According to

him, the oneness of God demands unity of moral values in human society. This view became the basis for developing ethical theology, in which faith has direct implications for social action and humanitarian responsibility.

In the Indonesian context, Rahman's ideas are highly relevant to the spirit of Islam Nusantara, which emphasizes *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. Tawhid in Indonesian society is not merely a symbol of faith, but also an ethical principle that guides social justice, humanity, and balance between spirituality and progress.

b. Mohammed Arkoun and Epistemological Criticism of Dogmatic Theology

Arkoun (1994) offers an applied Islamology approach to critically reading theological texts. He rejects the view of theology as a closed system and calls for the deconstruction of reason in Islam, so that sacred texts can continue to be reread in accordance with their social context. This approach provides the basis for epistemological revitalization, namely shifting theology from a mere system of belief to a reflective discipline that interacts with historical and cultural realities.

In Arkoun's perspective, Muslims must dare to enter “forbidden zones” (zones d'interdits), namely intellectual areas that have been considered taboo, such as freedom of thought, human rights, and religious plurality. The revitalization of Islamic theology means freeing the mind from doctrinal shackles that limit critical abilities.

c. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and the Balance between Transcendence and Rationality

Unlike Arkoun, who is more critical of modern rationality, Nasr (2015) emphasizes the importance of restoring the sacred dimension of knowledge. According to him, the crisis of modernity stems from the separation between science and spiritual values. Therefore, Islamic theology must revitalize the harmonious relationship between revelation and reason between rational knowledge and divine knowledge (*al-'ilm al-laduni*).

Nasr's views are highly relevant in addressing the spiritual crisis of modern society, including in Indonesia, where modernization often leads to a void of meaning and spiritual alienation. Through the paradigm of sacred science, Nasr asserts that theological renewal does not mean abandoning tradition, but reviving it in a new, more humane context.

d. Nurcholish Madjid and Inclusive Theology in Indonesia

Nurcholish Madjid (1992) presents a uniquely Indonesian perspective on theological renewal. He rejects exclusive theological views and emphasizes the need for inclusive theology, namely an understanding of religion that is open to plurality and

modern rationality. In his view, faith must be accompanied by an awareness of humanity and freedom of thought, so that Islamic theology can become the foundation for civil society.

Madjid's thinking is very significant in the context of globalization and democratization. The revitalization of Islamic theology in Indonesia can take concrete form in the Islamic education movement, social da'wah, and community empowerment based on the values of justice, tolerance, and humanity.

3. The Crisis of Modernity and Challenges for Islamic Theology

The crisis of modernity in the Islamic world is marked by a crisis of identity, a crisis of spirituality, and a crisis of epistemology. Modernization brings technological progress and rationality, but it also gives rise to a disorientation of values. In this context, Islamic theology has an important role to play as a moral and spiritual corrective.

However, to fulfill this role, theology must be able to engage in dialogue with science, philosophy, and social reality. As stated by Osman Bakar (2018), one of the weaknesses of contemporary Muslims is their inability to integrate modern science with the framework of Islamic theology. As a result, there is a dichotomy between faith and science, between the mosque and the laboratory.

The revitalization of Islamic theology, therefore, is not only about reviving old teachings, but also about building a new epistemology that enables creative dialogue between revelation and reason, between religion and civilization. In the Indonesian context, this means making Islam not only a belief system, but also a civilizational paradigm that gives birth to humanistic and transformative social, political, and educational ethics.

4. Integrative Theology Model: Uniting Spirituality and Modernity

From the various studies above, it can be concluded that the revitalization of Islamic theology requires a new integrative-holistic model with the following characteristics:

- a. Rationality of Faith: recognition of the role of reason as a means of understanding revelation without negating the spiritual dimension.
- b. Dialogical Theology: openness to other traditions and modern science through intellectual dialogue and human ethics.
- c. Theological Humanization: placing humans as moral subjects, not merely objects of destiny, with social responsibilities inherent in faith.
- d. Social Contextualization: theological interpretation that is responsive to contemporary issues: gender, ecology, economic justice, and religious plurality.

- e. Active Spirituality: fostering awareness that true faith must bear fruit in concrete actions that bring grace to all creatures.

This integrative model not only combines *turats* and *hadatsah*, but also builds an epistemological synthesis between the three main sources of knowledge: revelation, reason, and empirical reality.

5. Implications of Islamic Theology Revitalization in Indonesia

In the Indonesian context, theological renewal has direct relevance to national and religious dynamics. Integrative theology can serve as an ideological foundation for Islam *wasathiyah* (moderate Islam), which has long been a characteristic of Islam in the archipelago.

First, inclusive theology can strengthen social cohesion in a pluralistic society by emphasizing the values of justice, tolerance, and equality. Second, transformative theology can be a driver of political ethics based on moral responsibility rather than pragmatic interests. Third, spiritual-rational theology can inspire modern Islamic education that fosters critical thinking and deep spirituality.

Thus, the revitalization of Islamic theology is not only an academic agenda, but also a civilizational project that aims to build a new awareness of the relationship between God, humans, and nature in the modern order.

Conclusion

This study shows that the revitalization of Islamic theology in the modern paradigm is not only a movement to renew religious thought, but also a process of epistemological reconstruction and profound spiritual transformation. Islamic theology can no longer stand as a closed system that only defends classical dogma, but must become a living science that engages in dialogue with the challenges of the times: modernity, plurality, globalization, and the humanitarian crisis.

The results of this study confirm that the revitalization of Islamic theology must be rooted in an integrative approach that connects three main dimensions: revelation, reason, and social reality. Thus, faith does not stop at the doctrinal level but is transformed into ethical awareness and humanitarian praxis. This model rejects the old dichotomy between theology and morality and revives the spirit of *tawhid* as a principle of unity that encompasses spiritual, intellectual, and social aspects.

Philosophically, this revitalization represents a shift from apologetic theology to reflective and dialogical theology. This new paradigm invites Muslims to re-read classical teachings through a hermeneutic and rational approach, without denying their transcendental meaning. In this

context, theology serves not only to justify faith, but also to interpret the meaning of religiosity in a contextual, critical, and humanistic manner.

In practice, the renewal of Islamic theology has direct implications for the character building of the ummah and society. First, integrative theology opens up space for the strengthening of Islam wasathiyah (moderate Islam), which affirms the balance between belief and openness, between spirituality and rationality. Second, it can strengthen national consciousness and universal humanity, because it places tawhid as the foundation of social justice and interfaith peace. Third, the revitalization of theology becomes the foundation for Islamic education that is oriented towards critical reasoning and active spirituality, so that it is able to shape a generation that is both knowledgeable and moral.

In the Indonesian context, the revitalization of Islamic theology has strategic significance as part of efforts to build an inclusive and progressive Islamic civilization in the archipelago. The classical heritage (turats) is preserved as a source of values and spirituality, but is reinterpreted in the light of modernity and humanity. This paradigm serves as a bridge between the past and the future, between doctrine and social action, between faith and scholarship.

Finally, this study concludes that the revitalization of Islamic theology is not only an academic task, but also a civilizational responsibility. It requires intellectual courage to reinterpret texts, spiritual honesty to acknowledge human limitations, and social awareness to make faith a source of ethics and progress. Revitalized Islamic theology is a theology that does not separate heaven from earth, but unites God, humanity, and nature in a living, dynamic, and liberating consciousness of tawhid.

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