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Contemporary Religious Discourse between the Constants of Religious Reference and the Prospects for Renewal

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Abstract:
This research addresses the issue of contemporary religious discourse in light of the rapid intellectual, social, cultural, and technological transformations, by examining the relationship between the constants of religious reference and the requirements of renewal, viewing this relationship as one of integration and interaction rather than conflict or rupture.
The study begins by distinguishing between the immutable principles of religion and religious discourse, which is subject to change and revision in accordance with the requirements of time and place. It also identifies the most prominent manifestations of the crisis of contemporary religious discourse and explores the prospects for renewal in ways that enable religious discourse to preserve the authenticity of its religious reference while responding to the requirements of the contemporary era.
Keywords: Religious discourse; religious reference; renewal; prospects for renewal.

Introduction:

Religious discourse constitutes a spiritual and religious authority that ranks among the most influential forms of authority in human existence. It addresses not only human behavior in its outward manifestations but also penetrates the depths of the human conscience and contributes to shaping a worldview. It establishes the standards by which good and evil are measured in human life. Since religious discourse derives its power and authority from its association with the absolute and the immutable, its capacity for change and guidance can mobilize entire societies and contribute to the building of civilizations; conversely, when affected by rigidity and stagnation, it can paralyze energies and impede the movement of life and development.
However, this symbolic or religious authority places religious discourse before a decisive civilizational challenge: How can it fulfill its guiding role within a reality characterized by fluidity and rapid transformation across various scientific, social, and digital domains, without becoming a closed historical text?
These rapid and accelerating transformations have contributed to reshaping human thought and behavior.
These transformations have imposed new challenges on religious institutions and actors in the religious sphere, requiring religious discourse to possess the capacity to comprehend and engage with these changes. Contemporary religious discourse is no longer confronted merely with the challenge of preserving established principles; it is also required to reconsider its approaches and to continually renew its tools, methods, and methodologies in order to keep pace with the aspirations and concerns of people today and to address their emerging questions without compromising the constants and fundamental principles that constitute its religious reference and identity.

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The significance of this issue is further heightened by the diversity and multiplicity of discourses and the differences among their schools of thought. Some tend to preserve established principles, while others call for renewal and a break with the past. Still others advocate a middle path, avoiding both excess and negligence, by combining authenticity with religious reference while calling for the renewal of religious discourse in accordance with the methods, tools, and approaches required by the contemporary era.

Nor should we overlook the role of the digital sphere and new media, which have increasingly posed a challenge to religious discourse and contributed to the emergence of forms of discourse shaped by their algorithms. Religious information has become widely accessible, while virtually everyone has gained the ability to analyze religious discourse and reformulate it according to their own inclinations. This has made it increasingly necessary to establish a comprehensive and scientifically grounded religious reference framework capable of regulating religious discourse, countering currents of extremism and excess, and preserving its authenticity.

Accordingly, there is a pressing need to distinguish between religion, as revealed and immutable, constituting the religious reference, and religious discourse, as a human effort to understand the religious text and seek to apply it to reality in ways that serve humanity. In this human capacity, religious discourse remains open to change, development, review, renewal, and updating in accordance with changing circumstances, including time, place, people, and contexts.

Renewal does not mean breaking with the heritage, religious constants, or disregarding them; rather, it is a disciplined, systematic, and scholarly process aimed at developing the tools of understanding and independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) through new mechanisms and approaches. It seeks to connect religious values and principles with contemporary issues while preserving religious reference and identity. Renewal that lacks a guiding compass risks falling into dilution, fragmentation, extremism, and terrorism.

Religious reference, therefore, is not a constraint that restricts *ijtihad*; rather, it constitutes the fundamental framework, or the constant that remains unchanged. The definitive religious principles and the higher objectives of Islamic law (*Maqasid al-Sharia*) provide the foundation upon which renewal is built, allowing for movement and development in subsidiary matters and emerging issues without undermining the fundamentals. It thus enables a civilizational renewal capable of accommodating the changes of the contemporary era without losing its spirit or authority, thereby ensuring that *ijtihad* retains its identity.

The relationship between the constants of religious reference and the requirements of renewal is not one of opposition or rupture; rather, it is a relationship of complementarity. Religious reference provides renewal with its principles, parameters, and boundaries, while renewal enables religious discourse to remain effective and sustainable and to respond to contemporary changes.

Accordingly, this study seeks to examine contemporary religious discourse between the constants of religious reference and the prospects for renewal. It does so by addressing the concepts of discourse and religious reference, identifying the most prominent challenges facing religious discourse in the contemporary era, and then exploring the areas and parameters of renewal in ways that contribute to preserving the religious reference and developing a discourse better able to achieve its objectives and purposes in promoting the values of moderation, balance, and dialogue, as well as combating extremism and excess—what is referred to as **"the terrorism of religion."**

First- Clarification of Concepts:

1) Religious Discourse:

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A. Discourse:

- **Linguistically:** With regard to the term discourse (khitāb), the Dictionary of the Standards of Language (Muʿjam Maqāyīs al-Lugha) states: "It derives from the verbal noun of khāṭaba, yukhāṭibu, khiṭāban wa mukhāṭabatan, meaning speech or conversation between two persons. It is so called because it involves addressing one another and exchanging responses[1].

Ibn Manẓūr further supports this meaning, stating: "Al-khiṭāb is the exchange of speech. One addresses another through speech (mukhāṭabatan wa khiṭāban), and mukhāṭaba, following the pattern mufāʿala, is derived from khiṭāb[2].

- **Terminologically:** The term *discourse* has generally been associated with various contexts. Some have defined it as: "the legal ruling, or what is known as the Lawgiver's discourse, relating to the actions of individuals through prescription, stipulation, or modification[3].

Others, however, have regarded it as: "a form of speech through which the speaker marshals various means enabling him to influence his audience, and presents them with arguments and proofs by which he substantiates his claims[4].

B. Religion:

- **Linguistically:** The term *dīn* (religion) derives from the transitive verb *dāna–yadīnu*, meaning "to possess or rule over someone," and when used with the preposition *li-* (*dāna lahu*), it means "to obey him." When used with the preposition *bi-* (*dāna bi-al-shayʾ*), it means "to adopt something as a religion or creed," that is, to profess and believe in it, to adhere to its moral teachings, and to worship according to it[5].
- **Terminologically:** It is defined as: "A divine system that guides people of sound intellect, by their own choice, toward righteousness in this world and success in the Hereafter[6]. Here, the term refers specifically to Islam.

C. Religious Discourse (Genitive Construction):

Religious discourse may be defined as: "the exposition addressed in the name of Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims, calling them to Islam, teaching it to them, or educating them in its creed and law, conduct and dealings, thought and behavior, in order to explain Islam's position on issues concerning life, humanity, and the world, whether at the individual or social level, and whether spiritual or material, theoretical or practical[7].

If the concept of discourse in general refers to a communicative act in which words, ideas, context, the recipient, and arguments intersect, adding the adjective "religious" shifts it from a general domain to a more specific and meaningful one. In this context, discourse is connected to religion in terms of its source, references, values, subjects, and objectives. It derives from the foundations of the Holy Qur'an and the noble Prophetic Sunnah, as well as from other Islamic branches and traditions, whether represented by religious institutions or individuals. Religious discourse derives its significance from the acts of communication, conveying the message, and exerting influence, while religion determines the reference framework and the domain within which the discourse operates and upon which it is grounded[8].

Accordingly, the two cannot be equated. Religion represents the primary source of religious discourse, namely revelation, whereas religious discourse is a human formulation through which revelation is understood, explained, interpreted, and conveyed to human beings.

Consequently, religious discourse is subject to human variables, including circumstances, language, time, place, and the means employed for communication.

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In summary, religious discourse may be described as a communicative discourse with a religious reference, grounded in the sources and values of religion and expressing a human understanding of them through the development of mechanisms and approaches appropriate to each era, with the aim of achieving conscious interaction with human beings and reality.

Religious discourse cannot exist in isolation from its context; rather, it is engaged in continuous interaction with transformations within society and with its various issues, provided that such interaction takes place within the framework of the religious reference and its scholarly parameters, without excess or negligence.

Given its continuous engagement with societal issues and the diversity of its fields, functions, and objectives, religious discourse has developed into various forms and patterns. This has led researchers to classify it according to a variety of criteria, including **field, function, and content**.

Among its most prominent types are:

A. Doctrinal Discourse: This type of discourse is concerned with matters of religious creed and the issues related to them, such as monotheism and polytheism, faith and disbelief, atheism, and extremism. It is based on evidence derived from the Holy Qur'an and the noble Prophetic Sunnah. Its objective is to reinforce the doctrinal reference and safeguard it from deviation and error, as well as to combat extremism and excess in religion. Its scope encompasses the domains of faith and conduct.

B. Jurisprudential Discourse: This type of discourse is concerned with Islamic legal rulings, whether in the fields of worship, transactions, or family matters, and with applying them to the actions of legally responsible individuals and to newly emerging issues. It addresses what is lawful and unlawful and includes *fatwa* discourse (the issuing of religious legal opinions).

C. Preaching and Media Discourse: This type of discourse focuses on explaining religion to people and calling them to it, as well as reinforcing values and virtues. It includes guidance and exhortative discourse.

D. Sufi Educational Discourse: This type of discourse is concerned with the spirit and the self, moral and spiritual education, conduct, and noble virtues, as well as the ethical, behavioral, and doctrinal upbringing of younger generations.

This classification does not imply that these types are separate from one another. Rather, there is an overlap in their functions and contents within a unified framework that constitutes a single religious discourse. Accordingly, speaking of the different types of religious discourse is merely a methodological classification for analytical purposes and does not imply rupture, separation, or complete independence among them.

There are also other types that may be mentioned, such as:

A. Discourse of Moderation and Balance: This refers to a form of discourse that calls for an understanding of religion while preserving its established principles, without distortion or falsification.

B. Modernist and Renewal-Oriented Discourse: This discourse calls for renewing the methods and approaches used to understand religion by developing new methodologies for engaging with the Qur'anic text, such as humanistic, historicist, and scientific approaches. It represents intellectual currents associated with modernity, postmodernity, feminism, and other intellectual trends.

C. Extremist and Radical Discourse: This type of discourse is characterized by hostility, *takfīr* (declaring others unbelievers), and religious innovation. It is an extremist form of discourse whose proponents pose a challenge to religious reference and established principles because of their tendency to interpret religion according to their own inclinations.

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Religious discourse should be balanced and characterized by moderation, balance, and a God-centered orientation. It should be grounded in a stable religious reference and embody a set of essential foundations and characteristics, the most important of which are:

- **It should be divine in its source**, deriving its principles and values from revelation.
- **It should be moderate**, avoiding excess, *takfīr* (declaring others unbelievers), and extremism, while maintaining a balance between reason and revelation.
- **It should be renewed and flexible**, capable of adaptation and continuity, while taking into account the temporal and spatial particularities of different contexts.
- **The religious preacher should embody sound qualities**, including reason, piety, knowledge, and scholarly effort (*ijtihād*), rather than extremism. The absence of any of these qualities may contribute to extremism.

2) **Contemporary:** Within the context of this study, the term *contemporary*—as in "contemporary religious discourse"—refers to what pertains to the present era and to the intellectual, social, cultural, epistemological, and technological transformations that characterize it, as well as the new issues and questions generated by these transformations, which have imposed themselves upon contemporary religious discourse.

Contemporaneity does not merely mean belonging to the present in temporal terms; rather, it refers to the ability to consciously engage with the new developments of reality, comprehend its transformations, and provide an appropriate religious response to them while preserving the foundations and constants of the religious reference.

Describing discourse as "contemporary" does not imply separation from or a break with heritage. Rather, it refers to a form of discourse that derives its foundations from a religious reference while adapting its tools and modes of presentation in accordance with human needs and challenges. Contemporaneity is therefore a functional dimension of discourse that requires renewal in its means and approaches without compromising religious constants.

If the characteristics of religious discourse are renewed in light of its reference, content, and guiding functions, these characteristics remain closely connected to the reference upon which it relies to construct its identity, define its objectives, and regulate the mechanisms through which it is understood and directed. Religious reference thus constitutes the organizing framework that grants religious discourse its legitimacy and coherence, while serving as the dividing line between what is grounded in the fundamental principles of religion and what falls within the domains of *ijtihad*, religious discourse, and human understanding.

Accordingly, it is essential to examine the nature of this religious reference as the framework from which religious discourse derives its legitimacy and through which the pathways of its renewal and the means of translating it into effective practice can be regulated.

3) Religious Reference:

A. Linguistically: The term *marjiʿiyya* (reference) is a derived noun formed from the verbal noun *marjiʿ* of the verb *rajaʿa–yarjiʿu*, and it denotes repetition and returning or referring back[9].

It is stated in the Qur'an: **"To Me is your return"** [al-ʿAnkabūt: 7], meaning your ultimate return or destination. Likewise, He, the Almighty, says: **"And our return is to Allah"** [Ghāfir: 43].

The verb *rajaʿa* means "to return" or "to go back," while *arjaʿahu ʿan al-shayʾ* means "he turned him away from something and prevented him from it," and *arjaʿahu ilayhi* means "he returned or referred it back to him[10].

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Based on these linguistic definitions, it becomes clear that the term *marjiʿiyya* is linguistically derived from a root conveying the meanings of turning away, returning, and referring back to something.

B. Terminologically: It refers to the trusted scholarly authority to which one turns for an opinion on a particular matter. It also denotes a set of overarching normative principles and orientations that guide judgments concerning what is right and wrong, and what is permissible and impermissible, from the perspective of the recognized interests of society. Such a reference possesses theoretical authority, free from particular considerations, in distinguishing between what is correct and what is erroneous[11].

ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Messiri defined it as follows: "It is the essential idea that constitutes the foundation of all ideas within a given discourse, and its ultimate, fixed foundation, without which a worldview cannot be constructed. It is the single principle to which all things are referred and attributed, while it itself is neither referred nor attributed to anything else[12].

As for **religious reference** as a genitive construction, it refers to "the divine foundations and principles derived from revelation for governing the affairs of the community in various aspects of life, to which people refer when disagreements and disputes arise[13].

More broadly, it constitutes the religious identity of society and its constitution for life.

It is the religious authority to which people turn in matters concerning both their religious and worldly affairs. It has been defined as: "those religious principles, sources, and foundations to which people in a given society or state refer in order to derive the rulings of their religion, understand its issues, and clarify its concerns[14].

From another perspective, religious reference has been defined as: "the intellectual authority to which people turn in matters concerning their doctrinal and jurisprudential affairs[15].

To this, we may add the dimensions of conduct and spiritual reference, or moral education and conduct, as well as reference in the transmission and recitation of religious knowledge.

Taken together, these aforementioned foundations and pillars constitute the religious reference of both the individual and the community. They also contribute to preventing disagreements and disputes among individuals, particularly through the doctrinal component, any disruption of which may lead to extremism and terrorism, and the jurisprudential component, which regulates people's lives in matters of worship and social transactions.

When the religious reference of a particular country is defined, this entails consideration of the jurisprudential school adopted by that state in administering people's affairs, the doctrinal school that assists in understanding and explaining matters of creed, and the school of spiritual conduct and education adopted by the state as a framework for moral and spiritual formation. The same applies to the traditions of religious transmission and recitation.

An example of this is **the religious reference in Algeria**, which refers to the framework relied upon in deriving religious rulings, represented by the **Mālikī school of jurisprudence**, the **Ashʿarī school of theology**, and **Sufism according to the path of al-Junayd**. This is what Ibn ʿĀshir referred to in his well-known statement:

In the creed of al-Ashʿarī and the jurisprudence of Mālik, And in the path of al-Junayd, the spiritual wayfarer.

After clarifying the fundamental concepts of the study and defining the meanings of religious discourse and religious reference, there arises a need to elucidate the relationship between religious discourse and the constants of the religious reference, while highlighting their role in regulating the pathways of understanding and discourse, and distinguishing between the immutable and the variable,

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as well as between those domains that require renewal and *ijtihād*, in response to the requirements of contemporary reality.

Second- The Constants and Domains of Religious Reference:

If the authority of religious discourse derives its legitimacy from its affiliation with revelation, then the sustainability of this legitimacy depends on the extent to which the discourse adheres to the constants of the religious reference. These constants constitute the solid core of the Islamic civilizational structure and protect collective consciousness from fragmentation and extremism, as well as from the waves of globalization and their consequences.

A. Linguistically:

The verb thabatha–yathbutu–thubūtan wa thabātan means "to become firm, resolute, and composed." From it are derived athbata–yuthbitu–ithbātan, meaning "to verify, establish, or affirm." The term thābit (constant) also conveys the meaning of affirming something and keeping it in place, as stated by Almighty God: "Allah eliminates what He wills and establishes what He wills" [al-Raʿd: 39].

It is also used in the sense of preventing someone from leaving and keeping them in a particular place, as in the Almighty's saying: "to restrain you" [al-Anfāl: 30].

From the same root comes al-tathbīt, meaning empowerment or strengthening, derived from al-thabāt (steadfastness) in times of hardship. Likewise, al-tathabbut, with the bāʾ carrying sukūn, denotes being steadfast in heart and judgment. It conveys the meanings of stability, continuity, firmness, and resistance to change.

A thing is said to be thabuta when it becomes stable and firmly established and does not change[16].

B. Terminologically:

A thābit (constant) is that whose evidence is definitive. The term constants refers to those rulings established by evidence that is definitive in both authenticity and meaning, as well as by sound and established scholarly consensus (ijmāʿ) that the Muslim community adhered to during its early centuries. They have also been defined as: "the matters upon which consensus has been reached and the definitive texts concerning which dispute is impermissible; departing from them is regarded as departing from the community of Muslims and following a path other than that of the believers[17].

Religious constants are those fundamental principles, foundations, and rulings established by definitive evidence, or those universal principles and general foundations that do not change with changes in time, place, circumstances, or individuals. They constitute the reference framework that preserves the unity and coherence of religion and defines the scope of ijtihād and human action.

2) The Variable:

A. Linguistically:

The term mutaghayyir (variable) is derived from ghayyara–yughayyiru–taghyīran, meaning "to change" or "to alter." Change (taghyīr) refers to replacing one attribute with another, and it also denotes difference and transition from one state to another. A mutaghayyir is something characterized by variation and difference[18].

Accordingly, the concept of change encompasses the following meanings: alteration, transformation, transition, variation, and difference. Thus, in its linguistic sense, a variable is that which is susceptible to alteration and transformation, without remaining fixed upon a single value, state, or meaning.

B. Terminologically:

The variable as related to religious reference refers to: "those rulings established on the basis of probable evidence, or through ijtihād based on analogical reasoning (qiyās), al-maṣāliḥ al-mursala (unrestricted public interests), custom (ʿurf), or the higher objectives of Islamic law (Maqāṣid al-

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Sharīʿa). Variables constitute the domains of ijtihād in which disagreement is not restricted, owing to the probabilistic nature of their evidentiary basis, whether in terms of authenticity or meaning. In such matters, there is room for the same latitude that was available to the righteous predecessors. People may therefore discuss them through evidence, proofs, and arguments, while preserving brotherhood and the bonds of religious unity[19].

More precisely, the term variable refers to all issues, questions, and rulings that are not based on definitive evidence with regard to their authenticity or meaning, and which Islamic law has left open to ijtihād and scholarly consideration. They are therefore capable of adapting to changes in time and place, circumstances, and interests, while remaining framed by the principles of the religious reference, its constants, and its higher objectives. Variables thus constitute the domain corresponding to the constants.

3) The Scope of the Constants of the Religious Reference:

In addition to what has been mentioned above, the constants of the religious reference refer to a set of foundations and rulings, values and principles, whose legitimacy derives from definitive scriptural texts or universal principles, and which do not change with changes in time and place. They also include matters established by evidence that is definitive in both authenticity and meaning. These include:

- **Doctrinal Constants:** These encompass belief in the oneness of God, belief in the messengers, the revealed books, the angels, the Last Day, and all the fundamental principles of creed (*uṣūl al-iʿtiqād*), including matters pertaining to divine attributes (*ilāhiyyāt*), the unseen (*ghaybiyyāt*), and prophethood (*nubuwwāt*), which do not change with changing eras.
- **Jurisprudential Constants:** These are the established principles governing acts of worship, including the fundamental forms of worship recognized in Islam and established by definitive scriptural texts.
- **Ethical and Moral Constants:** These include fundamental values such as justice, benevolence, mercy, trustworthiness, brotherhood, humanity, and cooperation.
- **Constants of the Major Objectives of Islamic Law:** These include the preservation of religion, life, property, intellect, and progeny. They represent the higher purposes for which the divine obligations and legal prescriptions were established.

The source of these constants is divine revelation, represented by the Holy Qur'an and what has been authentically transmitted from the noble Prophetic Sunnah. This dimension is characterized by completeness and universality; it is firmly established and not subject to alteration or nullification.

As for religious thought, which is subject to *ijtihād* and change, it is the product of the scholarly efforts of scholars and Qur'anic exegetes, in addition to the jurisprudential reasoning developed throughout history to derive rulings and apply them to reality. This is the domain in which renewal takes place.

It should be noted that the concept of the "constant" does not imply rigidity. Affirming the constants of the religious reference does not mean closing the door of *ijtihād* or freezing religious discourse, because the scope of renewal emerges primarily in the realm of variables, as well as in methods of understanding, application, and communication with contemporary reality.

4. Levels of Religious Reference

To clarify this point, the levels of religious reference can be divided into the following:

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- **Religious Constants:** These refer to the doctrinal, jurisprudential, spiritual, and ethical foundations, as well as the higher objectives (*maqāṣid*) of Islamic law, discussed above. They constitute a stable domain that is not subject to change or negation.
- **Probabilistic Rulings and Juristic Interpretations:** These refer to the understandings developed by scholars in interpreting religious texts and deriving legal rulings from them. Such interpretations are open to reconsideration and further *ijtihād* when circumstances change and the requisite conditions are fulfilled.
- **Cultural and Historical Heritage (Religious Heritage):** This encompasses customs, traditions, and practices that emerged within particular historical contexts and are therefore open to evaluation, criticism, and development.

The constants of religious reference should not be understood as an obstacle to renewal; rather, they should be regarded as the framework that regulates and guides it. They ensure the continuity of religious reference by preserving its fundamental principles and identity, while serving as a compass that prevents fragmentation. At the same time, the sphere of the variable, interpretation, and *ijtihād* allows for engagement with the transformations and changes taking place in reality across various fields.

Accordingly, the real problem in contemporary religious discourse does not lie in the existence of religious constants as such, but rather in the absence of a methodological distinction between these constants and what constitutes human interpretation or inherited tradition. This confusion may lead to attributing sanctity and permanence to human interpretations that are, in fact, open to revision, criticism, and evaluation—or, conversely, to subjecting definitive constants and matters of certainty to the principle of change.

It is therefore necessary to distinguish between **epistemological renewal**, which concerns the variable aspects and inherited traditions, and **deconstructive dismantling**, whose aim is to displace and abolish religious constants by treating them as merely human interpretations or historical variables. Such an approach seeks to remove their sacred status in the name of modern scholarly methodologies, such as **destruction, deconstruction, humanization, and the historicization of the text**.

5. The Relationship between Religious Discourse and Religious Reference

The relationship between religious discourse and religious reference is founded upon the principles of grounding, reference, interpretation, and implementation. Religious reference represents the foundational framework from which religious discourse derives its legitimacy, content, and governing parameters. By contrast, discourse constitutes the human formulation through which religion is understood and through which its objectives, values, and guidance are expressed within a particular historical and social context. As a human product, discourse is therefore open to both correctness and error, as well as to criticism and evaluation, depending on the degree of *ijtihād* involved.

The role of religious reference is one of regulation and guidance, as it prevents discourse from becoming detached from its doctrinal, purposive, and ethical foundations. Religious discourse, on the other hand, is responsible for translating rulings into lived reality in the form of a discourse capable of addressing human beings, engaging with the issues of contemporary reality, and achieving effective communication. The strength of religious discourse is not measured by the extent to which it preserves inherited expressions and formulations, but rather by its ability to remain faithful to the constants of its religious reference while successfully applying them to a changing reality.

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Thus, religious reference serves as the guarantor of religious discourse, providing it with authenticity and coherence, while discourse grants religious reference presence, effectiveness, and continuity. Renewal, in turn, constitutes the dynamic dimension through which ways of understanding, expressing, and applying religious principles are reconstructed, without compromising what is definitive and constant.

6. The Relationship between Religious Reference and Religious Discourse: A Summary

The relationship between the two can be summarized in the following points:

- **The Relationship of Foundation and Legitimacy:** Religious discourse derives its strength from referring to and relying upon religious reference. Religious discourse does not acquire the status of religion merely by addressing religious issues; rather, it does so through its connection to religious reference and through grounding its claims in divine revelation and the noble Prophetic Sunnah.
- **Authority:** Religious reference is what grants discourse its symbolic and normative authority.
- **Regulation and Control of Discourse:** Religious reference determines what constitutes divinely revealed and sacred matters and what belongs to the human sphere and is therefore open to *ijtihād* (interpretation and understanding of religion).
- **Religious Reference as the Foundation and Religious Discourse as Its Derivative:** Religious reference is characterized by sanctity and stability, whereas religious discourse is based on understanding, interpretation, exegesis, flexibility, relativity, and the application of revealed texts to reality.
- **Islamic Reference as a Catalyst for *Ijtihād*:** Islamic religious reference serves as an impetus for *ijtihād*, as it contains purposive and interpretive mechanisms that encourage the intellect to engage in reflection, renewal, and contemplation, while preventing religious discourse from stagnating or becoming rigid.
- **Preservation of Islamic Authenticity:** Religious reference prevents dissolution into, or uncritical assimilation of, imported Western ideas and preserves Islamic authenticity.

The relationship between the two is therefore complementary. Religious reference constitutes the spirit and essence of discourse, while discourse should not merely invoke religious texts and their formal expressions; rather, it should penetrate the objectives and ultimate purposes of the religious reference. Successful religious discourse is that which translates the religious reference from abstract principles into humane and practical solutions to the problems of the contemporary age.

To develop such contemporary discourse, capable of restoring and revitalizing the human dimension, it is necessary to highlight the role of religious reference in achieving spiritual and social security. This, in turn, calls for an in-depth examination of the crisis facing religious discourse and the challenges confronting it, with a view to addressing them effectively.

Third - The Role of Religious Reference in Regulating Religious Discourse and Achieving Spiritual and Social Security:

The relationship between religious discourse and religious reference has gone beyond their shared sources and foundations to assume a functional dimension manifested in regulating and guiding the course of discourse in a manner that preserves its consistency with religious constants and ensures its ability to respond to emerging developments. Religious reference performs a normative function by defining the frameworks within which discourse operates, thereby preventing religion from being reduced to individual readings or interpretations detached from its foundational principles, while also preventing certain interpretations from being transformed, over time, into immutable constants that are no longer open to reconsideration.

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Hence, the need has emerged to distinguish between what is definitive and constant within the structure of religion and what constitutes human interpretation that is open to plurality, change, development, and criticism. The soundness of religious discourse therefore depends upon maintaining a clear distinction between what is religious in itself and what represents a human understanding of religion.

This distinction between religion itself and the human understanding of religion contributes to the achievement of several dimensions, including:

2. Doctrinal and Spiritual Stability of the Individual

The spiritual stability of the individual and the religious dimension of this stability are manifested in providing a doctrinal and ethical framework through which to construct a balanced conception of God, the human being, and existence, as well as of the individual's relationship with God. It also provides the individual with a system of meanings that enables them to cope with existential transformations and pressures without losing their essential identity.

Religious discourse governed by religious reference is not limited to presenting religious rulings; rather, it contributes to developing religious and ethical awareness, strengthening Islamic faith, and explaining its foundations in a clear and accessible manner, بعيدًا from theological disputation. In this way, the ordinary individual develops an overall conception of God, the human being, the universe, life and death, the relationship between them, and what is expected of them in this worldly life. Sound faith, therefore, contributes to establishing an upright society free from deviation.

Religious discourse derived from the constants of religious reference has a profoundly important role in consolidating faith and correcting the individual's path toward the worship of God alone, the Almighty, as stated in the Qur'an: **"I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me"** (Qur'an, al-Dhāriyāt 51:56). This imbues such discourse with an atmosphere of spiritual and religious illumination, whereby the recipient experiences spiritual purity and is endowed with a sense of devotion and submission to God Almighty alone, together with a desire to turn toward Him and respond to His call, as stated in the Qur'an: **"Call upon Me; I will respond to you"** (Qur'an, Ghāfir 40:60).

Religious discourse also plays a role in encouraging worship and in warning against severity, extremism, and excessiveness in religion, in accordance with the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him): **"Beware of excessiveness in religion, for those before you were destroyed because of excessiveness in religion[20].**

Thus, discourse that remains connected to religious reference and its foundational principles is characterized by balance, avoiding both excess and deficiency.

2. The Ethical and Moral Dimension

Religious discourse seeks to encourage Muslims to engage in productive work, guide them toward beneficial deeds, acquaint them with lawful means of earning a livelihood, encourage them to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, promote righteousness and good deeds, cultivate sound character, and develop everything that refines the mind, enlightens the intellect, and enables individuals to gain insight into the affairs of their worldly life and their ultimate destiny. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: **"Whoever calls to guidance will have a reward like the rewards of those who follow him, without that detracting from their rewards in the slightest; and whoever calls to misguidance will bear a sin like the sins of those who follow him, without that detracting from their sins in the slightest[21].**

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Religious discourse also plays a role in promoting noble moral values, so that they become a way of life by which people conduct themselves in their relationships with one another, because such values bring considerable benefit to both the individual and society and contribute to their well-being in this world and the Hereafter. Islam is a religion that calls for noble moral character, as the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: **"I was sent only to perfect noble character[22].** The Qur'an had previously praised him and presented him as an exemplar for us, as God Almighty says: **"And indeed, you are of a great moral character"** (Qur'an, al-Qalam 68:4).

It should be noted that when religious discourse fails to adhere to the Prophetic manners, morals, and values, it may become extremist discourse that calls for discord and strife among people. The effectiveness of religious discourse in shaping people's inner dispositions and behavior therefore depends upon the extent to which it remains connected to values, ethics, religious reference, and its established religious constants.

3. The Social Dimension

Activating religious discourse in a manner that responds to the challenges of the contemporary age contributes significantly to achieving social security and distancing society from waves of extremism, religious excess, and takfīr (the practice of declaring others unbelievers). It also contributes to fostering cohesion and unity among Muslims, strengthening the bonds of brotherhood among them, encouraging them to care for one another, consult with one another, and contribute to resolving both individual and collective problems within an atmosphere characterized by love and solidarity.

In this context, religious discourse serves as a guiding authority for promoting social solidarity. It plays an important role in encouraging members of society to assume their social responsibilities and in clarifying the meanings of unity and solidarity, while upholding the principles of equality and brotherhood among Muslims—whether strong or weak, rich or poor, young or old. There is no distinction between an Arab and a non-Arab except in piety.

Achieving social security results, first and foremost, from achieving doctrinal security, followed by the consolidation of virtuous values and morals among people. Establishing bonds of brotherhood among individuals represents one of the most important means and most effective approaches to resolving disputes and conflicts between those in disagreement and to achieving peace among individuals. Muslims, in their mutual affection, compassion, and solidarity, are like a single body: when one organ suffers, the rest of the body responds with sleeplessness and fever. A Muslim is the brother of another Muslim; he does not betray him, abandon him, or despise him.

Religious discourse rooted in an authentic religious reference calls for strengthening the bonds of brotherhood among members of the same society and regards such brotherhood as a fundamental pillar in the construction of an Islamic society. Therefore, there is a continuing need to renew the bonds of love, solidarity, cooperation, tolerance, and mutual support in order to preserve inner peace, which constitutes the genuine gateway and latent strength for embarking upon processes of social construction and transformation and for confronting social dangers and afflictions.

Religious discourse also plays a significant role in promoting a culture of coexistence and rapprochement among people. One manifestation of this is reconciliation and the restoration of good relations between disputing parties, as stated in the Qur'an: "So fear Allah, set things right among yourselves, and obey Allah and His Messenger if you are believers" (Qur'an, al-Anfāl 8:1).

Reconciliation and the restoration of good relations among people are among the greatest acts of devotion to God Almighty and among the righteous deeds that ought to be undertaken. They contribute indirectly to fostering unity among people, as well as to achieving social integration,

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cohesion, and interconnectedness among all members of society, away from extremism, religious excess, terrorism, and discourses of *takfīr*.

Religious discourse has a clear and highly significant role in demonstrating that a society in which favoritism and nepotism prevail, where personal interests are allowed to interfere with the public interest, and where intellectual corruption becomes widespread will be afflicted by a chronic disease and disorder, as weakness gradually permeates its social fabric and various institutions. Such conditions must be addressed, as they weaken society and undermine its security and stability.

Religious discourse constitutes a spiritual authority capable of spreading security, safety, and reassurance among people's hearts, while combating ideas that call for moral dissolution and immorality and that undermine security and social peace. Religious discourse committed to an authentic religious reference contributes to achieving security, happiness, and stability in people's lives, as stated in the Qur'an:

"Then, when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray nor suffer; but whoever turns away from My remembrance will certainly have a life of hardship, and We will raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection." (Qur'an, Ṭā Hā 20:123–124).

Since the essence of religious discourse is aimed at cultivating a balanced human being and fulfilling their spiritual and moral needs, while seeking to achieve psychological and social stability, as well as doctrinal and social security, its ability to perform this function remains closely linked to its effectiveness in engaging with the continually evolving and changing realities of human life. Stability in fundamental principles and values does not necessarily entail rigidity or stagnation in modes of expression and mechanisms of application.

The increasing and accelerating transformations affecting the social and cultural dimensions of human reality require religious discourse to reconsider its tools, methods, approaches, and subject matter, so that it remains capable of responding to emerging questions and growing challenges, particularly in the age of digitalization and artificial intelligence. This has made the present period one of the most critical and complex stages, given the rapid and radical technological and value-based transformations it entails and the spiritual, religious, and social crises that may emerge from them, such as terrorism, extremism, religious excess, atheism, suicide, drug abuse, secular feminism, secularism, homosexuality, and other related phenomena.

This makes the renewal of religious discourse neither an intellectual luxury nor a departure from religious constants; rather, it is a civilizational, ethical, and religious necessity that ensures the continued effectiveness of religious discourse and its capacity to fulfill its intended role in both this world and the Hereafter. It also strengthens its ability to keep pace with contemporary transformations and respond to the various doubts and objections that arise and may affect the future and security of individuals and communities. This requires conscious communication, a sound methodology, and a religious vision that preserves the religious reference while responding to changes in reality, provided that renewal remains within the bounds of religious, scholarly, and methodological principles and regulations.

When renewal becomes detached from religious reference, it may develop into selective interpretations or an unregulated response to the pressures of reality.

The importance of religious reference is thus manifested in its role as the framework that regulates the process of renewal and preserves the balance between the constants of religion and the changing conditions of reality. Research into the renewal of religious discourse therefore constitutes, in essence, an effort to strengthen and consolidate religious reference, because the effectiveness and

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soundness of renewal depend upon the existence of a stable reference on which it can be grounded—a reference that regulates its course and prevents it from deviating or being led astray.

Fourth - Reasons for the Renewal of Religious Discourse:

Renewal constitutes a natural response to a range of factors generated by contemporary reality and its challenges. It has also become an urgent necessity for identifying the nature of emerging developments in the technological, social, religious, scientific, and human spheres, in response to which rigid and static discourse is no longer adequate.

There are several factors and reasons that support the call for the renewal of religious discourse, which can be summarized as follows:

- **The failure of contemporary religious discourse** and its complete inability to accommodate and achieve integration among the intellectual, scientific, religious, and even social dimensions of the Muslim community's overall system. It has also failed to protect the identity of the Islamic nation from various forms of internal and external penetration, to preserve it in the face of imported currents, and to provide it with the capacity to withstand and remain firmly grounded in the face of sweeping transformations that challenge established conceptions and realities.
- **The inability of current religious discourse to unite the ranks of the Islamic community**, bring its members together, and strengthen its internal cohesion. Instead, it has contributed to increasing divisions and rifts among Muslim brothers, fragmenting them into sects, parties, and rival groups, each claiming to possess the truth and genuine faith while declaring others unbelievers. Each group regards itself as the saved sect and considers the others who disagree with it to be misguided. Such discourse tends to focus on what divides and fragments rather than on what brings people together and promotes unity.
- **Its inability to present a humane and missionary vision** characterized by universal perspectives, objectives, and frameworks, while maintaining clear and stable principles and foundations and, at the same time, possessing the dynamism, movement, and continuous adaptability required to engage with emerging developments, unforeseen circumstances, and scientific transformations.
- **Its general weakness at the level of content and methodology**, which has resulted in its inability to comprehend emerging developments and in the persistence of rigid and insular modes of understanding that remain confined to a particular issue or a particular methodological approach23.Lack of planning, poor adaptability, and the failure to subject issues to a rigorous and sound scholarly methodology; improvisation in understanding texts without awareness of, or reference to, previous scholarly efforts; the personalization of issues; and the avoidance of systematic, interconnected, and rigorous collective reading.
- The prevailing tendency toward *takfīr* in political religious discourse, together with accusations of treason and collaboration with the Other, resulting from sectarian differences, the escalating conflicts over power, and the clash of worldly interests, has negatively affected Islamic discourse. It has consequently become fragmented and characterized by multiple perspectives and orientations, lacking unity, coherence, and strength.
- Clinging to the past and the inability to move toward the future; reviving and restating the issues of earlier scholars; and seeking solutions to emerging problems imposed by digital transformations and other developments in the past.
- The continued reliance on traditional means and incomprehensible language when addressing the digital human, without embracing the modernization of language and contemporary methods of

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religious outreach, or making use of them in serving religious discourse, such as electronic platforms, smart devices, and artificial intelligence programs.

- The severe weakness among preachers and their excessive reliance on educational and exhortative discourse at the expense of scholarly, political, security-related, and ethical religious discourse.
- The inadequacy of religious discourse and its failure to meet the conditions necessary for civilizational advancement, as embodied in rational arguments, the Quranic text, and the diverse Prophetic traditions, which can engage the masses and respond to their aspirations, provide appropriate solutions to various civilizational problems, and establish an integrated Islamic vision applicable to all times and places. Such discourse also seeks to enlighten the Muslim community regarding its present and future, as well as the purpose for which it exists. On the one hand, ignorance of the Arabic language, together with its various styles, methodologies, and meanings, may constitute an obstacle to understanding religion, developing religious discourse, giving it its proper character in interpreting religion, communicating it to people, and simplifying it without compromising the required legal and religious meaning. There is therefore a need for a clear, precise, and profound digital language, without allowing simplification to degenerate into superficiality or deviation from the truth.
- The emergence of waves that outwardly claim to advocate renewal, while in reality embracing dissipation, detachment, and a break with religious constants and foundational principles[24].
- The challenge posed by technology and artificial intelligence, together with the advances they have achieved and the spiritual, religious, scientific, and human challenges and emerging issues accompanying them.
- The declining role of traditional institutions of religious knowledge, as digital platforms have enabled anyone to produce and disseminate religious content. Consequently, recipients are confronted with a large number of discourses containing conflicting fatwas and interpretations, all claiming to represent the truth. This has resulted in the proliferation of digital religious references and the multiplication of opinions associated with them. Such plurality of references has, in turn, contributed to the spread of unregulated and unbalanced discourse. The speed of the digital space facilitates the alarming dissemination of extremist interpretations and superficial or fragmented readings of texts, particularly when content takes the form of a short *Reel*, completely detached from its context and from sound scholarly methodology, and disconnected from religious constants and foundational principles.
- Digital platforms have further deepened this gap, particularly through the presentation of short *Reels* addressing complex and interconnected religious and intellectual issues in the form of quick answers. This weakens the depth of analysis and neglects the details of intricate issues, their contexts, and the differences of scholarly opinion surrounding them.
- In addition, platform algorithms influence the formation of religious awareness, contribute to the diversification of *ijtihād*-based perspectives, and shape open religious and epistemological visions that facilitate the circulation of religious information. The danger is intensified because such developments may exceed the capacity of traditional religious institutions—such as mosques, *zāwiyas*, and pulpits—to correct and rectify misinformation, particularly when such content is presented in an emotionally charged manner capable of exerting a strong influence on audiences.
- The digital environment places religious discourse before a dual challenge of responsibility: preserving the authenticity of its content and its scholarly reference on the one hand, while possessing the capacity to comprehend and engage with the digital environment through a digital language

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adapted to its algorithms on the other. This makes renewal in religious discourse an urgent necessity in the context of the digital revolution. At the same time, it is essential to preserve the constants of religious reference and its foundational principles by strengthening communication and developing means and mechanisms, in order to ensure continued communication, continuity, and digital presence; enhance the scholarly and media competencies of religious discourse; and consolidate the sound religious reference in confronting the chaos of digital religious content.

Fifth: Guidelines for the Renewal of Religious Discourse

- Renewal means rebuilding religious presence within the digital environment on the basis of combining scholarly authenticity with communicative effectiveness. Addressing the challenges of digitalization requires the renewal of religious discourse, the strengthening of religious reference, and the activation of its digital presence, thereby achieving a balance between openness to the tools of the contemporary age and the preservation of the foundations and constants of religious discourse.
- Renewal never means changing or compromising the religious constants. Rather, it means reviving what has become neglected or forgotten of the rulings of Islamic law, while preserving what is inherited and introducing improvements to it in terms of tools, means, and methodologies that can adapt to its particularity and develop within it, making it suitable for every time and place. Islam does not recognize intellectual isolation, nor does it ever fear any methodology or thought originating from the Other. It does not view differing thought on the basis of hostility; rather, it has cultivated within Muslims a spirit of openness and independence, enabling them to benefit from whatever serves its universal mission.
- Islam constitutes an effective form of protection for Muslims against all currents, ideas, and cultures. Muslims can benefit from their tools and methodologies, adapt to them, and transform them into a new form, so that they ultimately acquire the character of a distinctively Islamic intellectual framework.
- The renewal of religious discourse means developing its tools, methods, and methodologies, and keeping pace with the language of the contemporary age without distortion or alteration, without compromising the foundations of creed or Islamic law, and without creating a new religion emptied of its constants and foundations. This underscores the importance of regulating the course of renewal through a set of scholarly, methodological, and religious guidelines that can ensure that renewal proceeds in accordance with the constants of religious reference while keeping pace with digital transformations toward a renewed, flexible, and effective discourse.
- It should be noted that the term *guidelines* refers to: “a set of general rulings and comprehensive principles that regulate conduct in general, derived by jurists from the religious texts—the Holy Qur’an and the Prophetic Sunnah—as well as from the principles of Islamic law, the higher objectives of Islamic legislation, and the juristic interpretations of the leading scholars of Islamic jurisprudence[25].
- As is well known, religious discourse proceeds from an integrated conception that does not confine renewal to changing the content of discourse or the ways in which it is presented. Rather, it takes into account the various elements of the discursive process. Discourse has content, a reference framework, means, methodologies, tools, and language. At the same time, it involves a speaker who conveys the discursive message, produces and directs the discourse, as well as an audience that receives it and interacts with it within a specific social, cultural, temporal, and spatial context.
- Regulating the process of renewal requires the reformer to take into consideration the guidelines pertaining to the discourse itself and its content; those pertaining to the preacher and his

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qualifications; and those pertaining to the audience, its particularities, and its level of awareness and understanding, as well as the application of discourse to its actual context. This ensures a balance between the authenticity of religious discourse and its effectiveness in contemporary reality.

1. Guidelines Pertaining to Religious Discourse:

They may be summarized as follows:

- Adhering firmly to the constants and foundational principles of religious reference. Renewal does not mean severing ties with, or departing from, the doctrinal and legal foundations of religion or its definitive rulings. Rather, it means reviving them anew through the tools of the contemporary age, reactivating them, and disseminating their constants in accordance with the requirements of the age in ways that serve people's lives and relationships.
- The necessity of recognizing the limitations and shortcomings of human reason and moving beyond the dichotomy of reason and revelation, as well as the notion that reason is the judge over religious law. For however perfect human reason may appear to be, it remains subject to deficiency precisely when it assumes that it has reached completeness. The revealed text takes precedence over reason, while reason serves the text: its starting point is the text, and its limits are determined by the constants of the text.
- Adhering to clarity and simplicity in language and style, without complication or ambiguity, because ambiguity leads to confusion and fragmentation. It is also necessary to interpret and explain the religious verses in accordance with the requirements of the prevailing language so that people may be able to understand them, in accordance with the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him): **"Speak to people in a manner they can understand. Would you like Allah and His Messenger to be denied?**[26]
- Taking into consideration the condition of the audience in terms of illness and health, their capacity for comprehension, and their scholarly and intellectual abilities. The speaker should be concise where concision is appropriate and elaborate where elaboration is necessary, addressing matters that serve people's actual circumstances and conditions, while taking into account the time and place, as well as the customs and culture of the audience. Any discourse that fails to observe these considerations is likely to be rejected and fail to gain acceptance among its recipients. This is particularly evident in mosque discourse: the preacher should address people from within the reality of their lives and deal with their actual problems. Discourse in rural areas is not necessarily the same as discourse in the city, nor is discourse addressed to a specific community identical to discourse addressed to the broader Muslim community. Problems change, as do style, language, and the target audience. Accordingly, the circumstances require consideration of time, place, and prevailing conditions. This is what is meant by taking reality and its new developments into account when applying religious rulings and meanings to particular contexts.
- The necessity of distinguishing between matters that are constant and those that are subject to change, particularly emerging intellectual or social issues with which the preacher can adapt.
- Taking into consideration the higher objectives (*maqāṣid*) of Islamic law when formulating religious discourse. The preacher should not speak according to personal desires and inclinations; rather, discourse must be guided by the objectives prescribed by Islamic law, lest one become subject to the Arab saying: **"Whoever speaks outside his field brings forth wonders."**
- Religious discourse should be characterized by moderation and balance, remaining distant from religious excess, extremism, terrorism, exclusion of the Other, and violation of the Other's sanctities,

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in accordance with the Qur'anic verse: **"And thus We have made you a moderate nation"** (Qur'an 2:143).

- The necessity of keeping pace with digital development and employing contemporary means—including algorithms, technologies, and software—to enhance and develop religious discourse and deliver it to recipients in a responsible manner, without neglecting the need to benefit from the strengths of discourse addressed to non-Muslims. It is therefore essential to remain informed about developments in various fields, sciences, and areas of knowledge, while focusing on addressing erroneous beliefs and correcting them through evidence and rational argument, seeking to remove misconceptions, clarify their errors and elements of disbelief, and respond to the doubts associated with Islam as a result of excessive approaches and suspicious views, such as claims that Islam was spread by the sword, that it is a religion of bloodshed, and other false and unfounded allegations.
- There is a need for a logical discourse that appeals to reason and wisdom, presenting Islam and its spirit of tolerance as they are, without forced interpretations or distortion, while taking into consideration sectarian particularities and pluralism under the umbrella of Islam and freedom of belief, in accordance with the Qur'anic verse: **"Whoever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve"** (Qur'an 18:29). This should be accompanied by avoiding engagement in discussions of issues that provoke discord and division, and by approaching the principle of difference as a means of fostering coexistence and brotherhood.

2. Guidelines Pertaining to the Preacher:

The producer and communicator of religious discourse must meet a number of conditions and guidelines in order to be capable of producing discourse that keeps pace with the language of the contemporary age while preserving the constants of religious reference. These may be summarized as follows:

- **Scholarly and religious qualification:** The preacher must be well versed in the sciences of Islamic law, firmly grounded in them, and possess a sound creed and a stable, moderate disposition consistent with the framework of religious reference. He should be familiar with the views and *ijtihād* of scholars and should not depart, in his discourse or juristic reasoning, from the broader consensus of the Muslim community. Al-Shāṭibī states in this regard: "The rank of *ijtihād* is attained by one who possesses two qualities: first, a complete understanding of the objectives of Islamic law; and second, the ability to derive rulings on the basis of that understanding[27].

Ijtihād also requires *fiqh al-nafs*—a sound and discerning understanding of the self—which serves as the criterion by which the correctness or error of a mufti's legal opinion is assessed, and by which it is determined whether that opinion should be accepted or rejected. Scholars have unanimously agreed that a mufti must possess sound juristic understanding, a sound mind, mature judgment, accurate reasoning and legal inference, intellectual alertness and sound judgment, and comprehensive knowledge and learning[28]. This is in accordance with the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him): **"Perhaps a bearer of jurisprudential knowledge is not himself a jurist[29].** We may encounter a preacher who merely repeats statements without awareness or understanding and without knowledge of the rulings of Islamic law. This is more dangerous for the Muslim community because he speaks without understanding or awareness. Therefore, the preacher must take into consideration people's circumstances and reality and must not contradict their religious reference.

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Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy on him, states: "Whoever gives people legal opinions based merely on what is transmitted in books, while disregarding their customs, practices, times, places, and circumstances, has gone astray and led others astray[30].

- **Intellectual ability to reconcile revelation and reason:** Revealed texts can never be completely separated from rational understanding. A text cannot be properly understood without employing the intellectual faculty to establish harmony between revelation and reason. Ibn Rushd, may Allah have mercy on him, emphasizes this by stating: "Demonstrative reasoning does not lead to contradicting what the Law has brought with reason, for truth does not contradict truth; rather, it agrees with it and bears witness to it."[v] Accordingly, even when a text is definitive, reason is not prevented from understanding it. Rather, it requires a particular form of *ijtihād* through which the operative cause (*ʿillah*) underlying the definitive text may be ascertained, in accordance with the legal principle that rulings established by revealed texts revolve around their operative causes and the objectives of Islamic law associated with them, being present when the cause exists and absent when it does not.

Evidence for this may be found in the action of our master ʿUmar, may Allah be pleased with him, when he suspended the application of the ruling established by the text concerning the allocation of alms to those whose hearts were to be reconciled, as well as his decision not to apply the prescribed punishment for theft during the Year of the Famine (*ʿĀm al-Ramādah*), because the ultimate purpose underlying the relevant text was not realized in either case. Suspending the application of a textual ruling does not mean invalidating it; rather, it means returning to it whenever the intended operative cause underlying the ruling becomes manifest[31].

People's growing disengagement from religious discourse in recent years can be attributed to its being completely detached from their reality, aspirations, and suffering. Thus, one finds the preacher speaking about ancient theological debates, such as the disputes between the Ashʿarites and other theologians, while overlooking the suffering and wounds of his community, such as the struggle in Gaza, drug abuse, feminism, social ills, and other contemporary issues.

The role of the renewer and the *mujtahid* lies in his skill and ability to apply revelation to an evolving reality. This requires an understanding of what God Almighty intends through His commands and prohibitions, and making this divine intent the criterion by which realities and emerging issues are assessed. The suitability of Islamic law for every time and place is closely connected with the continuous renewal of thought, jurisprudence, theology, and religious discourse, so as to keep pace with reality, its new developments, transformations, and unprecedented circumstances. Accordingly, the need for renewal remains ongoing for as long as humanity continues to exist.

- **Possessing the intellectual and linguistic faculties** necessary to understand religious texts, establish connections among them, and apply them to reality while taking into account the various dimensions of each particular case. This requires depth of understanding rather than superficiality in presentation and discussion.
- **Combining knowledge of Islamic law with other fields of knowledge, the digital languages of the contemporary age, and an understanding of the circumstances, customs, and traditions of the audience**, in accordance with the principle of addressing people according to their intellectual capacities. As ʿAlī, may Allah honor his countenance, is reported to have said: "Address people according to the measure of their understanding."
- **Demonstrating objectivity, impartiality, and moderation**, while remaining far removed from extremism and religious excess in discourse; and possessing the capacity for *ijtihād* rather than merely

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imitating others, while keeping pace with emerging developments, contemporary issues, and unprecedented circumstances (*nawāzil*).

- **Avoiding haste in issuing judgments.**
- **The necessity of mastering digital language and platforms** in order to keep pace with the contemporary age and digital audiences, and to respond to misconceptions and doubts while ensuring that religious discourse remains firmly grounded in its foundational reference.
- **The preacher must recognize the danger of directing religious discourse in the service of particular orientations, institutions, or individuals**, whether by using it as a means of incitement, exclusion, or the promotion of hatred and discord among members of the same community. The preacher must understand that he is accountable before God for every statement he makes and every message he directs to people, whether from his pulpit, on his social media page, or in a statement delivered to the media. He is a role model within society, and therefore his words must be measured, unifying rather than divisive, aimed at narrowing the gap and reducing differences between adversaries, firmly grounded in an established religious reference, and calling for moderation and balance.
- **He must be fully aware of the reality of the community, including its aspirations and suffering**, and must be knowledgeable about its circumstances, conditions, and emerging developments. Whoever undertakes the task of renewing the condition of the community and its religious life must possess insight into and expertise concerning its reality, without disregarding its present or future concerns. He must be familiar with the world in which it lives and must not operate in an empty space[32].
- **He must embody noble moral qualities**, including piety, trustworthiness, justice, and truthfulness. The mufti speaks on behalf of the law of God and applies its rulings; therefore, justice is the foundation upon which society is built.

The *mujtahid* who seeks to guide the movement and development of society through the derivation of religious rulings and juristic standards, so that his ideas are characterized by Quranic guidance and sound direction, must make the establishment of justice both his objective and his foundation. He must issue legal opinions (*fatāwā*) that serve the establishment of justice; indeed, the substance of all his legal opinions must be directed toward building a just society[33].

He must avoid anything that undermines his dignity and honor or casts doubt upon his religion, character, and conduct. He must remain closely attached to religion in belief, practice, and conduct, and nothing should appear in his behavior that suggests negligence toward Islamic law or toward its trustworthy scholars.

He must avoid anything that undermines his dignity and honor, as well as anything that may compromise his religion, character, or conduct. He must remain closely attached to religion in belief, practice, and conduct, and nothing should appear in his behavior that suggests negligence toward Islamic law or its trustworthy scholars. His foremost concern should be the concerns of the community, and its suffering should be his own suffering. His benefit to others should therefore be broad and widely recognized, and he should be known and acknowledged for his deeds, truthfulness, and sincerity. His approach should be devoted to reforming the condition of the community as a whole. His renewal efforts should not be confined to a particular group or a specific approach; rather, they should constitute an integrated project of renewal carried out sincerely for the sake of God alone.

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3. Guidelines Pertaining to the Audience

These are the guidelines or conditions that must be taken into consideration with regard to the audience, so that religious discourse can be formulated accordingly and these considerations can be properly observed.

- **Taking into account the audience's educational, intellectual, and social level.**
- **Taking into account age, environment, circumstances, customs, and traditions**, which together constitute the temporal and spatial context of the audience, as well as the different age groups and gender. Religious discourse varies according to gender and age group; young people, for instance, are not like older adults, just as women are not like men.
- **Taking into account the language spoken by the audience** and adopting a language that facilitates understanding, communication, and interaction, such as the digital language mastered by the younger generation today.
- **Relying on dialogue and evidence for persuasion**, rather than commands, intimidation, and fear-based approaches.
- **Taking into account the psychological and social dimensions of the audience**, without compromising the religious text or its higher objectives (*maqāṣid*).

In light of these guidelines, renewal at the level of religious discourse becomes an integrated system of principles that simultaneously preserves the authenticity and constants of religious discourse while ensuring its effectiveness in addressing contemporary developments. The content of religious discourse cannot be renewed in isolation from the conditions governing its production and reception, nor from the environment in which it takes root and bears fruit. Accordingly, the scholarly and methodological, religious and communicative qualification of the preacher, together with the necessity of taking into consideration the particularities, needs, and contexts of the audience, are essential conditions for the success of a renewal project capable of accommodating changing realities while preserving the constants and foundational principles.

Such renewal restores religious discourse to its role in reform, enabling it to assist human beings and contribute to the achievement of **spiritual, political, social, and intellectual security**, without severing its connection with the religious reference. It thus remains engaged in an ongoing process of interaction with reality and its changing issues.

Sixth - Prospects for the Renewal of Religious Discourse:

This refers to the process of envisioning the future of religious discourse in a manner that enables it to identify the fields toward which it may develop in light of the rapid transformations taking place in the world, whether intellectual, social, or technological. This reality requires religious discourse to develop its tools and methodological mechanisms while preserving its religious reference. Accordingly, the prospects for renewal are not limited to reformulating religious discourse; rather, they extend to developing its content, renewing its communicative tools, strengthening its presence and effectiveness in the digital sphere, and opening itself to all fields of knowledge, while enhancing its ability to address the concerns of contemporary human beings. This would make it more effective in building religious awareness and strengthening spiritual and social security. These prospects may be outlined as follows:

1. Scientific and Epistemological Prospects

- Renewing approaches to understanding religious texts**, whether through historical, scientific, or humanistic approaches.**
- Strengthening ***ijtihād*** in emerging and contemporary issues.

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- Reconstructing the relationship between the Islamic religious sciences, the humanities, and the natural and scientific disciplines.
- Addressing contemporary issues and emerging developments through scholarly and scientific discourse.

2. Social and Humanitarian Prospects

- **Promoting the values of coexistence and dialogue and consolidating moderation and the middle way.**
- **Focusing on issues shared among religions as a means of advancing peace and security.**
- **Developing a discourse that fosters reassurance, tranquility, and inner peace.**
- **Confronting waves of terrorism, religious extremism, and excessiveness in religion.**
- **Restoring the ethical dimension to the understanding of religious texts.**

3. Technological and Scientific Prospects

- **The necessity of moving religious discourse into the digital sphere.**
- **Producing religious discourse suited to the characteristics and algorithms of contemporary digital platforms.**
- **Employing artificial intelligence in contemporary religious discourse**, while taking into account the need to develop the digital communication skills of preachers and religious outreach workers.

4. Prospects for Religious Discourse Institutions

- **Activating and enhancing the role of religious institutions in producing and renewing religious discourse.**
- **Providing preachers, religious outreach workers, jurists, and imams with scholarly training** that combines sound grounding in Islamic law and scholarly knowledge with an understanding of reality and proficiency in contemporary communication technologies.
- **Moving from individual renewal to a sustained institutional project** based on research, evaluation, and future-oriented planning.

The prospects for renewing religious discourse go beyond the superficial meaning of developing modes of expression, means, or methodologies. They encompass the construction of a religious discourse capable of embracing, raising awareness, and accommodating diverse realities, while preserving the constants of the religious reference, consolidating the spiritual and ethical dimensions, and strengthening the **spiritual, social, and cybersecurity of societies**.

Conclusion:

The study concludes that:

Contemporary religious discourse faces a delicate equation that combines the preservation of the constants of the religious reference with the necessity of keeping pace with changing realities, emerging developments, and unprecedented circumstances (*nawāzil*). This makes renewal dependent upon a methodology that safeguards these constants while seeking to develop the mechanisms of understanding, communication, dissemination, and influence, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of religious discourse in the contemporary context.

The success of the renewal process requires distinguishing between what is constant and what is changeable, while observing religious and scholarly guidelines and taking into consideration the characteristics of both the preacher and the audience, together with the ability to accommodate intellectual, social, scientific, and digital transformations.

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The future of religious discourse depends upon achieving a balance between authenticity and renewal, religious reference and openness, and revealed text and contemporary reality. Such a balance strengthens the preservation of identity and the constants of the religious reference, while enabling religious discourse to keep pace with the developments of the contemporary age, contribute to building awareness, and enhance **cybersecurity, spiritual security, social security, and political security**. It also enables it to confront the challenges of the age with scholarly awareness and a sense of civilizational responsibility, thereby ensuring continuity and fulfilling the human responsibility of stewardship (*khilāfah*).

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Footnotes:

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