CONTENTS

Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī: The Founder of Muslim Modern Reformist Thought

Spahic Omer[1]

Abstract: This article discusses the pan-Islamic reformist thought of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī. The article's approach is three-thronged, focusing on the meaning of Islamic unity and its relationship with pan-Islamism as a Western rendition of the former; how al-Afghānī tried to take on Western challenges methodically and scientifically, and sometimes even in the West's own backyard; and how al-Afghānī's ground-breaking ideological responses to the West necessitated a modernisation of the vocabulary of Islamic religious scholarship. The article concludes that al-Afghānī was an eminent political activist and scholar, and was a trailblazing modernist reformer. His influence was enormous. He was one of the pioneers of modernist movements in Islam that proliferated after his death. His tactic was neither reckless imitation nor irresponsible denigration, with regard to anything within the sphere of either Western civilisation or Islamic tradition.

Keywords: Al-Afghānī, Islamic unity, modernist movement, pan-Islamism, reformist thought

Introduction

The latter part of the 19th and the early 20th centuries were most critical for Muslims. The Muslim *ummah* (community) and Islamic civilisation as a whole stood at a crossroads. Internally, the Muslim world was divided like never before, religious laxity and intellectual stupor prevailed, and concerning the permutations of the socio-political dynamics of the day, Muslims remained lethargic and directionless. Externally, the Western world was rising rapidly, and its economic and military might, coupled with aggressive colonialist and expansionist tendencies, prompted it to make the most of the declining world of Islam.

In short, while Muslims were on the defensive, desperately clinging to their cultural and civilisational survival, Westerners were on the offensive, sensing that the old world order was collapsing irreversibly and that a new one, with Western values and worldview in charge, was in the offing. Nobody doubted that Islam and Muslims were at the most critical juncture of their civilisational existence. With the Ottoman Empire, as the last imperial torchbearer of the caliphate institution, in shambles, Muslims faced bleak prospects. Hence, some drastic steps had to be taken and unconventional choices made. People were torn between being audacious and facing the challenges head-on, in the belief that the latest developments were just another setback, as well as a test, and that the Islamic faith and Muslim spiritual, ethical, and intellectual configurations had what it takes to overcome the challenges, and between being despondent and fatalistic, recoiling in horror from the tribulations and gazing into the abyss of a cultural and civilisational obscurity.

One of the leading Muslim voices of the second half of the 19th century was Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897). In many ways he was an originator of Muslim reformist thought in

---

[1] Dr. Spahic Omer is an Associate Professor at the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). His research interests cover early Islamic history and civilisation, as well as the history and theory of Islamic built environment. He can be reached at ospahic@iium.edu.my.

modern times. He advocated that Muslims should take on Western challenges by means of the strength of Islamic unity—ideologised in the West as pan-Islamism—affirmative political actions, and a series of religious and educational reforms that will be faithful to the Islamic spirit and, at the same time, will be duly responsive to the exigencies of the contemporary era.

Afghānī's influence was enormous. His ideas served as precursors to more than a few branches of Muslim intellectualism in the 20th century. As a pioneer, some of his ideas were accomplished, while others were in their infancy. The latter was refined and taken to another level by his disciples and followers. Just like everything, Afghānī's reformist thought was subjected to the principles of evolution and progress, where sometimes the pure political gusto prevailed, and at other times the one relating to the religious and educational concerns did.

Afghānī was a Muslim political activist, scholar, and philosopher. He signified a microcosm of the Muslim affirmative engagement and dedication towards the end of the 19th century. This article delves into several aspects of his reformist interdisciplinary thought. The discussion is divided into the following sections: Pan-Islamism versus Islamic unity; the context of Afghānī's thought; Afghānī versus the West; modernising the vocabulary of Islamic religious scholarship; conclusion.

Pan-Islamism versus Islamic unity

Pan-Islamism was one of the most important concepts of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, both in Muslim and Western scholarships. At the same time, however, it was also a misunderstood and misapplied philosophy. The root cause of the problem was the fact that what pan-Islamism meant to Westerners was not what the notions of total as well as worldwide Islamic unity, brotherhood, and cooperation meant to Muslims, in particular to the architects and promoters of those notions.

To Westerners, pan-Islamism was a form of Islamic, chiefly political, activism that called for a Muslim union or federation against Western Christian powers. It was an idea and advocacy of a political union of Muslim peoples and their states in order to resist Western imperialism and colonisation. This denotation is sometimes extended to mean a desire and plan for a Muslim (re)conquest of the world, in which case pan-Islamism is often bracketed with such erroneous and illusory ideas as "Muslim extremism," "Muslim fundamentalism," and "Muslim militancy" (Lewis, 1968; Landau, 2016; Pears, 1917).

In short, pan-Islamism had a non-Muslim origin. It had nothing to do with Islam and the Muslim religious consciousness and political activism of the day. It was a Western socio-political construct intended to undermine and preempt the prospect of any global Muslim regeneration and alliance. Moreover, it was fostered that pan-Islamism was just another pan-ideology and pan-movement that stood in the way of the Western-style modernisation and democratisation of the world. The prefix "pan" and suffix "ism," which sandwich the word "Islam," were indicative of this. Pan-Islamism was conceived as a dangerous Muslim weapon to be employed against the West and its existential socio-political and economic interests, but in reality, it was a secret weapon in the hands of Westerners to be used for legitimising and furthering their colonisation and expansionism drives in the name of a new world order paradigm. As such, in the eyes of the West, pan-Islamism had to be confronted and neutralised by any means necessary.

To Muslims, on the other hand, "pan-Islamism" was an attempt to revive and implement some of the most critical precepts of Islam in its capacity as a comprehensive way of life, such as the unity and brotherhood of Muslims, plus solidarity and close cooperation between them. Doing so was a sign of being a good Muslim and living the true Islam, whereas

the opposite was a sign of serious religious laxity and incompetence with regard to the arduous society- and civilisation-building processes. Doing so, furthermore, established itself as an individual and collective responsibility, especially towards the end of the 19th and at the turn of the 20th centuries when the Muslim world and, with it, Islamic culture and civilisation at large were on the verge of collapse.

There was nothing pioneering nor uncommon in the entire cause and its campaigns, neither conceptually nor expediently. The only thing that was different were the local and global contexts, which, inevitably, called for correspondingly different approaches and methods. Hence, nobody felt inclined to christen the latest developments and certain Muslim leaders' responses to them trendily along the lines of some contemporary Western vogues. Rather, what was taking place was seen as calls for *waḥdah islāmiyyah* or *ittiḥād al-islāmiyy*, both of which meant "Islamic unity." Many other terms were in circulation, all of which were related, one way or another, to inclusive Muslim unity, harmony, camaraderie, loyalty, support, and cooperation.

Nor were those reformist initiatives modern in the sense that they were solely Western-inspired and were fundamentally innovative and demanded a departure from traditional ways and mainstream Islamic values. On the contrary, the initiatives emphatically called for endorsing and revitalising the legacies as well as the ways of the "ancestors" (*salaf*), which signify the purest ways and most exemplary legacies associated with the first three generations of Islam. Thus, the first Muslim "reformers" in contemporary times, such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad Abduh (d. 1905), and Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), regarded themselves as the revivers and preservers of Islam as practiced by the pious predecessors, albeit by relevantising and making Islam fully operational in modern times, which in turn rendered those reformers *mujtahids* or authoritative and independent interpreters of Islam and its laws.

Put differently, those reformers, as a matter of fact, were *salafis* par excellence and were part of an authentic *salafi* movement. They were also advanced and avant-garde traditionalists, so to speak, belonging to the "forward-thinking" orthodox and mainstream Islam. It was because of this that Rashīd Riḍā explicitly proclaimed in his *tafsīr*, or commentary of the Qur'an (*al-Manār*) that he was following the path and direction of the *salaf*. He vowed that he will never deviate from that course: "In doing so (following the *salaf*), I will live and die—God willing" (Riḍā, n.d., p. 86). Both Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh—whose heir in many ways was Rashīd Riḍā—made similar proclamations to the effect that following the path of the earliest Muslims and walking in their footsteps, in terms of understanding and practicing the fundamentals of the Islamic message, was the most proper course of action ('Abduh, 1994; al-Afghānī, 2000a).

For that reason, whenever Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) thought of modernism and modernist movements of Islam, he traced them back to the ideas and movement of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792), the founder of the Wahabi (often understood as a derogatory tag) movement and the symbol of Salafism. Muhammad Iqbal (2012) described the movement of Muḥammad b. Abd al-Wahhāb as "the first throb of life in modern Islam." He also said that Afghānī's groundbreaking modernism was probably inspired by Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (Iqbal, 2012, p. 200).

Except that the path of the *salaf* needed a modern operational framework supported by modern-day means and procedures, and that is what all true reformers were intent on. In doing so—constantly striving for the truth and excellence—if they got it right, they earned two rewards, and if they got it wrong, they earned one reward, as could be gleaned from a tradition of Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). However, the terms Salafism and Islamic modernism were subsequently muddled, politicised, and widely misused. It became hard to distinguish where the two converged, ran parallel with each other, or where they partly

or completely separated. It also became unclear who exactly belonged to which camp and why. For the identical motives, the methodological missteps and inferential blunders of some, either reformers or outright purists, were overstated and at times even vilified, while the achievements of others were amplified and unduly venerated. Certainly, substance was bartered for superficialities and consequence for inconsequence.

It was only later constructed and imputed to those persons that they were reformers and modernists after the fashion of Western modernism and reformation and that they were advocating the radical ideology of pan-Islamism. So much so that Nikki Keddie (1972), for instance, believed that Afghānī perceived himself as something of an Islamic Martin Luther (a seminal figure in Protestant and European Reformation) on account of him preaching a religious reform as a prerequisite for any material reform. Nikki Keddie even said that there was evidence of that, which, however, seems to have been a third party's deduction or interpretation rather than a factual attestation or a personal admission. Similarly, some alleged that Muḥammad 'Abduh was an admirer of the Protestant Reformation just because he was a staunch admirer and supporter of a reform of religious thought, freedom of conscience and thought, and free will, and was as staunchly against blind religious following and imitation. If the two patterns were to some extent identical externally, on the inside they were poles apart (Keddie, 1972).

The context of Afghānī's thought

It was obvious that the whole world in the 19th and the early 20th centuries stood at a crossroads. Politically, a new world order was in the offing. Ideologically, however, things were not as promising. According to Albert Schweitzer, while the ages of enlightenment and reason in the 17th and 18th centuries represented at once the incubator and apex of Western civilisation—whose positive impacts extended over the subsequent three or four generations—after that, around the middle of the 19th century, things started to go downhill. Then, in the course of the next few decades—about the end of the 19th and the early 20th centuries—"without resistance, without complaint, civilization abdicated. Its ideas lagged behind, as though they were too exhausted to keep pace with it" (Schweitzer, 1955, p. 4).

Albert Schweitzer (1955, pp. 4-10) attributed the abdication of civilisation to "philosophy's renunciation of her duty" and to a state when "a real combination of ethical ideals with reality was no longer possible." Afterwards, the author went on to elaborate that the causes of the collapse of civilisation revolved around people's self-deception as to the real meaning and condition of "our civilization," the collapse of the worldview on which "our ideals were based," the crisis in spirituality and morals, the superficial character of modern philosophising (a crisis of intellectuality), the undeveloped condition of the modern man and his lack of humanity. These causes at the same time revealed a path to the restoration of civilisation and its potential hindrances.

Not many people were able to penetrate through the surface of Western civilisation and a myriad of its inconsequentialities into the crux of the matter. A very few possessed the insight and wisdom of Albert Schweitzer. Because of its deceptive glitter, on the one hand, and because of its aggressive proselytisation tendencies, whereby Western civilisation was projected as a global as well as ultimate saviour of the world, on the other, the truth about Western civilisation was even harder to come by in the non-Western parts of the world. The world of Islam was no exception. In it, the modern West and its civilisational-cum-westernisation crusades presented themselves as undeniable realities that needed to be faced head-on. They posed endless questions that required answers. However, such were the conditions of the non-Western world, sustained deliberately or otherwise, that pinpointing the cumulative bankrupt dimensions of

Western civilisation normally took a backseat to the prospect of dealing with the basic and existential problems at hand.

As far as the Muslim world was concerned, only a handful of people were able to rise to the challenge. If the West was a victim of its own success, the Muslim world was a victim of its protracted living in a fool's paradise. The former was shrouded in impudence and arrogance, the latter in ignorance and stupor. Saying that people lived in a utopian state of mind would be an understatement. Certainly, Afghānī was one of those very few. He was way ahead of the curve and was more advanced than what could be properly comprehended and fully appreciated during his time. Hence, Jacob Landau (2016) remarked that Afghānī may have become more famous after his death than in his time.

This explains why Afghānī was constantly on the move, perennially restless, and at times overly assertive in his viewpoints. He knew how little time, limited resources, and few allies he had at his disposal while trying to do his bit to overcome the gargantuan problems facing the Muslim ummah (community). Afghānī visited many Muslim and Western countries, residing in some of them for extended periods. He was a nomad, so to speak, with no permanent residence. His origins were unclear too, which to some was irrelevant owing to the extraordinary dynamism and productivity of his personal vita, which eclipsed the case of the former and rendered it immaterial. Nobody knew where he had come from exactly, just as nobody ever knew what his next move would be, by design or enforcedly. His arcane life was and remained a mystery.

In this manner, there was a sense of consistency in Afghānī's life story. His travels included Iran, Afghanistan, India, Turkey, Hijaz, Egypt, France, England, and Russia.

> Thanks to his intelligence, charismatic oratory, powers of persuasion, and writing ability, he earned many admirers, some of whom considered themselves his disciples and continued to spread his message. He seems to have been equally successful in conversing with small elitist groups and in haranguing large crowds in the manner of a populist leader. It was this very success that made Afghānī suspect to the ruling circles and he was exiled from - or persuaded to leave - Iran, Afghanistan, India and Egypt. (Landau, 2016, pp. 13-14)

At any rate, Afghānī was a pioneer of Muslim modern reformist thought, irrespective of how some people may be disposed to interpreting the concepts of "Muslim modernism" and "Muslim reformism." Undeniably, Afghānī was the first Muslim intellectual who launched ideological responses to the major aspects of the Western cultural and civilisational onslaughts. He did so methodically, scientifically, and sometimes in the West's own backyard. His approach was neither reckless imitation nor irresponsible denigration pertaining to anything within the universe of either Western civilisation or Islamic tradition. Nor was he susceptible to hasty and awkward reconciliation between the values and canons of Islam and those of the modern West. Rather, Afghānī's aim was the timelessness and universality of the truth of Islam. He was after it in all spheres of life, regardless of where such a quest might have taken him, both in intellectual and physical terms. Thus, no "stone" did he leave "unturned" in intellectual circles, and no geographical spot did appear far-flung in his going the distance.

Afghānī versus the West

Afghānī was the first to face ideological and intellectual battles with the Western cultural hegemony. He made the most of channels and facilities provided by the latter, such as the press, multilingualism, systems of government, and human rights, which included freedom of movement and freedom of thought. Together with Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Afghānī founded the

newspaper *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* (the Most Trustworthy Handhold). As regards standard setting and benchmarking, the newspaper was the first of its kind in relation to the evolution of Islamic modernist and revolutionary thought. It was founded and printed in Paris and was distributed gratis all over the Muslim world.

Although it was in operation for only about seven months, from 13 March 1884 to October 1884, the newspaper generated tremendous interest, significantly impacting the Muslim religious and socio-political consciousness. It was a game-changer in Muslim journalism, connoting simultaneously the dawn of a new era. Its focus, in general, was three-pronged: promoting and campaigning for Islamic unity, resisting European colonialism and westernisation altogether, and encouraging a reformation of Islamic thought. A total of eighteen issues were published. The publication ceased after the newspaper had been banned in Egypt and India by the British colonisers and after the funds had dried up.

The title of the newspaper was given after the expression *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* (the Most Trustworthy Handhold) in two Qur'anic verses. In them, grasping *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* was made comparable to believing in Almighty Allah and rejecting false deities (al-Baqarah, 256), and submitting the whole self (being) to Allah and doing what is good (Luqman, 22). While in the first verse, the phrase *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* is followed by the words "which never breaks," in the second it is followed by a proclamation that "with Allah rests the end and decision of all affairs." When placed in the wider Qur'anic contexts and within its space-time, the newspaper's purpose and mission become readily apparent; as do the vision, purpose, and direction of the real-life struggle the newspaper epitomised.

Moreover, Afghānī composed the treatise "The Refutation of the Materialists," most probably in India in 1881. In it, he refuted all theoretical and practical aspects of materialism essentially as a system of thought and a system of life. He targeted many of that philosophy's ancient as well as contemporary manifestations, including Darwinism and its theory of evolution. The treatise is evidence that Afghānī was well-versed in Islamic and Western philosophy. His knowledge of the philosophy and development of science, by the same token, was commendable and up-to-date. The treatise was originally written in Persian. Muḥammad 'Abduh, aided by a follower of Afghānī, translated it into Arabic.

Afghānī also wrote some newspaper articles in French. His French was not of the acceptable scholarly standards; hence, while doing so, he should have been helped by others. Another possibility was that at first, he wrote his articles in Arabic, which were then translated into French. In a French police dossier on Afghānī, it was deposited that he was well educated, and although he had mastery of eight languages, he expressed himself in French with difficulty (Keddie, 1972).

When Ernest Renan (d. 1892), a French orientalist and scholar, gave a lecture at the Sorbonne on 29 March 1883, which was titled "Islam and Science," in it he denigrated Islam and its position towards science. The lecture was immediately published in a French newspaper. Afghānī, who was in Paris at the time, was stirred by the lecture/article and felt compelled to respond. His response was titled "Response (*radd*) to Renan" and was published in French in the same newspaper.

In passing, with regard to the content of Afghānī's "Response," people's understandings vary. Many failed to reconcile between Afghānī's overall disposition and his standard religious views, and some aspects of the "Response" which seem to have backed in some way Renan's unfair verdicts. However, according to Sayyid Hadi Khosroushahi, the editor and commentator of Afghānī's articles published in *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā*, the whole thing was a conspiracy against Afghānī. He was victimised by French and possibly some other European colonial authorities (al-Afghānī, 2000b).

In a nutshell, Ernest Renan greatly maligned Islam and its inherent proclivity for scientific inquiry and learning in general. Afghānī was incensed at the obvious affront and bias and wanted to reply and set the record straight. However, when published, Afghānī's response was not only docile and cordial but also supportive of most of Ernest Renan's standpoints.

Sayyid Hadi Khosroushahi believes that the published form of the letter was the product of a machination. He bases his conviction on the following points. Firstly, Afghānī wanted to answer and respond (*radd*) to the aired allegations. If he simply expressed his agreement with and support of the views of Ernest Renan, that would have defeated the purpose of an intended answer and response. Certainly, *radd* in Arabic, *reponse* in French, and response in English imply more than mere consensus and harmony. Secondly, Afghānī first composed and sent his response in Arabic, which was then translated into French. He had no control over the translation due to his modest French and due to the operating procedure adopted by the newspaper. However, soon thereafter the original Arabic version of the response went missing and was never recovered. Thirdly, why was not Afghānī allowed to respond to his distorted response in the same newspaper after he had found out that his earlier views were either mistranslated or clearly tampered with? Fourthly, why did Afghānī cut off all ties afterwards with the newspaper *Journal des Debats*, which had published his (in)famous response (*radd*), proceeding, instead, to collaborate with another French newspaper *L'Intransigeant*. Fifthly, some of the greatest Muslim minds of the era, such as Muḥammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā, and Shakīb Arslān (d. 1946), approved of Afghānī's actions. They fully understood the designs of the French and other conspirators, which aimed at discrediting the thought and character of Afghānī, alongside the integrity of his revolutionary cause (al-Afghānī, 2000c).

The newspaper *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* was obviously achieving its goals. It was a truly international publication that did not reverberate just across the Muslim world but also in the West, whose stakes concerning the former were increasing every day. The newspaper caused especially political and liberal hawks in the West to sit up and take notice. In one of his *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* articles titled "English Newspapers and *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā*," Afghānī elaborated on the antagonism of English newspapers towards the existential mission of *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* even before the commencement of its publication, based on what some French newspapers had published beforehand for the same tension-mongering reasons. Those English newspapers warned their government against taking lightly the threat of *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* to its imperialistic interests, specifically in India and Egypt (al-Afghānī, 2000d; al-Afghānī, 2000e).

Modernising the vocabulary of Islamic religious scholarship

One of the most remarkable intellectual contributions of Afghānī was his modernisation of the vocabulary and content of Islamic religious scholarship, which was subsequently perfected by his followers. As observed by Albert Hourani, the centre of Afghānī's attention was no longer Islam as a religion, but rather Islam as a civilisation. The aim of man's acts, in addition to serving God alone, had also become "the creation of human civilization flourishing in all its parts" (Hourani, 2013, p. 114) The idea of civilisation was one of the seminal ideas of 18th- and 19th-century Europe, and it was through Afghānī, above all, that it reached the Muslim world and started gaining currency in Muslim thought.

As a short digression, the first known use of the word "civilization" in French was in 1757 by Victor de Riquety Marquis de Mirabeau, a French economist, and the first use in English was in 1767 by Adam Ferguson, a Scottish philosopher and historian of the Scottish Enlightenment, in his influential book *The History of Civil Society*.

Definitely, it was Afghānī who was the first Muslim scholar to integrate the "civilisation" concept into the Arabic language as part of his modernist thought. In a number of his *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* articles, he employed such terms as "*tamaddun,*" "*madaniyyah,*" "*umam mutamaddinah,*" "*'alam al-madaniyyah,*" and "*niẓām al-madaniyyah,*" which mean respectively "civilisation," "civilisation or urbanisation", "civilised societies," "the world of civilisation or urbanisation," and "the system of civilisation or urbanisation." These words and expressions were not in use as such in classical times. After Afghānī, Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā refined the new terminology and yet fashioned and added the word "*haḍārah*" to also mean "civilisation". Thenceforth, "*tamaddun*", "*haḍārah*"—plus Ibn Khaldun's concept of "*'umran*"—became standard expressions for "civilisation" in the modern Arabic language.

Following the institution of an Arabic Islamic magazine, *al-Manār* (*the Lighthouse*), in 1898—one year after Afghānī's demise—whose founder was Rashīd Riḍā and who was at the same time its editor until his death in 1935, the civilisational themes therein were ever more common. As early as in the first issue of the magazine, it was admitted that the problem of terminology in contemporary Muslim thought, while confronting the mounting challenges of the day, was substantial ("Iṣṭilāḥāt kuttab al-'aṣr," 1315H, pp. 14). Clarifying some such terms, therefore, was undertaken, and a recurring section in the magazine titled "Iṣṭilāḥāt kuttab al-'aṣr" (The vocabularies of the authors of the present time) was assigned for the purpose. Some terms were explained straightforwardly and others in the contexts of other issues. The concept of "*tamaddun*" (civilisation) was one of such terms. For example, once an essay titled "Al-Tamaddun" (1315H, pp. 61) was published autonomously, whereas at another time, as part of a larger article called "Al-Ḥarb" (1315H, pp. 156), a discussion on "*al-ḥarb wa al-tamaddun*" (War and Civilisation) was presented.

By the way, the first Muslim scholars to systematically articulate the concept of "civilization" and to coin the idiom "Islamic civilization" in the English language, within the framework of their progressive Muslim thought, were Indian scholars Syed Ameer Ali (d. 1928) and Salahuddin Khuda Bakhsh (d. 1931). The former did so in his books *A Short History of the Saracens* (1900) and *The Spirit of Islam* (1902), and the latter in his book *Contributions to the History of Islamic Civilization* (1905). Evidently, Afghānī preceded them with his invention in the Arabic language by about twenty years.

Finally, when on one occasion Afghānī was asked concerning the right way to achieve civilisation, he replied that it must be a religious movement. He then expounded that even Europe's trajectory from barbarism to civilisation could not be feasible without the religious movement initiated and disseminated by Martin Luther. However, some researchers like Albert Hourani (2013) and Nikki Keddie (1972) erroneously inferred from this that Afghānī's message was messianic, that he believed that Islam needed its own Martin Luther, and that perhaps Afghānī saw himself in that particular role.

Conclusion

Afghānī was the forerunner of Islamic modernist thought in the sense that has already been explained. His thought was tripartite: political, social, and religious, focusing on awakening the Muslim mind and arousing it against the insatiable Western colonial powers and the fraudulent and hopeless Muslim rulers. The key was unity, predicated on proper learning and visionary political action plans. Because of Afghānī's practical fascination with politics and political reforms, he alternated between different centres of the Muslim political reality, chief of which, expectedly, was Istanbul.

Afghānī's influence was enormous, becoming more apparent after his death than in his lifetime. That was perhaps due to the fact that he was often misunderstood and that certain aspects of his fundamental ideas needed time to crystallise and take effect. Nikki Keddie (1968) recapped Afghānī's impact in the style of employing Islam as an ideology to strengthen its position as a focus of identity and solidarity against the attacks of the Christian West, and to use it as a rallying point for the repulsion of Western conquerors. To young men with a traditional religious education, he also showed a way to adopt political and scientific ideas from the West without abandoning their religious identification or pride in their own traditions. Whatever later historians may conclude about his exact influence, his position as a precursor and early teacher of anti-imperialism, nationalism, solidarity against the West, and self-strengthening reform—all of which causes have grown and flourished since his lifetime—seems secure."

By the same token, according to Jacob Landau (2016), Afghānī's greatest merit was to have shown that, in his days at least, "pan-Islam and nationalism could be mutually complementary, and to politicize Islam within a pan-Islamic context or, otherwise said, to transform Islam into a political ideology." Both the Ottoman government and its opposition could distinguish a silver lining in Afghānī's thoughts. Afghānī himself did not really take the trouble to demarcate the two from each other. His was a compelling case; no side could fully embrace nor completely snub him.

Muḥammad 'Abduh was Afghānī's most prominent disciple and close collaborator in the newspaper *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā*. Muḥammad 'Imārah believed that the newspaper was exclusively Afghānī's mouthpiece. He was the key factor in the publication. He was *mudīr* or director, and the newspaper was the mirror image of his personal beliefs and ideas. Muḥammad 'Abduh, on the other hand, was just the editor and an "assistant." He was invited to undertake the assignment, and were it not for his unenviable personal situation—he was exiled from his native Egypt by the British from 1882 to 1888—he might not have joined the newspaper project in a foreign country at all ('Imarah, 1993).

Afghānī was a leader in amalgamating the religion of Islam and politics in modern times and in calling for Islamisation and adoption of those aspects of Western civilisation that were indispensable for an Islamic revival. Blind following and soulless imitation of Western values, systems, and institutions were pernicious, as were the unreasonable interpretations of and the unrealistic implementation attempts towards Islam. Afghānī wanted Muslims to find solace in the fact that the supreme truth (whose repository is Islam alone), virtue, civilisation, and strength are essentially connected with each other. If pride and self-esteem were the problem, they should remember that neither the achievements of Christian nor the failure of Muslim countries were due to their religions. "The Christian peoples grew strong because the Church grew up within the walls of the Roman Empire and incorporated its pagan beliefs and virtues; the Muslim peoples grew weak because the truth of Islam was corrupted by successive waves of falsity. Christians are strong because they are not really Christian; Muslims are weak because they are not really Muslim" (Hourani, 2013).

Without denting the contributions and roles of other political, intellectual and religious figures—which in fact were complementary—Afghānī inspired a school of thought that produced sundry branches and systems, such as Muḥammad 'Abduh's purely educational and religious pan-Islamism and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī's pan-Islamic Arabic solidarity. Afghānī preceded the "age of labelling." However, what he did and how, in a way, speeded up its rise. Hence, seldom are scholarly studies undertaken today on the origins and philosophical backgrounds of such ideologies and movements—many of whose designations have rightly been questioned—as Salafism, Islamic modernism, political Islam, Islamism, Islamic awakening and Islamisation of knowledge, without reference to Afghānī and his direct or indirect influences.

Finally, Muhammad Iqbal (2012) regarded Afghānī as an eminent scholar and a groundbreaking modernist reformer. He was one of the pioneers of modernist movements in Islam. For instance, Muhammad Iqbal said about him:

> The task before the modern Muslim is, therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past. Perhaps the first Muslim who felt the urge of a new spirit in him was Shah Wali Allah of Delhi. The man, however, who fully realized the importance and immensity of the task, and whose deep insight into the inner meaning of the history of Muslim thought and life, combined with a broad vision engendered by his wide experience of men and manners, would have made him a living link between the past and the future, was Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī. If his indefatigable but divided energy could have devoted itself entirely to Islam as a system of human belief and conduct, the world of Islam, intellectually speaking, would have been on a much more solid ground today. (p. 78)

References

'Abduh, M. (1994). *Risālah al-tawḥīd*. Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq.

Al-Afghānī, J. (2000a). Al-Jarā'id al-Injlīziyyah wa al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā. In S. H. Khosroushahi (Ed.), *Al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā*. Qom: Markaz al-Buhūth al-Islamiyyah. pp. 292-293.

Al-Afghānī, J. (2000b). Al-Jinsiyyah wa al-diyānah al-Islamiyyah. In S. H. Khosroushahi (Ed.), *Al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā*. Qom: Markaz al-Buhūth al-Islamiyyah. pp. 70-74.

Al-Afghānī, J. (2000c). Al-Radd 'alā Renan. In S. H. Khosroushahi (Ed.), *Al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā*. Qom: Markaz al-Buhūth al-Islamiyyah. pp. 185-210.

Al-Afghānī, J. (2000d). Al-Waḥdah al-Islamiyyah. In S. H. Khosroushahi (Ed.), *Al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā*. Qom: Markaz al-Buhūth al-Islamiyyah. pp. 131-137.

Al-Afghānī, J. (2000e). Al-Wahm. In S. H. Khosroushahi (Ed.), *Al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā*. Qom: Markaz al-Buhūth al-Islamiyyah. pp. 202-208.

Al-Ḥarb. (1315H). *Al-Manār, 1*(9). https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-isl_al-manar_islam-AP-M266_v1-22559/page/n33/mode/2up

Hourani, A. (2013). *Arabic thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

'Imarah, M. (1993). *Al-A'mal al-kāmilah li al-Imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh*. Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq.

Iqbal, M. (2012). *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Iṣṭilāḥāt kitāb al-'aṣr. (1315H). *Al-Manār, 1*(1). https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-isl_al-manar_islam-AP-M266_v1-22559/page/n33/mode/2up

Keddie, N. (1968). *An Islamic response to imperialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Keddie, N. (1972). *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani: A political biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Landau, J. (2016). *Pan-Islam: History and politics*. London: Routledge.

Lewis, B. (1968). *The emergence of Modern Turkey*. London: Oxford University Press.

Pears, E. (1917). *Life of Abdul Hamid*. London: Constable & Company LTD.

Riḍā, R. (n.d.). *Al-Manar*, commentary of Surah al-Baqarah, verse 30.

Schweitzer, A. (1955). *The decay and the restoration of civilization*. London: Adam & Charles Black.

Al-Tamaddun. (1315H). *Al-Manār, 1*(3). https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-isl_al-manar_islam-AP-M266_v1-22559/page/n33/mode/2up