

Islam: The Way to Overcome the Threshold of Civilization in the View of Malek Bennabi

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Abstract:

The article deals with the problem of exploiting the status of Islam in overcoming the threshold of civilization in the view of the Arab-Algerian thinker Malik Bennabi, who established his civilizational project by relying on Islamic foundations, as he often cited the Islamic civilization, whose nucleus was the emergence of the Muhammadan call which removed restrictions and obstacles that abort initiative and ability and restrict the desire to transcend.

In addition, Bennabi believes that the Islamic religion has awakened in man the factors of his renaissance and built on them his treatment of the current situation, which is the necessity of renewing the intellectual and civilizational balance of the nation and sending a new breath in its body to remedy the burden of civilization.

Keywords: Islam – civilization – components – thought – innovation.

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Introduction

Bennabi believes that the civilizational breakthrough is essentially an idea that has a religious character. It also means that relationship exists and is built between every civilizational philosophy of development and construction. Therefore, the religious idea is a stage for crossing the threshold and moving the reactor and putting it on its correct path so that the individual becomes ready to build a dimension that creates the dynamic of social interaction between him and the other party, and so on.

Our thinkers often cited the Islamic civilization, whose nucleus was the emergence of the Mohammadan call, which dismantled the intellectual restrictions and obstacles that aborted initiative and power, and even shackled even the desire to transcend and change the ego, so what do we care if the project is a civilization project. Religion is an important and effective factor in the resurrection of any style or building pattern whose goal is to spread, sweep, and effectiveness that transcends the current things, as a component that has the function of liberating the

individual who still needs to satisfy himself. And the individual who is still trying to get rid of this dependency, because quitting is nothing but blocking these two outlets that characterize the biological composition of the human being, who always remains in need of preaching about the necessity of quitting and keeping pace with the times.

What Bennabi wanted to reach is the need to start in any civilized building from a solid ground, the basis of which is the individual whose desires have been curbed in a natural, spiritual and certain way that makes him immune to provocations, consequences or reactions in a way that guarantees the process of the work done, and its continuity and its impact on what around it. How does Bennabi view Islam and what is its concept and dimensions? (1) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Conditions for a Renaissance*, 1987, p14) « He believes that » Islam never left the souls of Muslims, but nevertheless it lost its social function and became an individual affair, expressing itself in a specific way in worship and personal ethics, and this is the minimum that Islam should have as a method of change and a path to progress. In this way, it is not different from other types of faith that stem from self-reflection or religious heritage. This is the analysis he has reached since the 1960's. (2) (DAYFALLAH, Bachir, *The Philosophy of Civilization in the Thought of Malik Bennabi*, 2005, p72)

And he did not stop at that, but continued his analysis in everything that would serve his nation and the conditions of his Islamic society.

Malik Bennabi's understanding of Islam differs from many Muslim thinkers who dealt with orders, prohibitions, and texts that are not subject to interpretation or ijtihad. He sees it as a way to establish balance in spirit and matter. Whenever the existing relationship is positive, its result is a harmonious and interdependent social system. Islam, for him, is a path of life based on achieving balance in the personality of the Muslim element, which is the key to civilization outside abstract philosophical frameworks or theories steeped in mysticism and isolation.

It is a successful life project before it is a spiritual belief characteristic. The erroneous understanding of the scope of Islam and the depth of its significance has greatly distorted that spotless image that was embodied in the civilized imagination of mankind. Attention to development and revival. (3) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Birth of a Community*, 1983, p14) We may not exaggerate if we say that there is no Muslim in this era who has not wondered one day whether there is a relationship between the current condition of Muslims and their Islam. I find this question lurking in the background of the chronic debate about the relationship between Islam and modernity. (4) (BENNABI, Malik, Oc. Cit., 1983, p112)

Islam is a force of cohesion and unity in the eyes of « Malek Bennabi », and it is the only religion that has the ability to activate the spiritual characteristic and strengthen its embodiment. He succeeded in bringing together enemies, masters and slaves at a time it did not occur to him to achieve this dream to start yet. That is the overlapping momentum in building a civilization for

which the world knew no borders. The necessary cohesion force in Islamic society is clearly present in Islam, but which Islam? Islam is animated in our minds and behaviour, and is emerging in the form of social Islam. This cohesion force is worthy of creating for us our desired presence, in its hands as a guarantee for that – an experience of a life time. A thousand years and a civilization was born on a barren land among Bedouins, natural-born men and the desert. (5) (ESSAYF, Tawfik, *Modernity as a Religious Need*, 2006, p17)

The secret behind this actual embodiment of the correct civilized path was in the positive and interactive movement created by Islam in a group of individuals whose human composition differs from one individual to another, but they agree on the need to produce a specific and strict desired practical path according to the philosophy of social solidarity and the desire to achieve goals. As long as everyone is equal in the primary scene, everyone works, everyone produces, and everyone contributes, because the battle is common and one.

Religion is a composite of social values, and it plays this role in its emerging state, the state of its spread and movement, when it expresses the idea of a group or when faith becomes a radical faith without radiation, I mean a tendency from every individuality. Its historical mission ends on earth if it becomes incapable of advancing civilization and moved by, it becomes the faith of monks who cut off their connection with life and abandon their duties and responsibilities. (6) (BENNABI, Malik, Oc. Cit., p70) The basic principle on which the belief is based is to insist on change and the initiative, and that is by exploiting the mental and self-capacities that are based on man with what God has enabled him on this earth.

The Muslim's role is to preach and convey the message to spread civilization and ideals, and as the methods of siege increase in the strength of material and force and the tightening of the noose, a strong determination to give must emerge from the depths of that in order to expand the circle of victory, and this action is the waste of a balanced and balanced person. The one who is able to transform ideals and values into living behavior that he applies to himself and who is the role model and vanguard that advances the ranks until he contributes to making history. (7) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Destination of the Islamic World*, 1986, p40)

In other words, the Muslim is that preacher of the desired civilization that aims to achieve it and the caller to it, contrary to what the other depends on, who limited it to worship and nothing else. Islam did not bring this at all, but rather it came calling for striving and working to improve the conditions of this individual, whose approach is the power of thought and intelligence, if he places in him the potential for change, so that he can set out to prove himself, his abilities, and his superiority, with his own will, after crossing the psychological barrier that has often restricted him and made him a hostage to superstitions. And perceptions existed for quite a while, and Islam came as a herald and a savior for him from the clutches of fanaticism, ignorance, and the tendency to colonialism. Every one in the world of receiving is the people of imitation, rather the only way to it, and they refer to God Almighty's promise of exaltation to the believers, just as

they refer to the experience of Muslims in their past history. Their ancestors crossed the bridge of faith to scientific and civilizational progress and dominance in the land. For them, this and that is evidence of the interconnection between faith and progress. (8) (SAHMARANI, Ashad, *Malik Bennabi a Reformist Thinker*, 1986, p104)

In addition to that, Bennabi believes that the Islamic religion has awakened in man as well as other things, moved them, created a suitable atmosphere for them to explode, and mapped out their emerging manifestations so that they do not deviate from the correct path and get out from what they were prepared for. It established the nucleus of a civilization in a short period of time, not exceeding two decades, and it expanded to include all regions, that is, places, thus occupying a universal role and undermining the pillars of false civilizations based on oppression and the absence of the active, productive role of man. The renaissance is the effort made by the Islamic world in the psychological (spiritual) field. It is a movement of conscience to correct its lag behind the promising Qur'anic thought and the pace of modern scientific thought. (9) (SAYF, Tawfik, Oc. Cit., p52) He states on another occasion that the scientific basis for the thought of the Muslim human being that heralds renaissance should be built on driving facts that establish the Qur'an as an Islamic constitution and encourage the development of scientific approaches to understanding it and attempts to study it.

The problem, according to Bennabi, is that we did not develop scientific methods capable of revealing the components of the Holy Qur'an, and we did not even strive to try to understand it and comprehend its manifestations, rulings and visions with a cultural dimension. (10) (BENNABI, Malik, Oc, Cit., p139) Malik Bennabi stood on an important point, and built on it his treatment of the current situation, which is the necessity of renewing the intellectual and civilizational balance of the nation and resurrecting a new breath and pumping new blood into its body so that we can rise and resuscitate with other data and renewed aspirations according to the era in which we live. It is unreasonable to build a civilization in the twenty-first century with tributaries, philosophies and data that are no longer valid now, and this is what experience has confirmed and reality has imposed. (11) (SAHAMRANI, Ashad, Oc, Cit., p106)

This is how Malik Bennabi understood Islam as the savior of the nation, and the Muslim as its representative and witness, and the way is to modernize the method of interpretation and join the ranks of science. For him, reform is to return to the climates provided by Islam and nothing else. Malik Bennabi's view of Islamic society is a comprehensive, dynamic, historical, evolutionary one, and his study is not a partial, static study limited to a specific stage of its historical movement. This is linked to his approach that he drew for himself by relying on the social and psychological realities of society through which civilization was built and keeping pace with the reality represented by modernity that imposed itself on our Arab and Islamic societies, but with methods that must be reviewed and contemplated in order to employ what is best for

this nation and try to move away from dissolution, accumulation and the staying away from identity and belief.

Modernity and the foundations of civilization in the thought of Malik Bennabi: Professor Bennabi addressed this matter in an unprecedented and precise manner, as he considered that history is not accumulated events, but rather the imprints of living societies over time. Therefore, making history is the task of the missionary men who realize the truth of things and hope for it, as history is not minutes and seconds that are counted or neglected, but rather it is the true picture of civilized societies. « Bennabi » says that time is an ancient river that crosses the world, and in twenty-four hours it irrigates the area in which peoples live, and the field in which they work, but these hours that become nothingness if they pass over heads that do not hear their roaming. (12) (SAHAMRANI, Ashad, Oc, Cit., p37) He, may God have mercy on him, decided that civilization is built according to the influence of four social factors.

1. The influence of the world of people.
2. The influence of the world of ideas.
3. The influence of the world of things.
4. The influence of the world of social networks. (13) (BELGHOUT, Tayib, *The Position of the Trade-Union Issue in Malik Bennabi Renewal Strategy*, 1993, p3)

These are the factors that give the human effort its maximum exemplary effectiveness. (14) Belghout, *Cultural Question Site*, Oc, Cit., p11) Accordingly, he emphasized that every fact that does not affect these factors is a dead fact that does not enrich anything. Accordingly, every people must create his civilization with his own means and efforts and with his own hands and history at any level of the world. Civilization is achieved by the joint activity of things, people and ideas available at that particular time, that is, at the same time that accompanies the process of its achievement. (15) (BENNABI, Malik, *Algerian Horizons*, unprinted and undated, p161) Civilization makes hands, forearms and strength of men as previously mentioned by the scholar Bennabi.

Cognitive, behavioral and practical powers, not by importing, flaunting and hoarding things of civilization. Bennabi says that we must realize that accumulating the products of Western civilization does not bring about civilization. Civilization is what constitutes its products and not the products that create, manufacture or develop civilization. Therefore, it is self-evident that it is what creates the results and not the other way around. And if we remain in the process of accumulation, we do not leave our places and we cannot come up with anything other than our conditions. (16) (BENNABI, Malik, « *Reflections* », 1978, p167)

The problem cannot be limited here, nor does it stop there, as Malik Bennabi expressed. There are moral and cultural values that are imported, and the society that needs them must generate

them (17) (BENNABI, Malik, *Between Guidance and Wandering*, 1978, p172) Such as efficiency, a sense of the value of time, honoring the human being, a sense of elegance, and aesthetic taste, civilization is the result of the effort made by the people who want to civilize, keep pace with the times, and change conditions for the better and the better. Perhaps the defeat and feeling of psychological frustration that we are experiencing today is the result of our fascination with the things and products of civilization only, and our belief that we will not catch up until we have all the products or things of civilization, but the truth is the opposite, as the crisis of the Islamic world for a long time was not a crisis in things or means, as some believe, but rather in ideas and their good selection and use. As long as this scholar does not realize this fact in a real and clear way, the disease will continue to recur and it will be difficult for him to find a cure. (18) (BENNABI, Malik, *Blown into the Battle*, 1981, p120)

The making of civilization is the making of history, and its conclusion is for everyone to know that discovering the path leading to the forefront of the procession of humanity is not necessarily imitating advanced societies in their ways, modernity, and approach to life, or how they follow them in their behavior, but rather in what they think and what they produce. With your own hands and your questions, not with the ideas and means of others piled up. Modernity, in the sense that the defunct Malik Bennabi intended, is not through obsessions and illusions, nor through accumulation that leads to frustration. (19) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Problem of Culture*, Translated by Bensabour Chahine, unprinted, p116)

The issue of civilization has begun to become more important to study day after day, as historical experience plays a fundamental role in the formation of contemporary civilized society and its aspiration towards the future, because it is impossible for any society to start from nothing without considering the reality of its cultural heritage in order to learn about its positives and negative and to know the position and values that contributed and are contributing to the formation of the society that it aspires to. (20) (KHATIB Sulayman, *Malik Bennabi's Philosophy of Civilization*, 1991, p37) Malik Bennabi believes that every civilization should have a connection to its past and heritage, and a better future will not be achieved except after studying the past, that is, the heritage, because it carries many components of the present and the future. Reflecting on the intellectual works of the scholar Malik Bennabi, we notice that they are trying to address a basic issue, which is the problem of civilization. Malik says : « The problem that has attracted my thinking and attention for more than a quarter of a century until now is the problem of civilization ».

His efforts were focused on searching for an objective solution to this Islamic problem by an objective solution with a fundamental treatment, and not its manifestations, because the main problem lies in the essentials. That is why he says that the problem of every people is in its essence a civilizational problem, and no people can understand or solve their problem unless they raise their ideas to human events and unless they delve deeper into understanding the factors that

build and destroy civilizations. (21) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Conditions for a Renaissance*, Oc. Cit., p21) He believes that religion is the basis for establishment of societies and civilizations, whatever they may be.

Civilization does not stem, as it is observed, except by religious belief, and it should search in one of the civilizations for its religious origin that sent it. (22) (BENNABI, Malik, Oc, Cit., p56) The theory of the civilizational cycle developed by Malik Bennabi after taking it from Ibn Khaldun, who is considered as the first to discover the cyclical phenomenon, with what it contains, from the starting point, then the rise to the summit, then to the decline, constitutes the gateway from which we can understand Bennabi's study of civilization, as in his study of the « cyclical phenomenon », he begins by saying God Almighty says : « And those days We alternate them among the people » (23) (SURAH « *Al-Imran* », *The Family of Imran*, Verse 140) (to establish the law of cultural circulation on it, and this principle is based on the fact that civilization, whatever it is, is governed by the law of migration or circulation, which in fact means the transfer of civilization with its value from one place to another in search of the primary elements that man needs. The move takes place to a new place, and thus the new cycle begins, and so on until humanity ends, and this cycle must be understood in order to comprehend the philosophy of civilizational construction. The study of history from the individual point of view is a psychological study, but from the social aspect, history is a social study because it is a study of the conditions for the growth of a particular society.

And if it is difficult to determine the exact roots of this movement in space and time, then there are two essential aspects of civilization, the metaphysical or cosmic aspect, which is an aspect with a goal and purpose, and the social historical aspect, which is an aspect linked to a series of diverse causes. (24) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Destination of the Islamic World*, Oc, Cit., p27) The latter is represented by civilization, it is as if it were a set of numbers that follow in similar but not identical units, and thus a fundamental fact in history is revealed to our understanding, which is the cycle of civilization. That is, we are faced with two fundamental aspects of civilization : the metaphysical aspect, which is an aspect linked to a series of causes. (25) (BENNABI, Malik, Oc, Cit., p28) The many successive groups are the successive civilizations, and they all represent connected links in the human epic, and each cycle is defined by psychological and temporal conditions specific to a particular society. If these conditions were met, it would be a civilization, and the cyclical phenomenon, as Malik Bennabi calls it, requires us to solve our problems and determine our ability to relate to the cycle of history, so that it becomes easier for us to recognize the factors of renaissance. Malik believes that every civilization falls between two extremes : birth and decline, and his theory of the structure of civilization can be presented in a diagrammatic form.

The graphic curve starts from the first point in an ascending line until it reaches the level of another point in a descending line. As for the stage between these two lines, it is an intermediate

stage, which is the peak stage, which is the length of the spread and expansion of civilization. (26) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Conditions for a Renaissance*, Oc, Cit., p72) The phenomenon is the existence of two axes that transmit civilizational values from one to the other on a periodic basis, as if the history of humanity is being made on two axes, between which is a continuous tidal movement that transmits civilizational values. (27) (BENNABI, Malik « *Reflections* », Oc, Cit., p109)

Malik Bennabi tries to apply this plan to the movement of Islamic history in order to determine the direction of the movement of Islamic civilization in its rise and fall, so that the Muslim knows his history in terms of values and concepts, and before the start of a cycle or its beginning, the human being is in a state prior to civilization. At the end of the cycle, man will have been culturally displaced and civilization has been completely robbed of him. He enters the post-civilization era, which is the stage of decadence, where man, soil and time are no longer factors of civilization, but rather inert, non-interactive elements. Civilization is created by ideas, changed by people. (28) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Destination of the Islamic World*, Oc, Cit., p31) The zero point in the diagram that records the state prior to civilization is the beginning of the combination of the three elements : man, soil and time. Which leads to the birth of a certain society, but the world of people and things has not yet existed. As for the world of ideas, it contains a seed of potential, just as the sperm contains all the important organic and psychological elements in the arrangement of the being. Thus, it can be determined that the idea, meaning that religion is the basis for building society and it creates a social system for individuals. The stronger the religious relationship between point zero and point (A), the degree of social vacuum decreases, which is the goal and ideal of all laws that attempt to fill social vacuums. (29) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Birth of a Community*, Oc, Cit., p55-58)

We note from the statement that the cycle of civilization passes through three different stages, which represents the natural human being. The first stage is the stage of the soul (from point zero to point A), which is represented by strong and extended social relationships that suggest a phrase from the Qur'an, « the solid structure ». As in the Almighty's saying « Those who fight for His cause as if they were a solid structure », (30) (SURAH « *Essaf* » *The Rank*, Verse 4) and the individual in this state or stage is in the best of his circumstances and social effectiveness.

In other words, this is the golden era for Islamic society, not because it has reached the height of its prosperity and progress, but because it enjoys two advantages : strength and upward mobility. In the second stage (from point A to point B), social relations are still strong, but some deficiency has appeared. Society continues to grow, but not all its forces are at the point of movement. The Muslim individual, while carrying out his social function, no longer works at his full capacity because some energy is meaningless and has retreated to rest. As for the third stage (from point B to point C), instincts disintegrate and individualism prevails according to the liberation of individuals' instincts, which leads to the collapse of social relations, occupying the vital energy

system. This is what is called the era of decadence, and it is the era that created in the Islamic world the appropriate conditions for susceptibility to colonization in it.

It is clear to us from the above that the pre-civilization society represents the beginning of civilization, while the post-civilization society, at the end point at the decline of civilization, represents the basis for its start again, according to Malik Bennabi's opinion. Its elements are :

- Human.
- Soil.
- Time, i.e. human + soil + time.

The first thing we should think about when we want to build a civilization is to think about its elements chemically, because if we analyse civilization into its components, this is considered constructive and not an accumulation. When you analyse any product of civilization, we find that it consists of three elements, and the first of these elements is the human being, because he was the one who came up with the idea and the product was made with his own hands. (31) (BENNABI, Malik, « *Reflections* » Oc, Cit., p168) According to Malik, the human being is the focus of activity in the movement of human civilization, defined by the intellectual mind and his cultural formation that he derived from his civilizational environment. All thinking about the problem of man in relation to his luck in life is essentially thinking about the problem of civilization. (32) (BENNABI, Malik, « *Reflections* » Oc, Cit., p114)

The meaning of civilization is for a person to learn how to live in a group and at the same time realize the main importance of the network of social relations in developing human life for its historical function. (33) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Birth of a Community*, Oc, Cit., p94) From here, we can summarize that civilizational progress depends on the role of man and his effectiveness in society, because the issue is not an issue of tools or capabilities. The issue within ourselves is that we must first study the social system. The first is the human being, while the second element is the soil, which means all the wealth on its surface and in its interior. (34) (BENNABI, Malik, « *Reflections* », Oc, Cit., p25)

By soil, our concern is not to investigate its properties, but rather to investigate its social value as a factor in cultural renaissance. The higher the value of the nation and the more advanced society is as a factor of civilizational renaissance. The higher the value of the soil, and the more backward the nation becomes, the more its soil becomes capable of degradation. (35) (BENNABI, Malik, *The Conditions for a Renaissance*, Oc, Cit., p139) As for the third element, it is the time or the period of time, and what is meant by, it is its value and its proper exploitation by humans, and not the absolute time. The prosperity of Islamic civilization at an astonishing speed is due to the Moslems reference for time at that time. Time passes equally in every land and for every

people and individual. In one area it becomes « wealth » and in another area it turns into nothingness.

Opportunities in life must be seized in order to give. Realizing the value of time individually and collectively is realizing its value that is not presented in the only currency that cannot be recovered if it is lost. A gold coin can be lost and a person can find it after it is lost, but no power in the world can recover a minute if it is lost.

Therefore, each cultural product can be expressed by a mathematical equation as follows :

Cultural product = human + soil + time.

So with these products we create the civilization we want. Also the sum of cultural products = the sum of people + the sum of soil + the sum of time.

The sum of these cultural products is essentially civilization itself in an uncomplicated form. The analytical result in the end leads to civilization = human + soil + time.

From this final equation, we conclude that civilization is the construction of a social complex of three elements and not the process of accumulating civilizational products.

This is the first concept of civilization according to Bennabi, who considers the human being to be the focus of activity among the basic elements of civilization. (36) (KHATIB Sulayman, *Malik Bennabi's Philosophy of Civilization*, Oc, Cit., p08) If this human being must be subject to the social, civilized individual from the world of persons, then this was not achieved in isolation from the world of ideas, which has improved the use of means. Likewise, there must be the existence of the world of things that combine ideas, assuming the creativity of industry and production, and for man his well-being, security, and development, and keeping pace with the times.

This equation has certain conditions in order to be consistent with lived reality that the individual and society hope for. History shows us that the compound that intervenes in the formation of these three elements is religion as a factor that creates civilization, because these elements are not sufficient to form civilization. Rather, there must be a basic engine that transforms these elements from a raw, static state in a moving, civilization-creating state. In the end, we find that Malik Bennabi considered the problem of civilization and its dimensions to be the major problem that organized several interrelated partial problems that the Islamic community must address, that is, stand by it and try to employ it in what is best for the nation.

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