

No Other Face of Islam? A Short Study of Liberal Islam

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No Other Face of Islam?: A Short Study of Liberal Islam¹

Ah Young Kim²

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the rise of Islamic Revival Movement since the 1970s and more recently, terrorist attacks in the West by the global jihadists' groups such as IS, many non-Muslims across the world easily associate the religion of Islam with authoritarian rule, cruel traditions and human suffering. Unfortunately, these non-Muslims actually share Muslim extremists' convictions that the "real Islam" is simply incompatible with modernity, democracy and respect for human rights.

On March 19th, a large anti-Islamic rally, led by conservative Korean Christians, was held at Seoul Station Square. It was just one in a series of such rallies since Islam related issues arose in Korea. However, this rally deserves particular attention because of statements that were made at this event. One of the speakers, a former missionary in a predominantly Muslim nation, said, "Muslims and IS are the same and the Quran never teaches religious peace among people from different faiths..."

Ever since Islam first appeared in history, there have been some Christian groups who have held hostile attitudes towards Muslims. But due to the current climate created by IS (Islamic State), this hostile attitude has been rapidly spreading among Christians at large, including Korean Christians. Now, erroneous generalizations such as "Muslims and jihadists are the same" and "all Muslims are possible terrorists" are being held by Christians as facts.

In October 2014, more than 120 Muslim scholars represented by Tariq Ramadan, a leading Islamic scholar at Oxford, released a letter where they call IS un-Islamic and argue that the group (IS) is incorrectly using scripture (Quran) to support its cause. They also said that IS's actions are causing a backlash among Muslims who see IS in contrast to their religion and past caliphate famed for tolerance.

"They are distorting the whole message. So we have to respond to this by saying...what you're doing, killing innocent people, implementing so-called 'sharia' or so-called 'Islamic State', this is against everything that is coming from Islam," says Tariq Ramadan. He also adds, "It is not a caliphate. It is just people playing with politics referring to religious sources...They have nothing to do with (Islamic) principles, because our principles are clear; that the one who is leading should be chosen by people who are followers or citizens...The main problems of Muslims

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are coming from the Muslims; from Muslim-majority countries.”³ In contrast to what the aforementioned former Christian missionary said during the rally in Seoul Station Square, many ordinary Muslims think that IS's acts are un-Islamic and criticize the violence and religious oppression in Muslim-majority countries.

Like Tariq Ramadan, there are Muslims who have developed a considerable body of reformative, modernized and progressive thoughts on the re-interpretation and reform of Islamic understanding and practice. These Muslim reformist thinkers from Egypt and Iran to Sudan have tried to divest Islam of traditionalistic and legalistic interpretations, and have tended to stress the values of a cultural, “enlightened” and dynamic Islam. They are called liberal Muslims. The phrase liberal Muslims or liberal Islam can seem like an oxymoron or a contradiction similar to the phrase Postmodern Islam. This is because Islam has been presented as an obstinate religion which has stubbornly maintained its traditions and principles, which were instituted 14 centuries ago, despite the ever-changing world. Even some Muslims admit that Islam is timeless and unchanging and that Muslims should interpret and submit to the words of Allah as literally as possible.

For ages, the non-Muslim world identified Islam as fanaticism, lacking in rationality. Even the title of French enlightenment philosopher Voltaire's play “Mahomet or Fanaticism,” shows the perception held by those of the “enlightened” West. The Iranian Islamic revolution in 1970's and the rise of the Islamic Revival Movement which swept from West Africa to Southeast Asia have reinforced this perception. Now it is reaching its peak with the rise of Islamic State (IS).

Too often the statements and acts of Muslim extremists and terrorists are portrayed as integral to mainstream Islam.

Yet this view of Islam, a kind of Islamophobia, is inadequate in describing the whole Islamic world which has more than 1.6 billion adherents all over the world. From an historical view, Islam has developed various traditions and interpretations. Broadly speaking, three ideological groupings among Muslims in modern time include: Islamic revivalists (also known as “Islamists” or “Islamic Fundamentalists”), Islamic neo-traditionalists, and Islamic modernists (or Islamic

3 Tariq Ramadan, “ISIL's acts are un-Islamic” in Talk to Al Jazeera, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/2014/10/tariq-ramadan-isil-not-islamic-2014101015462542487.html>, 2014, 10, 17 accessed.

Liberals).⁴ Among this the last tradition is found parallels to Western liberalism.⁵

However, exponents of this last tradition have expressed resentment that their positions have been generally ignored by Western audiences.⁶ Among the concerns of this neglected tradition are opposition to theocracy, support for democracy, guarantees of the rights of women and non-Muslims in Islamic countries, defense of freedom of thought, and belief in the potential for human progress. To claim and advocate such perspectives can be dangerous in some countries, and proponents of this tradition have suffered for their beliefs.

There have been various suggestions as to what to call this tradition, but the best may come from Indian jurist Asaf Ali Asghar Fyzee (1899-1981) who wrote, “We need not bother about nomenclature, but if some name has to be given to it, let us call it ‘Liberal Islam’⁷, a newer ‘protestant’ Islam which was born in conformity with conditions of life in contemporary world.

Charles Kurzman warns that we should not analyze liberal Islam by comparing it with Western liberalism, judging it according to Western standards. Rather, he contends that the study of liberal Islam should focus on its Islamic dimension. “The similarity of liberal Islam and Western liberalism does not imply that liberal Muslims are stale and reassuring imitators of Western philosophy. Many of their writings are firmly rooted in Qur’anic exegesis, in the lives of the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslims and in traditional Islamic forms of debate.”⁸

With this awareness and definition, the present writer will briefly survey the history of the tradition of liberal Islam and its modern development in this article.

4 Jon Armajani, *Dynamic Islam: Liberal Muslim Perspectives in a Transnational Age* (Oxford, UK: University Press of America, INC: 2004),11

5 Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (NY: Oxford University Press: 1998),4.

6 Yvonne Y. Haddad, *Islamists and the Challenge of Pluralism* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies and Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, Occasional Paper, 1995), 4.

7 Asaf A. A. Fyzee, “The Reinterpretation of Islam,” in John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, eds, *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 156.

8 Kurzman (1998), 5.

THE ORIGIN LIBERAL ISLAM: SHAH WALI-ALLAH (INDIA, 1703–1762)

According to John L Esposito, reform has been an integral part of Islam's history:

“The Prophet-Reformer Muhammad and his early community struggled to improve their world by establishing an Islamic order. In every age, the glaring disparities (real or perceived) between God's will and the state of the world have inspired religious reformers (mujaddids) and movements that called Muslims to reform their society and follow Islam more faithfully. This was supported by the belief, from a hadith, that every century ‘God will send to His community one who will renew its religion.’⁹

From its earliest days, Islam possessed a tradition of reform. The concepts of renewal (tajdid) and reform (islah) are fundamental components of Islam's worldview, rooted in the Quran and the Sunna¹⁰ of the Prophet. Islah is Quranic term (7:170; 11:117; 28:10) used to describe the reform preached and undertaken by the prophets when they warned their sinful communities and called on them to return to Allah's path. Renewal (tajdid) is based on a tradition of the Muhammad's saying: “Allah will send to this umma (the Muslim community) at the head of each century those who will renew its faith for it.” The renewer (mujaddid) of Islam is believed to be sent to restore true Islamic practice and thus regenerate a community that tends, over time, to wander from the straight path (literal meaning of sharia).

Inheriting this reformatory tradition, the Islamic Revival Movement arose in the midst of political and economic decline of Islamic world in the eighteenth century which occurred during a tumultuous period in the Islamic world.¹¹

9 John L. Esposito, *The Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 90-1

10 verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds and sayings, silent permissions (or disapprovals) of the Islamic prophet Muhammad

11 For the debates of this period see Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987); John O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982), chapter 2;

Politically, the great Muslim dynasties of the Mediterranean basin (the Ottoman Empire), Southwest Asia (the Safavid dynasty), and South Asia (the Mughul dynasty) were in various stages of collapse.

In its first seven centuries, Islam burst out of the Arabian Desert and rapidly exploded in a wide belt across North Africa, into the Middle East and then across Asia until it reached the southern islands of the Philippines. This period saw the “Golden Age of Islam,” beginning with the Umayyad Dynasty based in Baghdad. During this period, Islamic dynasties were on a par with China in its developments of art, science, education, agriculture, political structure, and military strategy.

These seven centuries of growth and geographic expansion in the Islamic world were followed by seven centuries of decline. During this period, Western European nations gained control of most of the world in a period of exploration and colonialism, led by Portugal and Spain and later followed by the British, Dutch, and French. “The Christian nations” of Western Europe colonized most of these former Islamic strongholds.¹²

But, religiously, Islam was continuing to win converts to the west, in West Africa, and the east, in Southeast Asia and the community of Islamic Scholars was expanding, building up international communities of religious scholars. These scholars blamed un-Islamic practices and traditions as the causes which brought about the extensive decline of the Islamic world. With a growing sense of inadequacy and weakness in the face of the expanding European imperial and industrial powers, they launched a series of revivalist movements that sought to rid Islam of un-Islamic practices not sanctioned by orthodox sources.

Liberal Islam has its roots in this revivalist context in the person of Shah Wali-Allah(1702-1762), who is considered the godfather of "revivalist" Islam. Born in the last years of the Mughul dynasty, Wali-Allah inherited his father's position as a head of a religious school. To complete his education, he traveled to Mecca, the holy site and the center of religious study in Arabia. On his return, he began to espouse a form of revivalism and like other revivalists Wali-Allah, viewing the un-Islamic customary tradition as a major source of Islam's problem, sought to revitalize the Islamic community through a combination of theological renovation

John Esposito ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

12 Robert Day McAmis, *Malay Muslims: The History and Challenge of Resurgent Islam in Southeast Asia* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2002), 1-2.

and sociopolitical organization.¹³

Wali-Allah's revivalism was a combination of "Sufism" (Islamic mysticism), and sharia-oriented thought. Within this Sufi tone, Wali-Allah succeeded in being critical of the Classical structure of sharia. He was able to reject taqlid (authority), uncritical adherence to the opinions of the ulama¹⁴ of the Classical schools of law and to revive interest in the use of personal effort in deciding a point of law, ijihad (reason). The legal system of the four schools must, he insisted, be subordinated to sunna. Wali Allah thus opposed, in principle, blind adherence to legal doctrine, supported ijihad, and granted to sunna a place of primacy in this process. By making this argument Shah Wali Allah was not advocating the abandonment or modification of sharia rule, although many modern Muslims have chosen to interpret him in this way. On the contrary, his speculation was aimed at reinforcing the value of these forms by emphasizing their connection with the universal sharia. He emphasized the spirit of law and its applicability in all times and places, rather than the form of law, which is shaped and formulated in accordance with conditions of time and place.¹⁵

In this way, Wali-Allah also developed a considerably more humanistic response to the customary tradition than did other revivalists. He was, for example, relatively tolerant of certain practices that other revivalists considered beyond the pale, arguing that Islamic law, while divinely inspired, must be adapted for the needs of different peoples and eras. He said, "It is not considered desirable to replace it by a different one (Islamic law) which is absolutely unknown to them (local people)... The basic purpose is that these reforms should be introduced in such a way that (local people's) faculty of reasoning is satisfied and does not repel them."¹⁶ The importance of human reasoning was a recurrent emphasis in Wali-Allah's work and a major precedent for later liberal Muslim thinkers. As a jurist Sufi, Shah Wali Allah considered theology to be the imposition of rational contemplation on matters that are either clearly indicated in the Quran and

13 Kurzman (1998),7

14 Muslim scholars, who trained in Islam and Islamic law

15 Nasr Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 6-7.

16 Mi'raj Muhammad, "Shah Wali-Allah's Concept of the Shari'ah," in *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi*, edit. by Khurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Leicester, England: The Islamic Foundation, 1979),346.

Hadith or matters unmentioned.

Yet, Wali-Allah was in many ways a revivalist and not a reformer. Despite his comments about the age of reason, Wali-Allah did not place any great stock in “modern” forms of knowledge and deemed traditional Islamic scholarship to be sufficient to meet the demands of the contemporary world.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIBERAL ISLAM IN MODERN TIMES

The nineteenth century, especially the later part, witnessed fundamental changes in Islamic thought. This was the period when the hegemony of the West and the corresponding political and economic weakness of Muslim societies created intense pressure for reform of Islamic legal and social institutions, both to accommodate western values and to restore the strength of Islam.¹⁷ Those changes touched almost all aspects of the Islamic intellectual debate including issues of identity, women, the state, tradition and renewal, text and reason, and Islam and the West.

Albert Hourani, in his classical work *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1938*, projected nineteenth-century liberal thought in relation to the overwhelming sense of crisis that swept the Muslim state and its elite circles in the face of the Western rise and military advances.¹⁸ In the face of a variety of challenges, nineteenth-century Islamic communities engaged in a wide range of activities that were aimed at both creative preservation and active adaptation.¹⁹

First, on the intellectual plane, liberals began to separate *ijtihad* from *taqlid*, reason from authority. Most of the major figures of nineteenth century liberal Islam echoed these thoughts. Iranian Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), who inspired and instigated the need for reformation across the Muslim world by combining active opposition to imperial power, on the political and intellectual contributions in India, Iran, Egypt, and Turkey²⁰ said, “in their beliefs they (the

17 Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.

18 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*. Revised edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

19 John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 2nd edition (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 149.

20 Nasr Abu Zayd (2006), 25.

members of each community) must shun submission to conjectures and not be content with mere taqlid of their ancestors. For if man believes in things without proof or reason, makes a practice of following unproven opinions, and is satisfied to imitate and follow his ancestors, his mind inevitably desists from intellectual movement, and little by little stupidity and imbecility overcome him-until his mind becomes completely idle and he becomes unable to perceive his own good and evil; and adversity and misfortune overtake him from all sides.”²¹

Sayyid Ahmad Khan (India, 1817-1898) was the first Indian modernist to introduce new themes in his interpretation, noted especially for his advocacy of social and educational reforms.²² As an apologist, he tried to justify the religious dogmas presented in the Quran in the light of modern scientific discoveries. He believed that a considerable part of the classical commentaries was "worthless and full of weak and fabricated (Prophetic) tradition" or comprised of baseless stories borrowed from Judaism. In his view, it was imperative to free the field of Quranic exegesis from tradition, substituting instead the principles of "reason" and "nature."

He proposed that the Quran stand on its own, requiring only application of a dedicated and enlightened mind for its understanding. The principles of interpretation should not depend on hadith because this would jeopardize the eternal and universal quality of the Quran. For him, the great miracle of the Quran is its universality which allows every generation to find in it the meaning relevant to its situation, despite the constant increase in human knowledge. Hadith based interpretation tends to limit the meaning of the Quran to a particular historical situation, thus obscuring its universality.²³

Like Ahmad Khan, the Egyptian Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905) seems to have taken a critical attitude towards the material handed down in the canonized collections of the Sunna. He refuted traditions that contradicted either the explicit meaning of certain Quranic passages or contradicted both reason and common sense. This is quite apparent from his rejection of traditions related either to magic or satanic elements, and those where angels descend to fight the enemy

21 Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Syyyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afgani"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 171.

22 Charles Kurzman, *Modernist Islam 1840-1940: A Source Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 291.

23 Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, 44

alongside Muslim warriors.²⁴ He emphasized, “First, to liberate thought from the shackles of taqlid...to return, in the acquisition of religious knowledge, to its first sources, and to weigh them in the scales of human reason, which God has created in order to prevent excess or adulteration in religion...and to prove that, seen in this light, religion must be accounted a friend to science, pushing man to investigate the secrets of existence...”²⁵

Taqlid, which means blind submission to tradition and authority, became anathema to liberals of the early twentieth century as it symbolized the popular influence of the liberals’ traditionalist opponents. Ijtihad, by contrast allowed Islam to be interpreted in accordance with the perceived needs of the modern age. Liberal Muslims sought to impose themselves as tutelary authorities of Ijtihad, and their primary means of activism was in the field of educational reform. Though many of them were the product of traditional religious education, they deemed these institutions insufficient to meet the needs of the day and sought to reform them or to create new institutions combining traditional and modern approaches. For example, above mentioned Sayyid Ahmad Khan founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh in India and Muhammad ‘Abduh attempted to reform the ancient al-Azhar University in Cairo.

The distinguishing feature of these new reforms was their introduction of Western subjects into the traditional curriculum, a practice that reflected the liberals’ second intellectual contribution, respect for “modernity.” While refocusing on the seventh century sources of Islamic faith to cure the ills of Muslim world, liberals sought to combine this refocus with an additional focus on Western disciplines such as engineering and military science, medicine and natural science, comparative legal studies and social science, and modern languages. For this reason, liberal Islam of this period became known by the rubric of “Islamic modernism.”²⁶

The second institutional base for liberal Islam in this period was journalism. As literacy increased through education, Islamic liberals made active use of this new medium to communicate with their followers. Indeed, the names of many

24 Nasr Abu Nayd (2006), 29.

25 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*. 1798-1939 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 140-41, quoted in Kurzman(1998), 8.

26 Kurzman (1998), 8.

leading liberals of the era are associated with various periodicals but some of these periodicals were only published and not distributed due to political pressure in some Islamic countries. Nevertheless, these journals had a tremendous reach and influence among educated Muslims. For example, Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq's *al-Jawa'ib* (Rumors), published in Constantinople, was read "in all countries of the Arabic speech" in the 1870's; Rashid Rida's *al-Manar*, which was to be the organ of reform according to the ideas of Muhammad Abdu. *Al-manar* was widely read in the Islamic world and was a major factor in shaping Muslim thought from North Africa to Southeast Asia.²⁷

Liberal Islam reached its political apogee in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In colonized regions, Muslim communities came to be represented by liberal organizations such as *Ittifaq al-Muslimin* (Russia); the *Muhammadiya* (Dutch Indonesia); and the *Aligarh* establishment (British India).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIBERAL ISLAM SINCE 1970'S

Since the 1970's, liberal Islam, which had been stagnant due to the accusation of secularism and undermining of the Islam faith, has enjoyed a renewed popularity. The timing is perhaps unexpected, since this period is also when Islamic revivalism has gained adherents. These two traditions have clashed on numerous occasions, usually in intellectual debate but sometimes violently.

Liberals of diverse ideologies are disproportionately the victims of such violence. Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, who opposed the revivalist Sudanese government's interpretation of sharia law based on his famous argument of "Second Message of Islam," was executed for alleged apostasy in 1985. Taha's own interpretation was that the Meccan message, which is basically spiritualistic, accommodating justice, freedom, and equality, was replaced by the Medinan message emphasizing law, order and obedience. This was done because the Arabs were unable to appreciate the Meccan message in the context of 7th century Arabia. According to Taha, however, it is both possible and imperative to return to the Meccan message and abrogate the Medinan message that was designed to fit in

27 Hourani, *Arabic Thought* (1983) 223; Voll *Islam*, 163

with the social and cultural confines experienced by the Arabs in the 7th century.²⁸ Due to his legal interpretation, Taha was executed after having been condemned as an apostate and heretic by the legal system of the Numari regime.

On a less violent scale, a number of authors have been subjected to confrontations that go beyond intellectual debate. Egyptian Muhammad Khalaf-Allah was urged not only to burn all the copies of his work but also reaffirm his faith in Islam and renew his marriage vows; Syrian Muhammad Shahrour's works were banned in several Middle Eastern countries; Iranian Abdul-Karim Soroush has been barred from speaking publicly in Iran and publicly threatened with assassination. With the rise of Islamic revivalism, some liberal Muslims are becoming pessimistic and believe "the time for Muslim liberalism has certainly passed."²⁹

At the same time, on the intellectual level, some liberal Islamic thinkers are building a more self-confident liberalism. The current generation is far more familiar with Western society and education than were previous generations. They even have been certified by faculty positions at prestigious Western universities as in the case of Abdullah Ahmed An-Naim, Mohamed Arkoun and Tariq Ramadan.

The Algerian born Arkoun is emeritus professor at the Sorbonne, Paris, and the director of *Arabica: Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*. He is very active in applying a modern interdisciplinary approach to the critical study of Islamic culture, tradition and scriptures. His chief concern is the deconstruction of the "unthought" and the "unthinkable" in classical and modern Islamic thought, leading to an unprecedented shift from "rethinking tradition" or even "rethinking the Quran" to "rethinking Islam."³⁰

Arkoun refers to Islam itself and the Quran as facts, that is, as phenomena which have evolved historically to shape the understanding of the words despite the efforts of the ulama to capture and fix the meaning of holy writ. The error of the ulama and the fuqaha³¹ resides in their belief that their knowledge of language gives them access to the text, whereas they ignore the deeper truth of the historicity

28 Nasr Abu Zayd (2006), 87.

29 Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islam and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993), 33.

30 Nasr Abu Zayd (2006), 83-6.

31 An Islamic jurist

of language itself.³² According to Arkoun, the Quranic fact is the originally oral prophetic speech, which Muhammad and his audience believed to be the revelation by Allah. Hence, Arkoun distinguishes between this “fact” and what he calls “the closed official corpus”, which is the written text of the Uthmanic³³ recension of the Quran. The oral Quran – the discourse – was performed in a language and in textual genres tied to a specific historical situation, and in mythical and symbolic modes of expression. It already contains of a theological interpretation of its own nature and must be subjected to an analysis of its structure.

The significance of Arkoun’s work lies in its concern for the methodological questions that are absent in Muslim scholarship of Islam in general, and of the Quran specifically.³⁴ This has made his endeavors greatly appreciated by Muslim modernist intellectuals seeking to apply modern methodology.

Originally from Sudan, Abdullah An-Naim is a human rights activist and professor of law at Emory University. He propagates the reconstruction of sharia to comply with international law and human rights. An-Naim was a student of Mahmud Muhammad Taha. When Taha was executed, An-Naim went into exile, and from there continued with his teacher's basic arguments on the "Second Message of Islam." An-Naim's aim is to reconstruct sharia so that it complies with civil liberties, human rights and international law. Although these concepts are the product of modernity, he does not appear to accept their secular foundations. By keeping the domain of Islamic reformation separate from the domain of modernity, he tries to Islamize these concepts by presenting a fresh rereading and new interpretation of its sources in order to reconstruct sharia³⁵ as he writes: “The fundamental object...is to start a process of drastic reform of Islamic law that would enable Muslims to seek to achieve their right to self-determination in terms of an Islamic identity (whether Sunni, Shi’i, or variations thereof), including the application of Islamic law, without violating the rights of others to self-determination... An Islamic alternative to sharia is provided as the appropriate

32 Binder (1988), 161.

33 Uthman ibn Affan: a companion of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, who commissioned a standard copy of the text of the Qur’an.

34 Nasr Abu Zayd (2006), 85-6.

35 Ibid., 87.

framework for Muslims to exercise their right to self-determination while fully respecting the rights of others, whether within their own countries or in other lands.”³⁶

Tariq Ramadan, who was mentioned in the introduction of the article, is the only one to propose the concept of European Islam, or European Muslim citizenship. Ramadan's grandfather, Hasan al-Banna, founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928. Ramadan identifies himself as a European who does not deny his Muslim roots but wants to develop an identity that combines Islam with Europeaness. Ramadan says, “I am European who has grown up here. I don't deny my Muslim roots, but I don't vilify Europe either.”³⁷

With some 15 million Muslims in Europe, he feels it is time to abandon the dichotomy in Muslim thought that defines Islam in opposition to the West. According to him, this is possible if one separates Islamic principles from their culture of origin and anchors them in the cultural reality of Western Europe. He also calls for rereading of Muslim texts because of the many misconceptions within the Islamic communities. What concerns Ramadan most is the jurist's elaboration of the concepts of dar al-islam, the territory of house of Islam, and dar al-harb, the territory or the house of enemy. Regarding to this dichotomy he proposes replacing the dichotomy of the territory of Islam and of dar al-harb with the new concept of “house of testimony.”

CONCLUSION

Muslims who are living in North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, North America, Europe, and even in Korea are puzzled facing the challenges that come with modernity and post-modernity. Like believers of other faiths, Muslims struggle with how to live out apply their faith in a rapidly changing world.

A host of questions, many of them urgently concerning the immediate future, are thus thrown up for their consideration: Is the postmodern age intrinsically hostile to Islam? Why do media commentators, whether academics or journalists, consistently and unanimously disparage Islam? Is the Muslim

36 Kurzman(1998), 237.

37 Nasr Abu Zayd (2006), 92.

response, rejecting the Western media as biased, an effective one? If so, how long can they isolate themselves from global civilization? Will the lampooning and vilification divert Muslims from the values of a religion that advocates compassion and balance? And where are these virtues, so emphasized in the Quran, to be located in the present Islamic turbulence?

What intellectual and cultural changes are taking place among Muslims? Is the mosque in danger of being replaced by the mall as the focus of Muslim social and community activity? How can Muslims retain their central Islamic features, family life, care for children, respect for elders, concepts of modesty, in the face of contrary philosophies of the postmodernist age? And how can Muslims successfully convey the relevance of their beliefs and customs, their “message”, to the world community of which they are part?³⁸

These questions are similar to those asked by members of different faiths. They also struggle to advocate their religious virtues and uniqueness while trying to adjust to the rapidly changing world. For some Muslims it means preserving religious tradition through devotion to customary or folk Islam. For other Muslims it is going back to the first generation of Muslims who opened the Islamic era with Prophet Muhammad. IS is one of the extreme cases of this kind of religious tradition.

Many other Muslims hold to the modernist or liberal perspective, that even though Islam is the religion for all generations, it needs to be interpreted and adjusted according to each generation. From this perspective, liberal Muslims are trying to build up a progressed theory and religious system for religious freedom against religious intolerance among the Muslims. They are working to articulate a progressive, constructive Islamic frame work. Informed by a deep knowledge of their religious tradition and modern educations in law, history, politics, medicine, economics, and the sciences, they are equipped to reinterpret Islamic sources and traditions to meet the challenges of modernization and development, ideology, democratization, pluralism, and foreign policy even though they are still a minority facing formidable obstacles.

Both of so-called “soft” Islam which Tariq Ramadan and his colleagues follow and “hard” Islam which brutal IS jihadists follow, belong to the same

38 Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London: Routledge, 1992), 3-5.

Islamic tradition. As with many other world religions, Islam also has a wide spectrum of their religious diversity. Yet most of the Christians' perspectives towards Muslims still remain in the 14 century old paradigm. Theories like clash of civilizations and the hostile attitude of Islamophobia have incited and intensified this negative perspective of Muslims and the religion of Islam.

The ways Christians and Muslims are viewed by many correspond neither with their factual reality nor with the way in which they view themselves. In part, such views are normative, in the sense that they state how these people should behave and think in a given context according to certain religious norms or moral criteria. In part, however, the views which Christians and Muslims hold of themselves and of each other have a much longer history. From the beginning of Islam, Muslims defined what Christians were, and in the same way Christians defined what Muslims were.

Throughout history, normative views about the others and their identity developed and strengthened the normative views Christians and Muslims had of themselves. The history of Muslim-Christian relations contains the construction of identity, not only one's own but also the others. These identities have been handed down through tradition and have been accepted to the present day.³⁹

As the circumstances surrounding Christian mission are rapidly changing, the first step in approaching Muslims, who as a group remain mostly resistant toward the gospel, should be having an accurate understanding and an un-biased view about the religion of Islam, its culture, its wide spectrum of Muslim identities, and the various contexts in which Muslims live.

“Despite the rhetoric and actions of Muslim extremists and terrorists, and religious and cultural differences, the peoples of America, Europe, and the Muslims world have many shared values, dreams and aspirations...All of our futures will depend on working together for good governance, for freedom of religion, speech, and assembly, and for economic and educational advancement. Together we can contain and eliminate our preachers of hate and terrorists who threaten the safety, security, and prosperity of our families and societies.” (John L Esposito)⁴⁰

39 Jacques Waardenburg, “Muslims and Christians: Changing Identities”, in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol.11, no.2 (Basingstoke, Hants UK: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2000), 158.

40 Esposito (2010), 199.

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