

Can Islam Be Reformed?

Short Answer: No.

Some Muslims are being forced to ask that question – can Islam be reformed? – or such variants as “what things need to be done to allow Islam to accept or adjust to modernity.” Some of them are merely apologists, pretending to recognize a problem that they talk about as if it minor, and can easily be dealt with, and in any case, it’s a Muslim Thing and non-Muslims should butt out, we’ll take care of it ourselves thank you very much, and by the way, the fact that we are so busy reforming Islam so that all those little problems and contretemps with non-Muslims can be ironed out, should reassure non-Muslims everywhere that nothing further need be done, we’ll have the new improved perfectly harmless – trust us! – Islam ready for its close-up in a minute.

Then there are Permanent Diners-Out whose Diners Club Card consists of endless talk about Reforming Islam. Pride of place, and possibly of pocketbook too, surely belongs to Irshad Manji, who now has managed to convince some gullible donors to set her up in New York City, at New York University, with an “institute” (its her baby, with her donors, her sinecure, her everything) and keeps telling us, brightly and earnestly, that Islam needs “to be reformed” and all kinds of bright young Muslims in the West agree with her, and are delighted to support her. What Irshad Manji has never produced is a list of exactly what, and exactly how, she proposes to change what is in the Qur’an, the Hadith, and Sira. Does she think, with the Young Turk Mustafa Akyol, that somehow the world’s Sunni Muslims can be persuaded to limit their guide to the Qur’an alone, that is dispense with the Sunnah, ignore what is in the Hadith and the Sira, stop taking Muhammad as the Model of Conduct (the phrase “uswa hasana” is applied to Abraham twice in the Qur’an, and once to Muhammad), and Perfect Man (“al-insan al-kamil”)? How, for god’s sake?

Akyol's "sola scriptura" solution is pie in the sky in the sweet bye-and-bye, but at least he puts it out. What has his rival in Islamic Reform, Irshad Manji, ever suggested? She hennas her hair, she waves her arms, she smiles and talks very very fast, as if fearful that someone might actually manage to take in, if she were to slow down, the vacuity and pointlessness of what she was saying, and she always says the same thing .

This year a real truth-teller, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, will have her book on Islamic Reform published. I don't know what is in it. But what I assume she must discuss is those who offer absurd, completely unrealistic "solutions," such as Mustafa Akyol with his proposal to jettison, in effect, the Sunnah, which for Believers is at least as important, as a guide to conduct, as the Qur'an, or Irshad Manji with her endless mountebank's patter about "reform" that is never given flesh.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali knows perfectly well that Islam cannot be reformed – all intelligent people raised in Islam know this, whether they declare their apostasy or not – unless the religious basis for its supremacism, aggression, violence, misogyny, antisemitism – are admitted to, laid out, and expunged from the texts, the immutable Qur'an, and the Hadith which were weighted, and assigned their levels of authenticity, by muhaddithin, a thousand years ago, and the Sahih ("authentic") collections are not to be tampered with. In other words, this Reform Hope, that inspires so many conferncdes, and so many grants, from so many foundations, and so many Western governments too, and provide such a good living for the mustafa-akyols and the irshad-manjis and the nawaz-ahmads (he of the Quilliam Foundation) who are on to a good thing, is a hopeless matter, save among such a small group of Muslims – Muslims who, if they were quite logical, would simply stop the pretense of their being able to Reform Islam, one that has had and can have no discernible effect on the more than one billion prijmitive True Believers, and that

is dangerous because it offers a false hope that many in the West, eager to find reasons not to do what must be done to contain and constrain Islam and its carriers, will happily, dumbly take seriously, and bet their peoples' wellbeing on the forlorn hope that the Reformers will work their magic in the nick of time, in the same spirit as that character in Dickens who was always assuring himself, no matter how miserable his condition, that "something will turn up."

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