CALLING FOR "ISLAMIC PROTESTANTISM" IN INDONESIA AND BEYOND
Towards Democratic and Pluralistic Islam

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Abstract: This paper discusses the notion of "Islamic Protestantism" as a vehicle to create a face of democratic and pluralistic Islam. Drawing from the works of some prominent Muslim reformists and Western scholars, it addresses in some parts the works of Indonesian scholars. The choice of democracy and pluralism as a main focus in this paper is based on the fact that these two issues, representing the basic ideological doctrines in the ever-increasing globalized world, are not only fundamental doctrines of modern Western political philosophy but also now primary concerns of modern Islamic political thought. Inspired by the Christian Reformation, this piece tries to promote an idea of "Islamic Protestantism" by applying deconstruction and socio-historical approach as methods to understand Islamic discourses, texts, and history.

Keywords: Islamic Protestantism, pluralism, deconstruction, Islamic reformism.

Introduction

In a time when the images of Islam as a religion of terrorism, extremism, despotism, authoritarianism, anti-pluralism, and mysoginism are scattered throughout Western countries and elsewhere, discussion about Islam as a resource for peace, nonviolence, democracy, pluralism, feminism, freedom, and other universal human values remains a significant challenge. Abu-Nimer once says, "For the right, Islam represents barbarism; for the left, Islam looks like a medieval theocracy; and for the center, it seems like a kind of

distasteful exoticism."[1] In the eyes of (some) non-Muslims and Westerners today, the picture of Islam is identical with al-Qaeda, Hamas, Jama'ah Islamiyah, Ikhwanul Muslimin, the Mahdi Army which exert violence to achieve their goals.

The attacks on the Pentagon and the WTC on September 11th, 2001, have certainly brought about negative images of Islam. The tendency to view Islam as "a religion of the sword" colored by acts of terrorism and violence, however, is not a new phenomenon. Instead, such biased views and stereotypes have been deeply rooted in the propaganda of media and the works of early Orientalists since centuries ago. Islam has long been portrayed as being violent, aggressive, decadent, stagnant, irrational, mythical, despotic, undemocratic, and inhuman. On the contrary, Western civilization has been perceived as being peaceful, progressive, dynamic, rational, democratic, pluralist, and humane.

Such negatives images and views of Islam have undergone a process of, to borrow the term Peter Berger[2], "internalization" in the minds of today's Westerners and non-Muslims. They then have subsequently formed cultures of hatred, enmity, prejudice, and unfair attitudes toward Islam and Muslim societies.[3] Bernard Lewis, for instance, in many occasions said that Islamic tradition and liberal democracy are fundamentally incompatible. Further, for him, the Muslim world at the beginning of the twentieth century was faced with the dilemma between religious fanaticism and modernization.[4]

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[1] Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam: Theory and Practice* (Gainessville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), p. 2

[2] See Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luchman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise of Sociology of Knowledge* (n.: Anchor, 1967); Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of Sociological Theory of Religions* (n.: Anchor, 1990).

[3] Muhammed Abu-Nimer explains that there are some reasons why some Westerners view Islam and Muslim societies pejoratively. They include matters such as "selective reporting, lack of scholarly works on nonviolent and peaceful issues within Islam, the legacy of colonial subordination of Islamic countries to the West, ignorance of cultural differences, failure of Muslims to convey their messages, and the violent Arab-Israeli conflicts." Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam*, p. 2.

[4] See Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Publisher: Harper Perennial, 2003); Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (Publisher: Random House, 2004).

This paper is to examine the views of Orientalists and non-Muslims' perceptions about Islam by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Islam and its reliability in the light of contemporary world. In doing so, it investigates Muslim practices, violent-undemocratic or nonviolent-democratic, largely prevalent throughout the Muslim countries from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia. The notion of so-called "Islamic Protestantism" is quite significant to discuss in this paper.

Two Faces of Islam

Two reports on the state of political development in Muslim societies seem to confirm Lewis's statement. First, the New York-based Freedom House released a major study on the "Islamic World's Democracy Deficit" on December 18th, 2001, just three month since the tragedy of the Pentagon and the WTC. The report documented an expanding gap between "Muslim countries" (i.e. countries in which its habitants are dominated by Muslims) and non-Muslim states in terms of levels of freedom and democracy. The report result is that a non-Muslim country is three times more likely to be democratic than a Muslim one. Commenting the outcome of this research, Adrian Karatnychy, Freedom House president and coordinator of the research, says, "There is a growing chasm between the Islamic community and the rest of the world. While most Western and non-Western countries are moving towards greater levels of freedom, the Islamic world is lagging behind."[5] Second is the research report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Entitled *Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations,* the report concludes that the Arab world is at crossroads and that "the region is hampered by three key deficits that can be considered defining features: the freedom deficit, the women's empowerment deficit, and the human capabilities or knowledge deficit." Compared with the rest of the world, the Arab countries, the reports remarks, have "the lowest freedom score in the 1990s and when measured by indicators such as political process, civil liberties, political rights, and free media the Arab states had the lowest value of all regions of the world for voice and accountability." Still, the report concludes that the

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[5] See *Freedom in the World 2001-2002: the Democracy Gap* (New York: Freedom House, 2001). Available online at http://www.freedomhouse.org/reserach/survey2002.htm

Arab region "has been slower to democratize than other parts of the world and only 4 of 17 countries have multiparty electoral systems."[6]

Other data to support Lewis' critiques can also be cited. They include: the military *coup de'etat* in Pakistan led by the General Parvez Musharraf; the growing extremist Muslim groups in Indonesia; the ongoing terror and violence in Sudan; and the conservative clerical backlash against Khatami's reform movement in Iran. These cases seem to strengthen some analyses saying that the Muslim world cannot be separated from the world of terrorism, violence, despotism, and authoritarianism. Regrettably these analyses do not only judge Muslims but also Islam as a religion.

Due to such cases, it is not easy to convince that Islam is a democratic, peaceful, nonviolent, and pluralist religion. Indeed there are some extremist Muslim groups from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia, from London to Jakarta, who use the means of violence to terrorize people and to reach their goals and interests.[7] However, the acts they commit do not represent views and deeds of Islamic *ummah* (the Muslim society) as a whole. The reason is that in the Islamic world, as proved by some surveys,[8] most Muslims reject the use of violence and terrorism as committed by Muslim extremists.

Despite the fact that there are some fundamentalist Muslims who reject and do not recognize democracy, pluralism, and secularism,

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[6] UNDP, *Freedom in the World 2001-2002: the Democracy Gap* (New York: Freedom House) Available online at http://www.freedomhouse.org/reserach/survey2002.htm

[7] See Stephen Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam: Saudi Fundamentalism and Its Role in Terrorism* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003); Zachary Abuza, *Millitant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2003); Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 2005).

[8] Take, for example, a poll taken in September 2006 by the Program on International Policy Attitudes. It found out that 94% of Iraqis had unfavorable view of al-Qaeda, with 82% expressing a very negative view. In six predominantly Muslim Arab countries, namely, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, as shown by a poll in 2005 conducted by an expert in Arab public opinion Shibley Telhami, the influence of al-Qaeda was also very weak finding that only 7% of respondents supported al-Qaeda's methods, and only 6% supported al-Qaeda's goal of creating a Muslim state in their home countries. See Christopher Preble, "War of the Worlds?," *Cato Policy Report*, Vol. XXVIII No. 6, November/December 2006. In Indonesia, as the largest Muslim country, as shown by the surveys' findings of the Indonesian Survey Institute, most Muslims also refuse violent ways of achieving goals.

many other Muslims worldwide are still willing to accept modernity, democracy, and "civic pluralism."[9] There is convincing evidence that many Muslims around the world support modernity and democracy. Recent political developments in Turkey, Iran, and Indonesia offer a more significant indication of Muslim concerns with democracy, freedom, secularism, and civic pluralism.[10] Additionally, in the Arab and the Middle East, Muslim politics leading to the creation of peaceful democracy has developed significantly. A fascinating and significant study capturing this rising move within Muslim world, especially in Arab and the Middle East, in relation to the ideas of democracy, civil society, freedom, and secularism is clearly shown in the two volumes of Augustus Richard Norton-edited books.[11]

Still, a recent study of Asef Bayat, academic director of the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) at Leiden University, entitled *Making Islam Democratic*, which focuses on post-Islamist Iran and *Hizb al-Wasat* of Egypt, also shows promising hopes for the practice of democracy and pluralism in the Arab and the Middle East. In this study, Bayat argues that Islamic world, especially Arab and the Middle East and more specifically post-Islamist Iran, is now in the process of democratization. Social movements and political struggles of student organizations, youth and women groups, intellectuals, academic circles, human right activists, and enlightened *mullah*, according to Bayat, have contributed to make Islam democratic and pluralistic. For him, since Muslim world is

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[9] The term "civic pluralism" refers to "a public culture and social organization premised on equal rights, tolerance-in-pluralism, and legally recognized differentiation of state and religious authority." See Robert W. Hefner, "Muslim Democrats and Islamist Violence in Post-Soeharto Indonesia," in Robert W Hefner (ed.), *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, and Democratization* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 28.

[10] See Jenny White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study of Vernacular Politics* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002); Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Robert W. Hefner, "Muslim Democrats and Islamist Violence."

[11] See Augustus Richard Norton, (ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East,* Vol. 1 (Leiden & New York: E.J. Brill, 1995); Augustus Richard Norton, (ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East* (Leiden & New York: E.J. Brill, 1996).

undergoing democracy, discussing the issues of compatibility or incompatibility between Islam and democracy is no longer relevant.[12]

Bayat's findings, actually, only confirm and reinforce previous works done by both Muslim and Western scholars. In 2002, Anthony Shadid wrote *Legacy of the Prophet* describing the new emerging Muslim politics in the Middle East. The main argument of this work is that a "sea change in political Islam"[13] has taken place over the past twenty years. Mainstream Islamist groups are undergoing a maturisation process in terms of their political thought *vis-à-vis* society, the state, democracy, and nonviolence. Just like Bayat's study, Shadid also featured the phenomenon of *Hizb al-Wasat* in Egypt which welcomes non-Muslims (e.g. Coptic) and women within political structures, as well as is willing to work with non-Islamist party.[14] The new pheno-mena of "moderate fundamentalist" Muslims who are willing to engage with ideas of pluralism and democracy are also discussed by Ahmad Mousalli. In responding this trend, Mousalli states, "Moderate fundamentalist thinkers are not, of course, Western moderate democrats in the strict sense; however, they are indeed liberal and democratic enough in a context like the Middle East, which is plagued with nationalist totalitarian rules and traditional despotic kings."[15]

The above explanation illustrates that the Islamic world is like a forest consisting of many different trees and branches. Al-Qaeda and other similar Muslim extremist gangs are only one of these "Islamic trees." Some Western scholars such as Samuel Huntington, Daniel

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[12] Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[13] Anthony Shadid, *Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats, and the New Politics of Islam* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2002), p. 76

[14] Essam Sultan, one of the founders of *Hizb al-Wasat* once stated, "The truth is that the most important, the clearest difference between the *Hizb al-Wasat* and the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) is faith in pluralism, faith in democracy, faith in freedom, faith in freedom of opinion, freedom of thought, freedom of activity, relations with other currents. The Muslim Brotherhood isolates itself from other political currents because they are outside the group's religious framework. In relation to us, the *Hizb al-Wasat* we consider the other political currents part of the national framework. We must have to interact with them. It is not possible to bring about a renaissance for the future nation without joining forces with these other groups in society." See at Anthony Shadid, *Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats, and the New Politics of Islam,* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), p. 262.

[15] See Norton, (ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East,* p. 118

Pipes, Anthony Dennis, and Robert Spencer have wrongly read Islam as a "tree", not a "forest".[16] Unfortunately, the "tree" they observe is merely an Islamic fundamentalism which is considered a menace for Western civilizations. They ignore the facts of democratic, pluralistic, peaceful, and nonviolent Islam scattered across Muslim world today[17] and in the past.[18] On the contrary, they only desire to engage with aspects of violence and authoritarianism within some groups of Muslims.

What I describe in the above paragraphs is just to show the fact of "two faces of Islam", as with other religions, referring to the ambivalence. On the one hand, Islam performs quite democratic, peaceful, and plural; and on the other hand, it presents a violent and anti-democratic face. This is the phenomenon of what Scott Appleby calls "the ambivalence of the sacred" or that of "good Muslim and bad Muslim" to borrow the book title of Muslim Ugandan thinker Mahmood Mamdani.[19] Islam is like a "virtual market" selling whatever human beings particularly Muslims need. Muslims can "purchase" whatever they want to. Through religious texts, historical backgrounds, and normative teachings, Islam "sells" universal worldviews and fundamental values such as inclusivism, pluralism, feminism, egalitarianism, freedom, democracy, humanism, and social justice. But

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[16] See Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72. No. 3. (1993); Daniel Pipes, *In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Anthony Dennis, *The Rise of the Islamic Empire and the Threat to the West* (Bristol, IN.: Wyndham Hall Press, 1996); Robert Spencer, *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance: How Islamic Law Treats Non-Muslims* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004).

[17] See L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam*; Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000); Robert W. Hefner, *Remaking Muslim Politics*; John L. Esposito and Azzam Tamimi (eds.), *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

[18] A fascinating account relating to the practice of peaceful and nonviolent living in medieval Islam can be found in Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: n.p., 2002).

[19] See Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim and Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004); Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

at the same time, it also "sells" extremism, exlusivism, fanatism, hostility, injustice and so forth.

Charles Kimball makes an interesting reason in his notion of "when religion becomes evil." He argues that there are five warning signs of "when religion becomes evil." First, when the adherents of religion claim their teachings, texts, and doctrines as the only one truth. This is what theologians call as the claim of truth. Second is that when the adherents have blind-loyalty toward their clerics or imam. Third is when they desire to build a religious kingdom. Fourth is when religion allows and legitimizes evil deeds. Fifth is when the followers of religion command a holy war.[20] What Kimball argues is exactly what extremist Muslims have done.[21]

In the case of Saudi, when the Wahhabis were in power, terrorism and discrimination took place widely. As a result, undeniably, Wahhabism can be seen as the main Islamic faction that hijacks Islamic teachings for supporting extremism and terrorisms. Furthermore, it has become the single greatest source of the impoverishment of contemporary Islamic thought.[22]

Moreover, the ideological tenets of Wahhabism and other Islamic wings of extremism like Salafism are strongly rooted in the Islamic texts and are heavily relied on Islamic traditions as their religious justification and "moral" legitimacy. Indeed, there are no religious texts that instruct directly the use of hostility, agitation, and violence. But, religious texts do inspire undemocratic policies and violent behaviors.[23] It is central, therefore, to review Islamic discourses and to carry out Islamic reform by promoting the so-called "Islamic Protestantism".

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[20] Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil? Five Warning Signs* (n.: HarperOne, 2003).

[21] Indeed, the temptation to use religion for political objectives is powerful and the consequences can be devastating. This is what Scott Appleby has said as a "weak religion." Appleby said that religion becomes weak where religion as an independent cultural and social presence has been weakened, by neglect, oppression, a history of sub-ordination to a hostile or indifferent state, or by a losing struggle with forces of modernization. When religion becomes weak, it is easy to use it as a tool for violence. See Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).

[22] See Abdurrahman Wahid, "Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam", *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 December 2005; El Fadl, *The Great Theft*.

[23] See Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God.*; Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East.*; Barton, *Indonesia's Struggle.*

From Islamic Reformation to "Islamic Protestantism"

The idea of "Islamic Protestantism" is deeply rooted in the history of Islam, especially since the nineteenth century, when some modernist Muslims and Arab nationalist leaders called for Islamic reformation. The reference of this idea is the fifteenth Christian Reformation led notably by Martin Luther. However both camps—modernists and nationalists—had different point of views regarding whether the Christian Reformation resembled Islam or the reverse: the developments in Christian history that resembled Islam. Thinkers like Muhammad `Abduh of Egypt (d. 1905), Muhammad Iqbal of India (d. 1938), and Ziya Gokalp of Turkey (d. 1924), to name several Muslim modernists, tended to see the resemblance of the Christian Reformation to Islam. On the contrary, prominent nationalist figures like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897) and other reformists such as Indian reformer Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), for instance, advocated the need for the spirit of the Christian Reformation and Luther to lead Islamic reformation. This call then was echoed by Fath 'Ali Akhundzadah (d. 1878) in the Russian Empire and Abdullah Cevdet (d. 1932) of Ottoman Empire, both of whom used the Christian Reformation analogy as a cover for atheism.

The call for the reformation goes further. Habib Allah Puri Riza (Iran) argued that Shi'i Islam needed a "sacred revolution" "with thinkers like Luther and Calvin; Muhammad Rashid Ridh>(d. 1935) cited the need to merge "religious renewal and earthly renewal, the same way Europe has done with religious reformation and modernization;" Hadi Atlasi (d. 1940) claimed the urgent need for a Muslim "Luther" to save the Muslim world, and he considered Shihabuddin Marjani (d. 1889), the founder of Islamic modernism in Russia, as the "Muslim Luther"[24].

In Indonesia, according to Deliar Noer in his *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia,* the call for Islamic reformation was advocated by Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah organization, Haji Miskin and Imam Bonjol in Minangkabau, the founders of Indonesian Wahhabism, and also Muhammad Natsir, "the opponent" of

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[24] See Michaelle Browers and Charles Kurzman (eds.), *An Islamic Reformation?* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), pp. 1-17; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Liberal Islam: A Source Book* (New York 7 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Soekarno, the leading advocate of Indonesian secularism and nationalism, during the nationalist movement era.[25] These Islamic reformation movements, according the secularist Syrian thinker Sadiq Jalal al-'Azm, had caused the establishment of a counterreformation movements led by the Ikhwanul Muslimin in 1928 (?) and similar movements.[26] In the Indonesian context, the modernist movements had stimulated the founding of the Islamic traditionalist organization, *Nahdlatul Ulama* in 1926, led by Syeikh Hasyim Asy'ari, the grandfather of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur).

Although in this piece I use the term "Islamic reformation," it does not mean to imitate the above modernist ideas. To some degree, I strongly criticize such ideas as "reformation" or "modernization" for some reasons. First, their notions for calling a reformation, meaning "return to the Qur'an and the Sunna" (the precedent of the Prophet), remain problematic because, as I mentioned before, some verses of the Qur'an are not invulnerable from criticism. Still, since the precedent of the Prophet Muhammad is scattered and recorded in many classical Islamic resources—and at times the records contradict from one resource to another—the critical question is: which Sunna that is more authoritative? Second, their commitment to strictly follow the Qur'an and the Sunna, as well as the model of the Prophet's companions (*al-salaf al-shih*) as the "authentic Islam" brings to the destruction of abundance of Islamic traditions, cultures, texts outside the Qur'an and the Sunna, and so forth which are regarded as "faces of Islam"—accordingly need to be purified. Thus, "reformation" means "purification." In responding to this group, Khaled Abou El Fadl states, "By emphasizing a presumed golden age in Islam, the adherents of Salafism (Abou El Fadl's term for this group) idealized the time of the Prophet and his companions, and ignored or demonized the balance of Islamic history. By rejecting juristic precedents and undervaluing tradition, Salafism adopted a form of egalitarianism that deconstructed any notions of established authority within Islam".[27] Third, their apologetic views are other weaknesses of this group.

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[25] See Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[26] Browers and Kurzman (eds.), *An Islamic Reformation?,* p. 5.

[27] Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Islam and the Theology of Power", *Middle East Report,* No. 221, (2001), p. 32.

It is crucial to notify that these "reformist groups" are basically a cluster of apologist Muslims who defended the Islamic system of beliefs from the onslaught of orientalism, westernization, and modernity by simultaneously emphasizing the compatibility and supremacy of Islam. Their claims as the "modernists" fundamentally aim at creating a fantasy view of "Islamic modernity." A large number of reformist groups responded to the intellectual challenges coming from the West by adopting pietistic fictions about the Islamic traditions. Such fictions avoided any critical evaluation of Islamic doctrines and traditions, and celebrated the imagined perfection of Islam. A common apologist argument was that any modern institutions and concepts including democracy, freedom, feminism, and pluralism were first and foremost invented by Muslims and had already existed within Islam.[28] Based upon the above description Abou El Fadl, once states that the nineteenth and early-mid twentieth century reformist Muslim movements led by Abduh, Afghani, Ridha, Shawkani, San`ani, Qutb, Hawa, Mawdudi, Dahlan, and so forth, were a modified version of Wahhabism, a puritan faction of Islam founded by Muhammad bin `Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792) in the late eighteenth century in Najd based on the creed of Ibnu Taymiyah (d. 1328) and his disciple, Ibnu Qayyim al-Jauziyah (d. 1350). Abou El Fadl calls all of them the Salaf ("the predecessors") simply because they had suggested Muslims to strictly go behind the Prophet, his companions, and their successors.[29]

Do their claims work in favor of "Islamic Reformation"? The answer is frankly, "no." It is because such "modernists" had projected ideals of "Islamic fantasy." Their claims to return to the Qur'an and the Sunna by devaluing secondary texts of classical Islam, in practice, do not work. In addition, `Abduh's claims (and other supporters) of "Islamic Protestantism" were far from the spirit of the Christian Reformation, which challenged the monopoly, supremacy, and

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[28] Beside the apologists, this cluster can be regarded the idealists, that is, those who advocate Islam is a religion that supports peace, nonviolence, pluralism, feminism, democracy and other universal principles. Islam is suitable for any area and time, wherever and whenever (*al-Islam shalih li likulli zaman wa makan*). According to this group, Islam promotes pluralism and not sectarianism, advocates peace and not violence, teaches *rahmat* (God's blessing) and not disaster, love and not hatred and certainly harmony, living peacefully and nonviolently and not terrorism.

[29] El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* p. 75.

religious despotism of the Catholic Church. While Luther declared "95 Theses," demanded freedom from the monopoly of interpretation and the supremacy of Church, and deconstructed the problematic verses of Bible which are not suitable for the spirit of modern time, these Muslim groups, in contrast, had rejected any effort of self-criticism towards Islamic doctrines, discourses, and the original texts of the Qur'an. As a result, these groups have participated in creating the emergence of ideas and practices of religious fundamentalism, conservatism, authoritarianism, and despotism within Islamic world.

This is among the fundamental reasons of the rise of the "second wave" of "Islamic Protestantism" movement in the late twentieth century and present day Islam. In 2002, an Iranian scholar Hashem Aghajari embarked on a "project of Islamic Protestantism" by arguing that like medieval Christianity, Islam in the Islamic Republic of Iran had changed to become bureaucratized and hierarchical, and accordingly it needs fresh and radical ideas of reformation just like what had been done in the fifteenth Christianity. He described the "Islamic Protestantism" as a type of Islam characterized by rational, scientific, humanistic, thoughtful, intellectual, and open-minded.[30]

Another eminent Muslim thinker joins in this camp is a Syrian author Muhammad Shahrour (b. 1938). Anthropologist Dale Eickelman in his article, "Islamic Liberalism Strikes Back," states that a best-selling 1990 book by him, that is, *Al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an: Qira>ah Mu'asrah* ("The Book and the Qur'an: A Contemporary Reading"), "may one day be seen as a Muslim equivalent of the 95 Theses that Martin Luther nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church in 1517".[31] Through this book, Shahrour provokingly argues the need for reinterpretation of the Qur'an with new lens and modern social sciences such as linguistics and hermeneutics to grasp the whole picture of the Qur'an, and not through the prism of centuries of jurisprudence. In his other book, *Dirasat al-Islamiyah Mu'asrah fi>al-Dawlah wa al-Mujtama`* ("Contemporary Islamic Studies in State and Societies"), Shahrour also demands Muslims not to blindly follow the

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[30] Ayelet Savyon, "The Call for Islamic Protestantism: Dr. Hashem Agjhari's Speech and Subsequent Death Sentence," *The Middle East Media Research Institute Special Dispatch Series,* 445, December 2, 2002.

[31] Dale Eickelman, "Islamic Liberalism Strikes Back." *MESA Bulletin*, No. 27, (1993), pp. 163-8.

conception and thoughts of medieval jurists Muslims. Well-known Iranian philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush (b. 1945) also is widely considered by both supporters and critics as the Martin Luther of Islam due to his strong critiques towards religious practices and thoughts of Iranian Mullah and Muslim fundamentalist in his home country. The revolution of 1979, he argued, was hijacked by the state's own clerical establishment, who used their moral authority to gain absolute power, and by that reason, he claims that Iran is no longer a genuinely democratic religious government.[32] No doubt, Soroush and Shahrour are among a few Muslims who have strong voices regarding the issues of freedom, democracy, pluralism, and other basic human right values.

Besides the above Muslim scholars, Sudanese Muslim academician and activist Addullahi Ahmed Na'im (b. 1946) also has echoed the idea of Islamic reformation. However, he stated that an Islamic reformation cannot be a belated and poor copy of the European Christian model of Reformation. Instead, it will have to be an indigenous and authentically Islamic process. By his book, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law*, An-Na'im is an important voice for calling an Islamic reformation by reformulating the structure of "liberal Shari'ah" identified by granting civil liberties, respecting basic human rights, minority rights (particularly non-Muslims), equality before the law, and so forth. In an attempt to reconstruct this "new Sha'ria", he evokes the use of Mecca verses of the Qur'an, which is, according to him, more liberal, plural, and democratic.[33] Moreover, Ahmad Bishara, the chairman of the National Democratic Movement of Kuwait, can be regarded as the supporter of this movement when he said that the aim of the political party he established was to "reform Islam the way Martin Luther reformed the Catholic Church." Kenyan thinkers, Ali Mazuri and Alamin Mazrui, also pondered that "it would be particularly fitting if the Martin Luther of the Islamic Reformation

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[32] See Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*; Reza Aslan, *No god but God: the Origins, Evolution, and the Future of Islam* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006).

[33] Abdullah Ahmed An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

turned out to be a woman, posting her 95 Theses of reform not on the door of a Wittenberg mosque but universally on the Internet".[34]

A list of today's Muslim reformers supported the idea of "Islamic Protestantism" can be lengthened. However, the point of this piece is just to show that such an idea does not come down from an empty sky. Rather, it is deeply rooted within the history of modern Islam which emerges as an outcome of the practices of religious despotism and discrimination of extremist and fundamentalist groups throughout the Muslim countries. Furthermore, the idea of this "Islamic Protestantism" does not mean to do a "copy-paste" the fifteenth Christian Reformation" to current Muslim world or to conform the Protestant Reformation; rather, it is intended to take the "spirit" of the reformation in radicalizing Christian discourses and interpreting or deconstructing religious texts, and then try to apply it within Islamic contexts. Thus, the term "Islamic Protestantism" is only a name referring to the "liberal ideas" of Islam. The term "Protestantism" here also can be referred to two things: Protestantism (with capital "P") in the sense of the Protestant Luther or "protestantism" (within little "p") in light of "protest" to the forms of Islamic despotism, conservatism, fanaticism, authoritarianism, fundamentalism, etc. Another notice is that this idea of "Islamic Protestantism" is not in the sense of social movements and political actions, but more to that of intellectual endeavors.

In light of this framework, I am in line with the current Muslim reformers and I do support their intellectual endeavors in reforming and reconstructing Islam. However, at some point, I differ from them in terms of methodology of Islamic reformation. Generally, they use the discipline of hermeneutics (*tafsir* and *ta'wil* in the Islamic tradition) and enlarge the function of reason, mind, and thoughts (*'aql*) to interpret, rationalize, and finally idealize the Islamic religion. They elaborate the means of *ijtihad* (critical reasoning) as an intellectual medium to find out and defend the idea of compatibility between the values of Islam and those of modern civilization and culture. Indeed, I realize that such interpretation is always the challenge for a religious community. Nevertheless, their ideas are not able to answer and solve "the problematic texts" in relation to discrimination, violence, injustice, unequal gender relationships, intolerance, and so on.

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[34] Browers and Kurzman (eds.), *An Islamic Reformation?*

Accordingly, the use of hermeneutical methodology is not sufficient. Muslims need breakthroughs beyond the texts.

Their claims that the interpretation of the puritans is based on the lack of understanding of Islam and a very narrow perspective are incorrect and unfair. There are many puritans who have good knowledge in the Islamic tradition and in fact some of them are well-educated. The supporters of puritanical ideology, such as Ibnu Taymiyah, Ibnu al-Qayyim al-Jawziyah, Abu> al-A`la> al-Mawdu>di>, Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Qutb, Sa`id Hawa, Hasan Turabi> Shaykh Bin Baz, and al-Zawahiri> are brilliant Muslim scholars who grasp Islamic sources/traditions and have written numerous scholarly works on various topics. For instance, Sayyid Qutb has written a number of books including *Fi>Z{ila>l al-Qur'an* which consists of thirty parts in six volumes, the book that has been used by worldwide puritanical groups as an intellectual basis of their movements. Ibnu Taymiyah, Ibnu al-Qayyim al-Jawziyah and al-Mawdu>di> are also known as intellectual Muslim "giants." They had absolutely understood and were cognizant of what they had done in the interpretation of Islam based on the Qur'an, the Hadith and other Islamic traditions. The core problem here is not the lack of understanding and narrow interpretation but it is due to the Qur'an itself which provides ambivalent statements!

Here I suggest that Muslims should be "idealistic" as well as "realistic." I am aware that there are "two faces of Islam": good-bad, light-dark, peace-violence, justice-injustice and so forth. I am cognizant that there are two sides within the history of the Prophet Muhammad: the bright history as well as the dark history.[35] If Islam contains only positive sides as the idealists or apologists assume, the question is why does this religion breed the radical Muslim groups and individuals? On the contrary, if Islam just contains "negative teachings" as the "rejectionists" claim, why does this religion bears so many Muslims who devote their lives to peace building, democracy, pluralism, and human rights, and inter-faith dialogues?.[36] If Islam has strongly

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[35] Ibnu Ishaq, *Hayatu Muhammad* ["The Life of Muhammad"], translated by A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955, 1987); Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions International, Ltd., 1983).

[36] See at Chaiwat Satha Anand, (Qader Muheideen), *The Nonviolent Crescent: Two Essays on Islam and Nonviolence* (Alkmaar, The Netherlands: International Fellowship of

supported the ideas and movements against "the others" (Jews, Christians, non-Muslims, local beliefs, etc.) and provides only the teachings of anti-democracy, anti-pluralism, anti-egalitarianism, etc., like the puritans assume, why are there a lot of verses in the Qur'an and practices of Muhammad's life that teach tolerance, freedom, democracy, equality, etc and command Muslims to live peacefully with others and to respect human beings.[37] The existence of "the two faces of Islam" including the ambiguous texts of the Qur'an is due to the fact that the revelation process was dynamic in accordance with particular historical contexts and special backgrounds. The Qur'an itself "came down" within the particular context of circumstances (*asbab al-nuzul*). So, it makes sense at all if the verses of the Qur'an provide different meanings from one another or simply said, they are "ambiguous" in meaning.

Based on the above description, therefore, I will support the idea that Muslims should take only the positive side of Islamic tradition and texts and set aside the negative ones. Islam has to be placed only in its universal values and humanistic spirit. Examples of positive aspects of Islam are as follows: when Muhammad could conquer Mecca, a main town in Arabia at the time, that was known in the Islamic history as *Fath Makkah* ("the Victory or the Openness of Mecca"), Prophet Muhammad forbad his followers to destroy local tribes and other non-Muslims and allowed them to practice their beliefs and faith based on some verses of the Qur'an that support and obligate all Muslims to live peacefully with believers. In addition, the Qur'an promises that "all those who believe—the Jews, the Sabeans, the Christians—anyone who believes in God and the Last Days, and whoever does good deeds, will have nothing to fear or regret" (Q.S. 5:69). The Qur'an also advises Muslims to coexist with the Jews and Christians: "We believe in God, and in that which has been revealed to us, which is that which was revealed to Abraham and Ismail and Jacob and the tribes of Israel,

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Reconciliation, 1996); Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam*; Robert W. Hefner, "Muslim Democrats and Islamist Violence"; Abdul Aziz Said, Nathan C. Funk, and Ayse S. Kadayifci (eds.), *Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam: Precept and Practice* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001).

[37] See at Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism.*; Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam.*; Reza Aslan, *No god but God: the Origins, Evolution, and the Future of Islam* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006).

as well as that which the Lord revealed to Moses and to Jesus and to all the other prophets. We make no distinction between any of them; we submit ourselves to God" (Q.S. 3:84).[38] This is precisely what makes the idea of "monotheistic pluralism."

On the contrary, the verses of the Qur'an that contain teachings of intolerance, violence, anti-democracy, inequality, slavery, misogyny, and so on must be reexamined and deconstructed just like Luther had done with his "95 Theses." Without deconstruction the equal relationships, the efforts of peace building, as well as egalitarian and humanistic theological transformation could have never been manifested in the religious community's life. Deconstruction of "the problematic texts" is significant in order that the puritans/radicals do not use such texts to legitimize their acts. This approach is based on the fact that classical Islamic tradition also recognizes the concept of *naskh* (literally elimination or abrogation) in which the texts that are not suitable with the spirit of contemporary society can be ignored. Therefore, Muslims should elaborate on this concept to erase the problematic texts that are out-dated and are opposite to the spirit and worldviews of contemporary societies and contradict to the spirit of democracy, pluralism, heterogeneity, peace movements and other universal values. The approach is in-line with the Arabian sayings: "*Khud}ma>sfa>wa utruk ma>qadhara*" (Take the clean things and leave the dirty ones).

In this context, Muslims have to be able to distinguish the doctrinal aspects of Islam from its traditions or cultures, the teachings that provide resources for building human solidarity from those which are otherwise, those which reflect Arabian cultural influence from those which do not. Islam is rational so that any teachings which oppose human rationality should be avoided. Muhammad himself had said: *al-di>n huwa al-'aql la>di>na li man la>'aqla lahu* ("Religion/Islam is the reason, there is no religion for those who have no reason). This means that a Muslim should use his or her rational power to analyze and to rethink all aspects of Islamic teachings. Islam is also contextual, in the sense that its universal values have to be translated into particular contexts—Arabian, Malay, Asian, American, Latino, African, Canadian, Russian and so on. Thus, any aspects of Islam which reflect

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[38] See Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Qur'an: Text Translation and Commentary* (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 1987).

ancient Arab, even Quraysh, cultures, which are irrelevant to the modern context, are not binding on Muslims who live outside Arabian territory and, thus, there is no obligation for those people to conform to them.

Examples of what non-Arab Muslims do not have to take into account because they are merely expression of a particular Islam in local Arabia, are the *hijab* (female head covering), polygamy, the amputations of hands (for theft), retaliation (for death or injury), stoning to death (for adultery), obligatory beards and gowns of particular styles. Then, examples of Islamic teachings mentioned in the Qur'an that should be ignored by Muslims because they represent the opposite of universal humanistic principles, are the concept of *dhimmi*, unequal gender relationships (e.g. male-female, heterosexual-homosexual, etc.), mysoginism, slavery, the truth of claim and other teachings that have the potential to destabilize the world and threaten human relationships and human security. In my opinion, there is no "law of God", as most Muslims understand that concept. What do exist are general principles and universal values which in the classical Islamic tradition of legal study are called *maqasid al-shari'ah*, that is, the general goals of Islamic law. The values include the protection of religious freedom (*hifz al-din*), reason (*'aql*), property (*mal*), the family, and honor (*nasl* and *'irdl*). How these values are translated into any given historical and social context is something Muslims must work out for themselves through *ijtihad* (intellectual endeavor). I argue that Islam is "a living organism" that evolves concerning the pulse of humankind's development Islam is not a static monument that was carved in the 7th century and thereafter as a beautiful statue may not be touched by the hand of history. Only through *ijtihad* or critical thinking can Islam be living wherever and whenever it is. Islam must be seen as, to borrow Mohammed Arkoun's term, "a dynamic verb" instead of "a static noun."[39]

Once more, those teachings and texts have to be disclosed (read: deconstructed). The religious texts in Islamic tradition can be deconstructed through a socio-historical approach. This approach combines two methods: the historical and the sociological method. Norman Gottwald stated that the two methods are different but

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[39] Mohammed Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or To Subvert* (London: Saqi Books, 2006).

complementary to each other.[40] Historical method embraces all the methods of inquiry drawn from the humanities (e.g. literary criticism, form criticism, tradition history, rhetorical criticism, history of religion, etc). Sociological method includes all the methods of inquiry proper to the social sciences (e.g. anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, etc.). Both methods are significant to understand the dynamic of early Islam. Both methods are compatible for reconstructing early Islam and thought. Historical study of early Islam aims at grasping the sequential articulation of Muslims' experiences including Muhammad as a "guider" and the rich variety of its cultural products. Sociological study of early Islam aims to hold the typical patterns of human relations (e.g. relations among tribes of Arabia) in their structure and function.[41]

In a socio-historical approach, each community abandons some assumptions which have influenced the collective perception of the Muslim community. The premise is that the Qur'an as "God's word" (I deliberately use quotation because I fundamentally do not believe in the "word of God") is not to be seen as supra historic, or outside of history. A historical approach understands the "sacred texts" or scriptures as profane, temporal and impermanent because the Qur'an is an outcome of human cultures—a historical product. Thus, there is no reason to sacralize, dogmatize, and idolize it. Bibliolatry, borrowing T.H. Huxley's term in *Science and Hebrew Tradition,* that is, "idolizing process toward scriptural texts," is a dangerous view because it can bear fanatical attitudes and blind-behavior. The most dangerous enemy of Islam today is "bibliolatry" or dogmatism, a kind of closed conviction that a particular doctrine is an infallible medicine for all human problems and ignores the fact that human life is continually evolving. There is no sacred and holy text. The real one is a "sacralized text". Instead, there is a long and complex historical process at work

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[40] Norman Gottwald, *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, 1984), p. 27.

[41] Excellent examples of socio-historical approaches to the religious texts particularly the Bible have been shown well by scholars of Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. For instance, Norman Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: 1985) and then *Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 BCE*; Robert B. Coote, *In Defense of Revolution: The Elohist History* (Minneapolis: 1991); Robert Coote and David Robert Ord, *The Bible's First History: From Eden to the Court of David with the Yahwist* (Philadelphia: 1989).

through which texts become "*scientia sacra*" – both sacred and mythic. At the beginning, the Qur'an was an oral tradition. Codification and canonization of the Qur'an occurred in the time of the caliph `Uthman, far after the death of Muhammad. In the hermeneutical studies, there is a serious problem in the process of moving from oral tradition to a written one in religious traditions.[42]

Conclusion

Such deconstruction can serve to build a transformed religious community. But this "religious transformation" can only occur if each community is prepared to "detach itself" from the Text's hegemony over the critical logic of the Muslim community. Instinctively, the text has been slithering beneath our consciousness, influencing every step of religious Muslim community behavior: do this, and don't do that. We have acted like robots controlled by a remote control. As long as our movement is positive and "humanist" there is no problem with the Muslims' approach to religion. The problem emerges when our actions are destructive and violent. Though the text has been considered sacred, containing positive "movement-principles" (for instance, the text regarding freedom/liberation, equality, the teaching of love, social solidarity, emancipation, universal brotherhood, etc.) it also contains negative "movement-principles" (such as slavery, doctrines of supremacy, gender domination, "jihad", etc). Thus, the negative "movement-principles" of the text creates narrow-minded humans who exploit other humans in the name of religion and God. To deconstruct the Qur'an, first of all, Muslims should view the Qur'an as a "dynamic discourse" or in the Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd words in his *Mafhum al-Nass* "al-Qur'an ka al-khitab," and not as a "sacred text" (*Al-Qur'an ka al-nass*).[43] In the 23-year revelation process, the Qur'an was also a dynamic phenomenon, full of dialogues, and following a take-and-give mechanism, as well as receive-and-reject one. Indeed, as asserted by al-Zarkashi in the *al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, the Qur'an "came down" to Muhammad only in the shape of ideas while wording

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[42] William Graham has written an excellent book concerning this matter. See William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[43] Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Mafhum al-Nass, Dirasat fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al Misriyyah al 'Ammah li al-Kitab, 1993).

was given by Muḥammad himself[44]—the view that is totally different from mainstream Muslims who view and value the Qur'an both meaning and words as the "Word of God" (*kalam Allah*).

Likewise, it is important to deconstruct the idea that one text—and thus one religion—is superior to another. God is more magnificent than any text. He is beyond any text. The claim of supra-historical Godly verses reduces the greatness of the concept of God itself. So, through deconstruction, arthritic textual claims disappear—no one text or religion dominates another. These are the very latest efforts advocated by the inter-religious dialogue as explained by Leonard Swidler in his *After the Absolute: the Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection* (1991). The idea is to disavow "double standards," the claims for unitary truths and single paths of salvation as these are all considered to be uncritical ways of thinking. Arthur J D'Adamo argues that this uncritical "way of knowing" is at the root of inter-religious community conflict. Each religious group thinks it has the source of truth -- (1) consistent and errorless; (2) complete and final, (3) the only source of salvation and enlightenment; and (4) directly given by God without human influence. It is a narrow minded way of thinking and not conducive for building a universal brotherhood. The religious dialogue's activists should start discussing this "*muharramat*" (forbidden) topic without any hesitation or trepidation.

We should open ourselves to other belief systems and restrict our egoism, abandon "primordial identity," and use self introspection to look into the double standards we apply to others. As a Muslim, I have a duty to perfect and reform Islam in accordance with contemporary society and the modern era. Basically every Muslim functions as "a little Muḥammad" who is responsible for reforming and perfecting Islam by taking only universal values of this religion for building pluralistic and democratic systems, civilized cultures and humanized civilization. Islam is a blessing for all human races as clearly asserted in the Qur'an: *wa ma arsalnaka illa rahmatan li al-'alamin*. As humans are an organism that always develops—qualitatively or quantitatively, Islam itself must also be able to thrive in accordance with the needs of humanity. Only then, in widening our theologically inclusive view, would religions have significant positive roles for providing a spiritual

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[44] Muḥammad bin `Abd Allah al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhan fi al-Ulum al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Darul Ma'rifah, 1972).

foundation for human futures in establishing cultures of pluralism and democracy. This has been superbly portrayed by Bhagavan Das, "all of us, the religion's disciples, would meet in the same road of life. Who come from the far, who come from the near, all are hungry and thirsty, all are in the need of life's bread and water which can be gained only through unity with the Supreme Spirit." In short, "Islamic Protestantism" is a foundation for creating democratic and pluralistic Islam. []

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