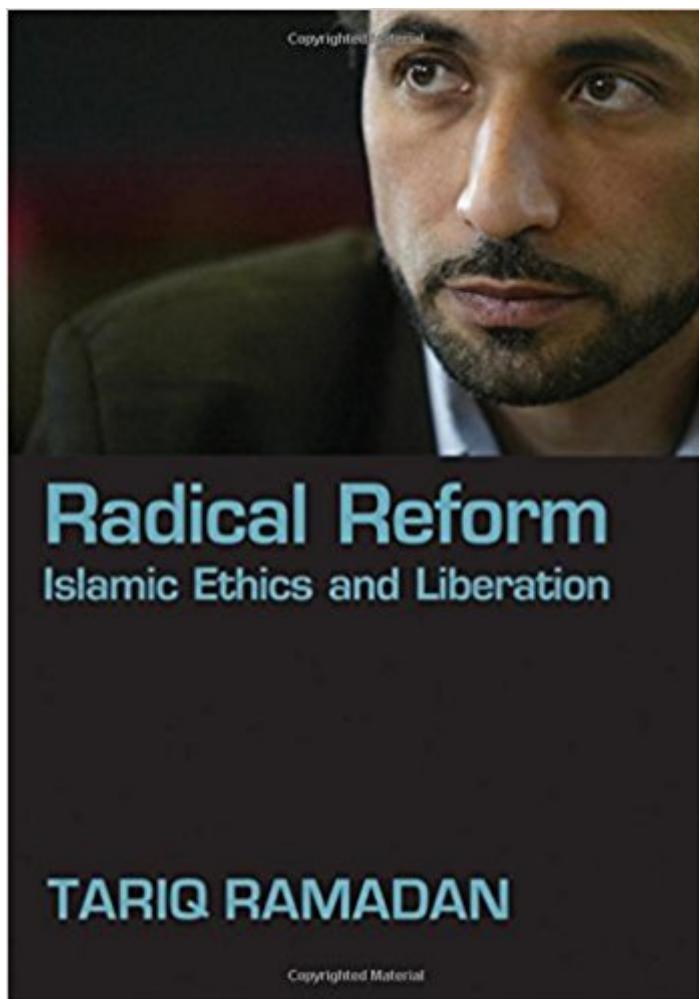


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Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics And Liberation



Synopsis

Tariq Ramadan has emerged as one of the foremost voices of reformist Islam in the West, notable for urging his fellow Muslims to participate fully in the civil life of the Western societies in which they live. In this new book, Ramadan addresses Muslim societies and communities everywhere with a bold call for radical reform. He challenges those who argue defensively that reform is a dangerous and foreign deviation, and a betrayal of the faith. Authentic reform, he says, has always been grounded in Islam's textual sources, spiritual objectives, and intellectual traditions. But the reformist movements that are based on renewed reading of textual sources while using traditional methodologies and categories have achieved only adaptive responses to the crisis facing a globalizing world. Such readings, Ramadan argues, have reached the limits of their usefulness. Ramadan calls for a radical reform that goes beyond adaptation to envision bold and creative solutions to transform the present and the future of our societies. This new approach interrogates the historically established sources, categories, higher objectives, tools, and methodologies of Islamic law and jurisprudence, and the authority this traditional geography of knowledge has granted to textual scholars. He proposes a new geography which redefines the sources and the spiritual and ethical objectives of the law creating room for the authority of scholars of the social and hard sciences. This will equip this transformative reform with the spiritual, ethical, social and scientific knowledge necessary to address contemporary challenges. Ramadan argues that radical reform demands not only the equal contributions of scholars of both the text and the context, but the critical engagement and creative imagination of the Muslim masses. This proposal for radical reform dramatically shifts the center of gravity of authority. It is bound to provoke controversy and spark debate among Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

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Ramadan, author and research fellow at Oxford University who in a cause célèbre has been repeatedly denied a visa to the U.S., presents a deft and timely call for radical change in the way Muslim scholars interpret and apply their central texts. Ramadan believes in an integrative approach—one that marries a reinvigorated theological, values-based approach with a spiritually realistic understanding of contemporary everyday problems. For instance, family planning through contraception is acceptable within Islam and also practical considering economic difficulties faced by Muslims in developing countries. Maintaining that Muslim scholars were once very open to creative approaches, he argues that they have now become more insular and less educated, especially in their views toward women. Ramadan's point—that the world continues to change and requires a second look at the Qur'an and other Islamic texts to keep pace—is well taken. His insistence that scientific findings are also part of God's revelation and should be included in Islamic analysis is consistent with the Qur'an. Ramadan's newest book is an exciting read because it envisions a way for Muslims to be modern without turning their backs on their religion. (Dec.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Radical Reform is sure to stimulate discussions and debate in many intellectual circles." --American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences

As a public intellectual, Tariq Ramadan is the equivalent of a rock star. He is handsome, charismatic, and glib. Be reassured, however, that this book overcomes all these obstacles. Since the French occupation of Egypt in 1798, Muslim intellectuals have been faced with two imperatives. One is to master enough of the lore of the West to throw off the hegemony of the colonizers, and to restore the Islamic ummah to the position of power in the world that it once held. The other is to maintain an authentically Islamic identity, i.e., to ensure that Muslims do not forfeit their souls in the process. The tension between these imperatives has produced what Ramadan calls "the crisis of the contemporary Muslim conscience". Resolving this tension has been problematic because the metaphysical assumptions that underlie western science and rationality are not transparently compatible with the metaphysical assumptions underlying Islam. The Islamic Modernists -- Afghani,

Abduh, Ahmed Khan, Tahtawi -- asserted the compatibility of Islam with science, and Islam and rationality, but did not demonstrate that compatibility in any closely reasoned fashion, or with respect to the kind of practical conflicts that arise in the life worlds of Muslims. Ramadan makes a very credible attempt at doing so, taking seriously both the moral and spiritual claims of Islam, and the need for reform of interpretations of holy law in the face of the challenges and opportunities presented by modernity. He is extremely knowledgeable about the content of the law, and about the history of the jurisprudence which has produced various interpretations of that law. One of his most valuable contributions comes in the later chapters where he recounts recent attempts by religious scholars, substantive experts, ethicists, and others to confront and resolve the separate requirements of holy law and modern expertise in areas such as medical ethics, the environment, and gender relations. No one could produce a seamless assimilation of Shariah and the modern book of nature, of revelation and science, because no such assimilation is possible. Revelation ultimately leads us into the heart of mystery, and science is an imperfect instrument in the hands of finite beings. Neither is capable of trumping the other, at least not for observers who reject both credulity and scientific literalism. In a later chapter, after making a convincing case for the co-equal importance of both formal revelation in the scriptures and general revelation in the form of science, Ramadan dispels contemporary genetic engineering as an abomination. Of course experiments with nuclear energy and arguments for a heliocentric universe were similarly dispelled by religious authorities in the past. Staking out the authority of religionists to delimit the activities of science in this way raises suspicions about the good work he had done in the hundreds of pages leading up to that point . . . at least in the minds of those who insist upon equal authority for science. But as a meditation on how a resolution of the claims of piety and reason can be achieved, this book takes us quite a ways.

Tariq Ramadan is so freaking intelligent. He's amazing and one of my favorite authors.

Tariq Ramadan presents many of the most crucial and controversial issues of our time and proposes a comprehensive approach to solving them. Muslims must make our decisions to influence policy not to respond to others actions. Very well written and cites Hadith that are wonderful, specifically those relating to the environment and animal rights.

Tariq Ramadan is probably one of the best male Muslim writers today. He has the unique ability to write from both sides of the story and explain using proof and fact from either an Islamic, scientific,

Christian, Jewish, Agnostic or Cultural view point without disrespecting anyone else's' views.

Anyone can point out problems...I was hoping this author could state some suggestions on what the needed reform would look like. Better for non-muslims perhaps than Muslims...Nothing in this book that we all don't already know and see transpire on a daily/weekly/monthly basis!

Tariq Ramadan has published an important new book as a culmination of all the work that he has been doing in a series of books including "In the footsteps of the Prophet", "Western Muslims and the future of Islam", "To be a European Muslim" and "Islam, the West and the challenges of modernity". Each of these books has been quite important but none more so than this one, which calls for a basic reform in the way in which Islamic law is formulated. "Radical Reform" calls for a new approach to the formulation of Islamic law based on the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the faith and by taking greater cognisance of the environment in which the law is to be implemented. He bases this call on his interpretation of the history of the original formulation of the body of Islamic laws (Fiqh) by each of the major Muslim scholars that developed their own schools of jurisprudence in the centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). Unlike a number of Western commentators who have called for fundamental reformation of Islam itself, Ramadan's approach is based on his impressive knowledge of the Holy Quran, the sayings of the Prophet (Hadith) and in depth history of scholarship in the complex science of Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh). But that of course does not mean that all Muslims will agree or embrace his proposals. The book is divided into 4 parts - a description of the reform process within Islam, an analysis of the classical approaches to the fundamentals of Islamic law and jurisprudence, his proposal for a new approach to the sources of law and finally, case studies of subjects as diverse as medical practice, culture and the arts, the role of women, ecology, economy, education and ethics. He of course, does not or could not attempt to provide answers to all of the myriad of questions and challenges faced by Muslim societies in addressing each of these issues in the modern world. But rather he has provided a tremendous effort to considering the fundamental ways in which the formulation of Islamic law has been historically carried out and could be developed much further in the future. As one example, he mentions the way in which Fiqh councils regularly consult medical experts before they issue fatwas on anything to do with medical practise such as organ donation, abortion etc. This is because the legal scholars that sit on such councils around the world realise that they do not have the technical medical knowledge to be able properly decide what is the best ruling on any such issues despite their in depth knowledge of Islamic ethics, principles and historical approaches to the

law. And yet Fiqh Councils do not regularly consult experts in other fields such ecology, economics and science when they make pronouncements on other areas that are beyond their field of specialisation. He calls for much greater consideration of the natural world and the environment in the determination of law and bases this call on the ways in which the great pioneers of the major Islamic schools of law (Madhab) developed their own approaches. As he states on p252, "The aim of this book is reform and coherence: reform in the name of coherence. One should know what one wants. If we aim to return to scriptural sources and extract higher objectives and ethical goals, we should then equip ourselves with the means to respect them across history and the diversity of societies. In a time of complex globalization where all the fields of human activity interact and have multidimensional consequences, there can be no question of having an isolated, partial or formalist approach. Twofold action is necessary in the light of the ethical goals to which we strive to remain faithful: on the one hand we must redefine - for our time - the way, the vision, in terms of the Islamic conception of life (ad-din) and of the common good and interest of humankind (al-maslahah), generally but also for the different areas of human activity (the sciences, education, economy). On the other hand, more detailed specialized studies should be undertaken to get up-to-the-minute knowledge about new developments and of their relations and actual interactions, and thus determine the most realistic and efficient way of acting on the world in the name of ethics and reform for the better." He hopes to start a global debate amongst Muslim scholars on the need for such a major reform and for a concerted effort to be started on this important undertaking. It is a bold vision which should lead to some very interesting discussions.

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