

Inside the Islamic Reformation

For the Muslim world's one billion people, this may be a time of change as profound as the Protestant Reformation was for Christendom. Our author reports on the currents and counter-currents that are pulling the faithful in new directions.

by Dale F. Eickelman

A l-Hamra, a provincial capital in the northern Oman interior, was remote even by that country's standards when I first visited it in June 1978. Paved roads and electricity had not yet reached the oasis; only a few homes had generator-powered televisions, and the nearest telephone was almost an hour's drive away. It was much the same when I returned to the oasis a year later to conduct field research. On this second visit, I spent a day in formal discussions with local officials and tribal leaders, and then, having missed my bus, was obliged to spend the night. The *shaykh* (or tribal leader) of the `Abriyin graciously invited me to stay in his guest house, along with several men who were visiting from outlying villages.

Well before dawn, these other guests—observant Muslims to a man—rose for morning prayer, and one of them called to me to ask whether I intended to perform my ablutions. "Not yet," I replied, and went back to sleep. Some minutes later, my host, Shaykh `Abdallah al-`Abri, gently prodded me with the muzzle of a machine pistol. In Oman, it is bad manners to touch a sleeping person with one's hands, and

Shaykh `Abdallah was a model of politeness.

"Are you sick?" he asked. "You're not getting ready to pray."

Half asleep, I mumbled, "I'm Christian; we pray differently."

Shaykh `Abdallah looked momentarily puzzled, then went away.

His puzzlement was no mystery. The *shaykh* had naturally assumed that a speaker of Arabic with a reasonable command of Omani etiquette would also rise to pray. In the late 1970s, he and the other inhabitants of the oasis had no pressing cause to think about any faith beyond Islam. Such terms as *Muslim* and *Christian* scarcely entered their minds. The British army officers and oil company officials who regularly passed through the region rarely stayed for long and, in any case, gave the inhabitants of al-Hamra little reason to think about other religions. The South Asian construction workers at the oasis were mostly Muslim, as were the schoolteachers from other Arab countries.

Yet al-Hamra (pop. 2,600), a compact town of mud-brick buildings on a rocky slope next to an underground irrigation canal (*falaj*), was changing—just how profoundly,



Campaign posters were not Iranians' only source of information about last May's presidential election, which a moderate cleric won in an unexpected landslide.

I did not then grasp. A decade earlier, the oasis's habitable limits, still defined by the watchtowers used to guard against rival tribes, had begun to push outward, as new diesel-driven pumps brought water from privately owned wells to agricultural lands far away from the head of the town's *falaj* (where, the water being purest, the tribal aristocracy lived). By the late '70s, schools and government offices were being built beyond the marketplace, once the far end of the town. By then, too, nearly all school-age children in al-Hamra attended elementary school, and government jobs and wage labor had supplanted date palms as the inhabitants' foremost source of income. The Beau

Geste profile of al-Hamra was fast being altered, and I had come—and would return again and again over the ensuing years—to study the transformation.

A few weeks after my overnight stay, I returned with my wife and daughter to spend a year in al-Hamra. Adjusting to a rhythm of life marked by the five daily prayers and, for men, the weekly congregational prayer, we soon learned to distinguish the voices of neighbors calling the faithful to mosques throughout the oasis. Islamic rituals were so thoroughly woven into the daily life of the community that everyone took them for granted.

That was why, on a return visit nearly a decade later, I was startled when a young relative of the tribal leader—a high school student when I'd first met him in 1979 but now a university-

trained police officer—announced to me that the people of al-Hamra, his own relatives included, were “ignorant” of Islam and therefore behaved “like animals”—that is, unthinkingly. “Sure,” he said, “they pray and fast, but they can't explain why. Muslims must explain their beliefs.”

His words came back to me last April, when I gave a public talk in Istanbul. I had been invited by an organization connected with the Refah (Welfare) Party, which has controlled Istanbul's municipal government since 1994. Although the Refah Party is routinely described as “fundamentalist,” the Turkish

panelists who commented on my talk were anything but provincials cut off from the outside world. They invoked such figures as the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and were at ease conversing in English and other foreign languages. These, and other religiously minded young Turks I met, were not the “fundamentalists” of stereotype. The reality they represented—like that of the young Omani policeman—was far more complex.

Years hence, if my suspicion is correct, we will look back on the latter half of the 20th century as a time of change as profound for the Muslim world as the Protestant Reformation was for Christendom. Like the printing press in the 16th century, the combination of mass education and mass communications is transforming this world, a broad geographical crescent stretching from North Africa through Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and across the Indonesian archipelago. In unprecedentedly large numbers, the faithful—whether in the vast cosmopolitan city of Istanbul or in Oman’s tiny, remote al-Hamra oasis—are examining and debating the fundamentals of Muslim belief and practice in ways that their less self-conscious predecessors would never have imagined. This highly deliberate examination of the faith is what constitutes the Islamic Reformation.

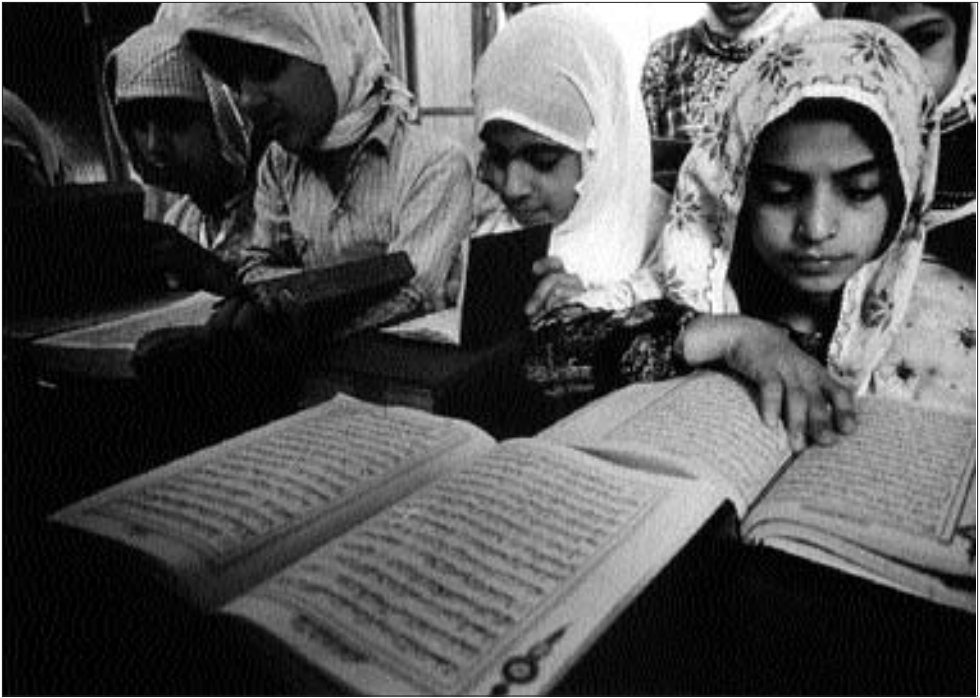
Unfortunately, buzzwords such as “fundamentalism,” and catchy phrases such as Samuel Huntington’s rhyming “West versus Rest” and Daniel Lerner’s alliterative “Mecca or mechanization,” are of little use in understanding this reformation. Indeed, they obscure or even distort the immense spiritual and intellectual ferment that is taking place today among the world’s nearly one billion Muslims, reducing it in most cases to a fanatical rejection of everything modern, liberal, or progressive. To be sure, such fanaticism plays a part in what is hap-

pening—dramatically and violently—but it is far from the whole story.

A far more important element of the Islamic Reformation is the unprecedented access that ordinary people now have to sources of information and knowledge about religion and other aspects of their society. Quite simply, in country after country, government officials, traditional religious scholars, and officially sanctioned preachers are finding it very hard to monopolize the tools of literate culture. For example, when I first ventured into the field as an anthropologist in 1968, I routinely saw people in southern Iraq gather around the literate members of the community, including shopkeepers, to have the newspapers read aloud to them; that same year, in rural Morocco, I was not infrequently asked to translate the formal Arabic of radio newscasts into colloquial Moroccan. By the mid-1970s, however, the need for such translation had dramatically decreased. And in 1992, during the Moroccan parliamentary election campaigns, I observed that young people, even in remote villages, were unafraid to ask the candidates probing questions, because they could now speak the public language of the educated. I also saw a *makhazni*, a low-ranking rural auxiliary policeman, politely but firmly refuse a questionable command from a local Ministry of the Interior official, pointing to written instructions he had received from provincial headquarters. Just a decade earlier, the policeman would have been illiterate and therefore unable to challenge such an order.

In al-Hamra, when I first came to know it, people received “news” from Shaykh `Abdallah. In 1980, when he started his generator to run the electric fans in his guest house, everyone in town knew that visitors with “news” had arrived and that soon the *shaykh* would be relaying it to them (or at least as much of it as he cared to tell). Two years later, when I was again in Oman, families in al-Hamra saw the same TV images of the massacres

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At a religious school in Djarbakir, in eastern Turkey, Muslim girls intently study the Qur'an.

in Beirut's Sabra and Shatila refugee camps that viewers in America did—thanks to a CBS news feed to Oman state television. Today, with paved roads, telephones, electricity, fax machines, and satellite television, al-Hamra is a changed place. “News” is no longer a monopoly of the few, and TV images bring people and places previously at the margin of awareness into the foreground. Among other consequences, this is helping to alter the way large numbers of Muslims, in al-Hamra and elsewhere, think about themselves, their religion, and their politics.

Mass education, the other major catalyst of change, has also gained momentum. In much of the Muslim world, it began to be introduced only after the 1950s, and in many countries considerably later. Morocco, for instance, committed itself to universal schooling after gaining independence from France in 1956. Though in 1957 only 13,000 secondary school diplomas were awarded, and university enrollments remained low, by 1965 there were more than 200,000 students in secondary schools, and some 20,000 in universities. By 1992, secondary school enrollment topped 1.5 million, and university students numbered 240,000. While

illiteracy rates in the general populace remain high—38 percent for men and 62 percent for women—there is now a critical mass of educated people who are able to read and think for themselves without relying on state and religious authorities.

The situation in Oman is more dramatic because the transformation has taken place in a much shorter period. In 1975–76, a mere 22 students graduated from secondary school. Little more than a decade later, in 1987–88, 13,500 did. In 1995, 60,000 graduated; more than 3,500 students were enrolled in postsecondary institutions, including the national university, which had opened in 1986.

Elsewhere the story is much the same, though the starting dates and levels of achievement differ. In Turkey, Indonesia, and Malaysia, mass education has reached every city, town, and village. In Turkey, for instance, adult illiteracy rates as of 1990 were 10 percent for males and 30 percent for females, down from 65 percent and 85 percent, respectively, four decades earlier. Secondary schools are now ubiquitous, and both private and public universities have proliferated. In Indonesia, university

enrollment, only 50,000 in 1960, reached 1.9 million in 1990. Iran also has seen a significant expansion in educational opportunities at all levels. In Egypt (as, for that matter, in Morocco), population growth has outpaced educational expansion; even so, the number of people able to converse intelligently with religious and political authorities, and not just listen to them, has increased dramatically.

So has the market for books, including books about religion and society. One text that has figured centrally in the Islamic Reformation is the ground-breaking *The Book and the Qur'an: A Contemporary Interpretation* (1990), written by Muhammad Shahrur, a Syrian civil engineer. To date, it has sold tens of thousands of copies. Even though circulation of the 800-page book has been banned or discouraged in many Arab countries, photocopy machines and pirate editions (printed in Egypt, among other places) have enabled it to travel across borders.

Shahrur, who was educated in Damascus, Moscow, and Dublin, draws an analogy between the Copernican revolution and Qur'anic interpretation, which for too long, he says, has been shackled by the conventions of medieval jurists: "People believed for a long time that the sun revolved around the moon, but they were unable to explain some phenomena derived from this assumption until one person, human like themselves, said, 'The opposite is true: The earth revolves around the sun.' . . . After a quarter of a century of study and reflection, it dawned on me that we Muslims are shackled by prejudices, some of which are completely opposite the correct perspective."

On issues ranging from the role of women in society to the need for a "creative interaction" with non-Muslim philosophies, Shahrur argues that Muslims should reinterpret sacred texts and apply them to contemporary social and moral issues. Islamic inheritance law, for instance, which provides women a smaller share of any legacy than men, may have been an advance for women in an earlier era, but, he contends, it is discriminatory in modern society. "If Islam is sound for all

times and places," Shahrur says, Muslims must not neglect historical developments and the interaction of different generations. Muslims must act as if "the Prophet just . . . informed us of this Book."

Shahrur's book 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. It took years before Luther's ideas took hold, but eventually even steadfast opponents had to take them into account and modify their ways of thinking and acting. The same may happen with Shahrur's ideas, though even more rapidly. Already, his views have been assailed in 14 books (some longer than his own) and countless magazine articles and sermons.

Shahrur is not alone in attacking conventional religious wisdom and the intolerant certitudes of religious radicals, or in calling for an ongoing interpretation of the application of sacred texts to social and political life. Another Syrian thinker, the secularist Sadiq Jalal al-'Azam, for instance, does the same. In May 1997, a debate between al-'Azam and Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a conservative religious intellectual, was broadcast on al-Jazira Satellite TV (Qatar), and for the first time in the memory of many viewers, the religious conservative came across as the weaker, more defensive voice. That program is unlikely to be rebroadcast on state-controlled television in most Arab nations, where programming on religious and political themes is generally cautious. Nevertheless, satellite technology and videotape render traditional censorship ineffective. Tapes of the debate circulate from hand to hand in Morocco, Oman, Syria, Egypt, and elsewhere.

Other voices also advocate reform. Turkey's Ali Bulaç, a university-based theologian, has captured the imagination of the educated young with his call for authenticity and a reinterpretation of the first years of the Prophet's rule, applying Muhammad's precepts and practices to current controversies about pluralism and civil society. Fethullah Güllen, Turkey's answer to media-savvy American evangelist Billy Graham, appeals to a mass audience. In televised chat shows, interviews, and

occasional sermons, Güllen speaks about Islam and science, democracy, modernity, religious and ideological tolerance, the importance of education, and current events. Because he regards Turkish nationalism as compatible with Islam, Güllen is said to have the ear of Turkey's senior military officers.

For a pan-Arab audience, Morocco's Sa'id Binsa'id argues that a proper understanding of Islam enjoins dialogue, a willingness to understand the opinions of others, adaptation, and a disposition toward good relations within a framework of civility. Indonesian and Malaysian moderates make very similar arguments. So does Iran's Abdolkarim Soroush, who, to the annoyance of more conservative clerics and the government, has captured the religious imagination of Persian readers. His work, in translation, also reaches Turks and others in the Muslim world. In Pakistan, a recent book making an argument similar to Shahrur's, *Qur'anic and Non-Qur'anic Islam* (1997), by Nazir Ahmad, a retired military officer, quickly went into a second printing.

The books of the Islamic Reformation are not all aimed at highbrows. Mass schooling has created a wide audience of people who read but are not literary sophisticates, and there has been an explosive growth in what a French colleague of mine, Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, calls generic "Islamic books"—inexpensive, attractively printed texts intended for such readers. Many address practical questions of how to live as a Muslim in the modern world and the perils of neglecting Islamic obligations, and not all appeal to reason and moderation. Many of these books have bold, eye-catching covers and sensational titles such as *The Terrors of the Grave, or What Follows Death* (1987), while other, more subdued works offer advice to young women on how to live as Muslims today. Often based on the sermons of popular preachers, Islamic books are written in a breezy, colloquial style rather than in the cadences of traditional literary Arabic, and they are sold on sidewalks and outside mosques rather than in bookstores. While Egyptian Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz is considered suc-

cessful if he sells 5,000 copies of one of his novels in a year in his own country, Islamic books often have sales in six figures.

Increasingly in the Muslim world, religious beliefs are self-consciously held, explicitly expressed, and systematized. It is no longer sufficient simply to "be" Muslim and to follow Muslim practices. One must reflect upon Islam and defend one's views. In Oman, one of the few places where all three Muslim traditions—Sunni, Shi'a, and Ibadi—converge, the debates can be spirited indeed, as I learned from a young Omani, who recalled the late-night dormitory arguments he and other students had in secondary school.

Roughly 90 percent of the world's Muslims are Sunni or "orthodox" Muslim. Nine percent—mostly in Iran, but with significant minorities in southern Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and coastal Oman—are Shi'a, or "sectarian," and believe that legitimate religious leadership of the worldwide Muslim community should remain in the hands of descendants of the Prophet's grandson, 'Ali. The Ibadiyya, not as well



The cover of *The Terrors of the Grave, or What Follows Death* (1987) exemplifies the new look in popular religious literature.

known, believe that anyone can become head of the Muslim community, provided such a person possesses the necessary piety and moral qualities. The Ibadiyya are few in number and clustered mostly in northern Oman (where they constitute nearly half the country's population), East Africa, southern Algeria, and Libya.

When I visited al-Hamra in 1979, many Muslims could practice their faith without reducing it to formal principles or comparing it with "other" Muslim or non-Muslim doctrines. Now, however, most of the younger inhabitants of the oasis are aware of what it means to be an Ibadi Muslim and how Ibadi practices and doctrines—on such questions as whether or not believers see God on Judgment Day—differ from Sunni and Shī'i ones. In the early 1980s, when Ibadi university students went to study abroad in places such as Tucson, Arizona, they were shocked to find other Muslim students describing them as kaffirs, or unbelievers, and asked Oman's mufti, an Ibadi religious leader, how to respond. One result was videocassettes and pamphlets explaining Ibadi doctrine and faith and arguing that Ibadi principles agree in most respects with Sunni ones.

The rise of literacy and the spread of communications—with tapes of popular preachers being played incessantly in taxis and other settings, and banned literature being copied almost everywhere—have prompted more Muslims to interpret Islam's texts, classical or modern, and apply them to modern life. They offer advice in popular "how to" pamphlets: how to lead the life of a Muslim woman in a modern city, how to raise children the Islamic way, how to follow Islamic banking and business practices. In other pamphlets and cassettes, often clandestinely circulated, Muslims measure particular regimes by "Islamic" standards. Sometimes, as on the Arabian Peninsula, these standards are progressive, insisting upon governmental integrity and upholding human rights. Often they are reactionary, restricting women's public roles and

advocating religious censorship and control of schools.

In Muslim-majority countries, many regimes court popularity by emphasizing their Islamic credentials and spelling out, in state-approved schoolbooks, standards that governments must meet. In Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other countries, dissidents have succeeded at times in embarrassing the governments by pointing out performances that fall short of such proclaimed standards. Some regimes try by various means to restrict what is said in public. In Oman, for instance, a special government department churns out model sermons for the "guidance" of approved mosque preachers. In Morocco's large cities, mosques are kept locked, except during hours of formal prayer, to prevent their use by unauthorized "study groups." In most countries, the regime carefully regulates broadcast and print media. But through alternative media, including cassettes and photocopies, the voices of dissent and difference continue to be heard.

The particular situation in each country and region varies widely, but everywhere there is a collapse of earlier, hierarchical notions of religious authority based on a claimed mastery of fixed bodies of religious texts and recognition by a prior generation of scholars. In Central Asia in the early 1990s, a Tajik garage mechanic became the leader of the most popular Islamic movement in the region. Even where there are state-appointed religious authorities—as in Oman, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Malaysia, and some of the Central Asian republics—there no longer is any guarantee that their word will be heeded, or even that they themselves will follow the lead of the regime.

No Muslims—whether their outlook be deemed "fundamentalist," "traditionalist," or "modernist"—have been unaffected by the sweeping changes of recent decades. Islam has been democratized. Like Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms in 1521, more and more Muslims today claim attachment to God's unmediated word, as interpreted only by their conscience.

But that does not mean that Muslim tradition is simply being discarded. Rather, it



A wall mural in Lebanon expresses the view of the Shi'i movement Harakat Amal that the tree of martyrs is nourished by the blood-soaked "land of the south"—Israeli-occupied south Lebanon.

is being examined and discussed. As the Syrian reformer Muhammad Shahrur well knows, the forces supporting conventional interpretations of God's word remain strong. And many debates are in progress.

This was evident last summer in Damascus in what could be called the "duel of the wedding speeches" (subsequently available on videotape, of course). First, at the wedding of Muhammad Shahrur's daughter, some 600 guests—including many state and Ba'th party officials and one non-Syrian (me)—heard Jawdat Sa'id explain Islamic beliefs and their relation to current events. Then, two days later, at another Damascus wedding, Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, a popular Syrian television preacher who strongly opposes Shahrur's views, spoke in response. After referring to the talk given at the recent wedding of the daughter of "a certain well-known engineer," he declared: "Just as one goes to a medical doctor for illness and an architect to build a house, for Islam one should go only to specialists formally trained in the religious sciences."

The Islamic Reformation is a protean phenomenon, its ultimate outcome far from clear. Shahrur maintains that democ-

racy is a fundamental tenet of Islam, and his proposition seems to have growing appeal. But most Arab regimes remain authoritarian. In Algeria, where Islamist radicals employ terrorism against a brutally repressive military regime, and in certain other Muslim countries, the new Islamic self-consciousness and fervor may result in an even more severe authoritarianism, at least in the short run. Elsewhere—in Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other Arabian Peninsula states, Morocco, and Egypt—conservative or relatively liberal regimes have sought to accommodate (or at least to appear to accommodate) Islamist views. In still other countries, such as Jordan, regimes have tried to balance Islamist concerns with secular politics, and to incorporate religious politics into a parliamentary system.

Over the long term, rising literacy and education, together with the proliferation of new media, may well foster the growth of pluralism, tolerance, and civility. People learn from experience, at least sometimes. In the early 1980s, for example, I heard many people in the Gulf speak with admiration of the Islamic revolution in Iran. By the middle of that decade, the same people—committed Muslim activists who



Islamic tradition and modern technology come together in a television studio in Istanbul in 1996.

wanted to see Islamic values permeate political and social life—were decidedly cool to the revolution. In Iran today, there is much frustration with the dominant conservative and extremist mullahs. The clash of views was evident at the Islamic summit meeting in Tehran last December. Although Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, excoriated the United States and the West, Iranian President Muhammad Khatemi, elected in an unexpected landslide last May, spoke of Islam's "spirit of justice and tolerance," and urged learning from "the positive accomplishments of the Western civil society."

Meanwhile, both the Islamist extremism in Algeria and its state-sponsored counterpart there have dampened the appeal to Moroccans of a more "Islamic" government, and Taliban rule in Afghanistan serves as a negative example to all neighboring countries. In Jordan and Lebanon, where Islamists have been drawn into the electoral process, there has been a gradual shift away from radicalism, as Islamist parties seek to appeal to wider constituencies.

In Turkey, people's views have been evolving rapidly. In 1992, 1993, and 1994, rural and urban Turks were asked whether Turkey was "Muslim," "European," or "both." Some 20 percent consistently said "European." But the proportion that

answered "Muslim" shrank from 37 percent in 1992 to 25 percent in 1994, while the segment that responded "both" correspondingly grew—from 25 percent to 36. Although figures for later years are not available, it is likely that this trend toward embracing both European and Muslim identities has continued. Islamic activists outside the Refah Party are seeking to encourage the spread of Islamic values, including respect for the rights of non-Muslims and education for both women and men at all levels of Turkish society. Even the "fundamentalist" Refah Party is credited with drawing women into grassroots politics, though it resists giving them leadership roles.

The Muslim world has its share of militant fanatics, and they have been responsible for a great deal of death and destruction. Only last November, for instance, Islamic militants who have been seeking to destabilize the Egyptian government massacred 58 foreign tourists at a temple in Luxor. Just days before that, newspaper front pages told of the convictions of Muslim extremists in connection with the 1993 bombing of New York's World Trade Center, carried out to punish the United States for its support of Israel. But the Muslim world cer-

tainly has no monopoly on fanaticism or terrorism, as the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City attests.

It is dangerously misleading to view developments in the Muslim world in terms of a clash between Islamic “fundamentalists” and Western civilization. There is a “fundamentalist” crisis, Malaysia’s Muhammad Mahathir said recently, but it is not the one perceived by religious and political authorities in many Muslim-majority countries and by some Western commentators. The real crisis, he said—correctly, in my view—lies in the need to encourage more Muslims to shun the extremism of the few and to get back to the true fundamentals of their faith—including a commitment to tolerance and civility. Indeed, the Qur’an itself (Sura 5, Verse 48) appears to give a final answer concerning the role of the Muslim community in a multicomunity world: “To each among you, we have prescribed a law and a way for acting. If God had so willed, he might have made you a single community, but [he has not done so] that he may test you in what he has given you; so compete in goodness.”

Civility and tolerance will not prevail without struggle. The ideals of civil society, democracy, and open debate over basic values—ideals that are explicit in the works of Syria’s Muhammad Shahrur, Turkey’s Fethullah Güllen, and Iran’s Abdokarim Soroush—are up against strong vested interests. These ideals threaten the sinecures of many preachers, specialists in religious law, educators, and clerics. Not surprisingly, some efforts at reform have been met with threats of violence.

But what I call the Islamic Reformation is nevertheless in progress. Many Muslims, of course, would resist the analogy with the Protestant Reformation. Shortly before writing this essay, I visited Turkey’s Fethullah Güllen. At the end of a spirited discussion on how the shift from face-to-face meetings to television had influenced his message, I

told him of the title I had in mind for my essay: “Inside the Islamic Reformation.” With polite amusement, he replied, “It’s your title, not mine.” Güllen explained that he saw his work—which includes the idea that there is no contradiction between an Islamic worldview and a scientific one—as an effort to persuade people to understand and live by the basic teachings of Islam. I pointed out that Martin Luther had said something very similar. Luther saw his work as returning to the fundamentals of belief, not creating anything new. Only later did others see his ideas and actions as instigating the “Reformation.”

I must concede, however, that the analogy with the Protestant Reformation is imperfect. In the Muslim world today, there is no one central figure or hierarchy of authority against whom the people are rebelling. There are instead many authorities, and, despite numerous claims to the contrary, no movement or individual speaks for all Muslims. Many thinkers who write about Islam freely admit this. Muhammad Shahrur, for instance, acknowledges that his upbringing as an Arab nationalist has deeply influenced his thinking about Islam. Indonesia’s moderate Nurcholish Madjid likewise recognizes that his writings on the future of Islamic civil society appeal mostly to Indonesians. Shī’i thinkers such as the Iraqi *shaykh* al-Rikabi, now living in Damascus, admit that their primary audience is the Shī’a.

The recognition by these and other leading reformers in the Muslim world today that different religious beliefs and practices exist, and that they should be tolerated and debated, is one reason to be hopeful about the eventual outcome of the Islamic Reformation. Perhaps even Shahrur’s notion that democracy is a fundamental tenet of Islam will take root and flower. In any case, whatever the outcome, the Islamic Reformation is under way.