**The Overdue Islamic Reformation**

[Aliya Anjum](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/aliya-anjum/)

June 1, 2023

The Western media often speaks of the need for an Islamic reformation, similar to Jewish and Christian reformation, which modernised these two Abrahamic religions. The reform of Judaism and Christianity is focused on political correctness. Some notable reforms are: female rabbis and pastors; the provision of divorce and same-sex marriages.

Jewish and Christian reformation is mainly due to the Torah (Old Testament) and the Injeel (Evangelion or the New Testament) not being preserved. Both collectively form the Bible. This fact is clearly stated in the Quran and corroborated by archaeology and history. Modern Judaism owes a huge debt to the world of Islam. Ancient Persia and the Islamic world of the middle ages were the only two empires in Jewish history where Jews thrived. All other civilizations and peoples persecuted them.

A native of Islamic Qurtaba or Cordoba, Spain, Moosa bin Mamoon bin Ubaidallah al-Qurtabi (Latinized to Moses Maimonides) was the chief physician of Salahuddin Ayyubi in Egypt. He was also the chief rabbi of the Jews. His 14-volume Mishneh Torah (circa 1180 AD) still carries authority as a codification of Jewish sharia (civil and religious law). The Talmud is Jewish Fiqh, which in turn is divided into two parts. The Mishnah Torah explains how to apply the commandments set out in the Torah. The Gemara discusses the Mishnah in further detail and helps to clarify teachings in the Torah that may need further explanation.

Islamic Sharia is derived from the Quran, whereas Jewish Sharia is based entirely on rabbinical rulings. This illustrates why the Quran does not consider Judaism to be a monotheistic religion, even though Judaism distinguishes itself from Christianity based on the claim of monotheism.

Just like the Jews and the Christians, clergy in Islam have introduced their own criteria and rulings.

“They have taken their rabbis and their monks-as well as the Christ, son of Mary-for their lords beside God, although they had been bidden to worship none but the One God, save whom there is no deity: the One who is utterly remote, in His limitless glory, from anything to which they may ascribe a share in His divinity.” (Quran 9:31) This fact of Rabbis taking the place of God is also corroborated by the late public intellectual Israel Shahak – who identified as a secular non-Jewish Jew.

The Christian Bible is updated and revised every year and there are several versions of the Bible. The two most popular ones are the King James Bible and the RSV. The Quran mentions Biblical revisions. “Woe, then, unto those who write down, with their own hands, [something which they claim to be] divine writ, and then say. “This is from God,” in order to acquire a trifling gain thereby; woe, then, unto them for what their hands have written, and woe unto them for all that they may have gained.” (Quran 2:79).

Christianity today acknowledges that the Bible is the inspired word of God. The Red Letter Bible marks in red what is considered to be the Divinely revealed verses of the Bible. During the dark ages and the middle ages, the reigning pope was tyrannical and wielded absolute power over Christian European monarchs. The Bible was what the Pope and the Vatican said it was. Common people were forbidden from reading the Bible. This led to the German Jan Huss reading the Bible and protesting that everyone does the same. He was executed for challenging the authority of the Vatican, but he became the father of the breakaway sect Protestantism. In time, the Protestants founded the United States on the principles of the Protestant work ethic and the rest is history.

Today, both Judaism and Christianity are reformed for the most part, except for eastern or Syrian Christians who pray and fast like Muslims. The Quran is the last testament after the old testament and the new testament. It is the verbatim word of God, which is to be perfectly preserved by Allah Himself till the end of time. Given this, Islam should be the religion with the perfect guidance.

However, our clergy has taken us on the same path as the Jewish and Christian clergy. What our muftis preach and implement are their rulings. Allah commands us in the Quran to obey God and His Messenger. This means the Quran and hadith.

Hadith, in general, is made up of three basic components: Isnad or the chain of narrators through, which the Hadith has spread; Taraf or the beginning of the text, which refers to the actions or characteristics of the Holy Prophet; and Matan or the actual speech of the Prophet. Using these criteria, there are five basic categorisations of Hadith: reference to a particular authority; the links of isnad (Sequence of Reporters); the number of reporters; nature of matn and isnad; and the authenticity of correspondents. The rigorous science of the chain of narration applied to Hadith has led to: the Sihah Sittah or the Sahih Hadith of Bukhari, Muslim, Abi Dawud, Nisai, Maajah and Tirmidhi; the Hassan Hadith or lowest level of sahih Hadith; Daeef Hadith or Weak Hadith, with no hujja or evidence; and Mawdu or fabricated Hadith.

Based on this, the Quran and sahih Hadith should logically form Shariah. However, just like the Jews and the Christians, our clergy introduced their own criteria and rulings.Four schools of thought emerged in Sunni Islam. They all agree on the Quran as the primary source of guidance. The very first difference is in the matter of Hadith. The four schools of thought unanimously agree on the Mutawatir Hadith (ones with many narrators) being second after the Quran. The schools of thought get divided from this point. The third source of Divine guidance differs from them. Some consider it to be Ahad Hadith with a single narration, others consider Qiyas or analogy, others consider Aadat or what was followed by all people of Medina as more sound than sahih Hadith, and finally, some schools of thought go by Urf or custom.

These differences are still acceptable, although they should not lead to the formation of sects as they have. Rather they should allow multiple possibilities as being permissible.

The objectionable difference between the schools of thought is the next one, which relates to Sahih versus weak Hadith. This can be seen in fatwas or Islamic rulings or the preachings of our muftis and maulvis online or in real life. Often, they quote weak Hadith to support their hypothesis. This practice leads to all kinds of innovations, erroneous ways and divergence from Islam.

The third difference is about the understanding of the Quran and Hadith. Herein, lies the greatest room for error. This practice is enabled by quoting and following religious men from the past. Sometimes, the names are known and sometimes, they are obscure, but the words of these deceased men take precedence over the Quran and hadith. The Pakistani clergy never quotes intellectual giants such as Zamakhshari or Tabari or Ar Razi. They quote obscure names in support of their innovations or bidaat. This is what has led to the implementation of a bigoted, rigid, misogynistic, ritualistic, archaic, unscrupulous and politically incorrect version of Islam.

Cambridge University’s Professor Akbar Ahmed’s research has classified three variations among practising Muslims: Conservatives, Progressives and Mystics.

We can see the progressives in the top echelons of our military, bureaucracy, judiciary, media, education and business. This is often the well-educated, who believe in Allah but keep the clergy at arm’s length to avoid the pitfalls in their teachings. Unfortunately, such people are a small minority in Pakistan.

The masses are the Conservatives. This includes but is not limited to the mullah brigade. The middle class is usually found in this classification. They do not engage with Islam intellectually, and their worldview is narrow and intolerant. These are the people who are most inclined towards ritual. They are the ones inclined towards reciting Surah Inshiqaq, Surah Takwir and Surah Infitar to see heaven and hell in their dream, as per a certain sahih Hadith. They have little interest in scientific inquiry or contributing towards socio-economic development.

The TTP falls into the extremist category of conservatives who wish to exterminate all those who do not think like them.

Finally, the Mystics are found across all social classes. They are drawn to it mainly due to the rigidness and bigotry of our conservative clergy. The practice of mysticism often borders on shirk or associating partners with Allah. Sometimes Progressives are also Mystics, such as Professor Akbar Ahmed himself.

Many Islamic political parties are clamouring for power. However, the state cannot be run by conservatives. They have turned religion into our shackles.

*The writer is an independent researcher, author and columnist. She can be reached at aliya1924@gmail.com*