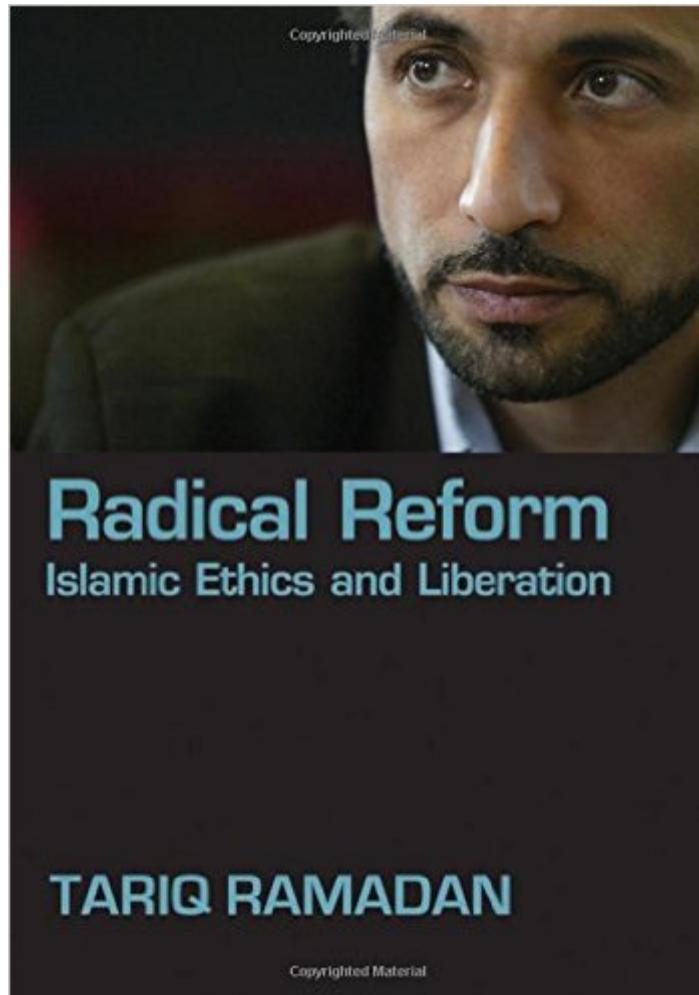


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Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics And Liberation



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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.

Ramadan, like many other muslim intellectuals in the West, tend to feel the gap between the ideals of Islam and its realities, and be more exposed to the pressures calling for reform... The dilemma, most of these intellectuals seem to face, is how to balance the need of maintaining the idealism of the faith and its coherence against the immediate pressures calling for pragmatic/realistic approaches for pressing developmental problems. It is a delicate balance to maintain. Most of these intellectuals tend to be viewed as missing that point of equilibrium or unable to find it in the first place. These intellectuals, Ramadan included, tend to give up on Islam as itself a reforming faith aspiring for its own space and model for humanity progress and prosperity, and rather tend to strive to find ways to align the faith itself with the givings. Muslim people tend to feel that humanity deserve a better fate than be just cramped into a narrow view of life and development. Ramadan's approach

tend then to channel its critique to the current or traditional ways of viewing or interpreting within Islam. It would have been more constructive of Ramadan to try to expose the humane values and creative ways Islam can offer, which humanity can employ to address and cure many of its chronic problems. It is true that we may not totally agree on how to diagnose our modern problems, and consequently may disagree on how to approach them, but the problem is when the mind set is already geared to view reality in a certain way, and then try to push for a solution in a given direction. This is probably where the point of concern is, rather than the inability to move in a given direction.

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.

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