

WHY AMERICANIZED MUSLIM REFORMERS ARE FAILING

How Islam prohibits exactly what reformers are trying to do.

November 12, 2015 Dr. Stephen M. Kirby



For many years we in the United States have regularly heard from a small number of Muslim American “reformers” who aspire to change Islam in ways that will make it more “modern” and compatible with American values such as freedom of speech and religion, and the equality of all people. According to these reformers, such change would rescue Islam from the “perverted” and “radical” interpretations of the *ihadists*, and return it to the way the reformers claim Muhammad originally taught it: as a religion that commanded peace and tolerance toward all, and promoted the rights of women.

These aspiring reformers seem to be generally Muslim males who were either born in the United States, or have spent a significant portion of their life in the United States. They have used the freedoms in the United States to explore Islam and to strike out on their own in providing an interpretation of that religion that conforms largely to American values. These personal interpretations commonly focus on Islam as a religion of peace that has been perverted by a few radical *ihadists*, and the aspiring reformers present Islam as such to non-Muslim audiences. I use the term “Americanized Muslim reformer” as a general reference to these aspiring Muslim reformers.

But what most non-Muslims don’t realize is that Islam prohibits exactly what these Americanized Muslim reformers are trying to do. Let’s look in the Koran, the holy book

of Islam considered by Muslims to consist of the timeless, perfect, unchangeable words of their god Allah.

Islam was Perfected during the Time of Muhammad

Allah states in 5:3 of the Koran that the religion of Islam was perfected and finalized during the time of Muhammad:

This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion[.]

In 15:9 Allah states that the Koran cannot be changed. According to Muslim scholars, 2:85 of the Koran prohibits picking and choosing among its verses (e.g., *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan*, Vol. 1, p. 88).

And to reiterate this, the prophet Muhammad said the penalty for denying a verse of the Koran was death:

It was narrated from Ibn 'Abbas that the Messenger of Allah said: "Whoever denies a Verse of the Qur'an, it is permissible to strike his neck (i.e. execute him)[.]"

Sunan Ibn Majah, No. 2539

And Muhammad talked about being in Paradise to greet the Muslims who died after him, and seeing some of those Muslims taken away because of changes they had made to Islam after he died:

"There will come to me some people whom I know and they know me, and then a barrier will be set up between me and them." Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri added that the Prophet further said, "I will say those people are from me (i.e. they are my followers). It will be said, 'You do not know what new changes and new things (heresies) they did after you.' Then I will say, 'Far removed (from mercy), far removed (from mercy), those who changed, did new things in (the religion) after me!'"

Sahih Al-Bukhari, Nos. 7050-7051

And once an issue has been decided in the Koran and/or in the teachings of Muhammad, it is blasphemy for a Muslim to disagree with that decision. This is plainly stated in the Koran, e.g:

It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger, have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And

whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed into a plain error. (33:36)

Their god and their prophet say that Islam cannot be changed after the time of Muhammad, so what are the Americanized Muslim reformers to do? Below are some of the major approaches I have found taken among these reformers. These approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and the use of more than one of these approaches, or variations thereof, is not uncommon.

The Koran Only

There are Muslims known as "Koranists." They believe that the only source of Islamic Doctrine is what is found in the Koran. The Koranists reject the *Sunnah* (the teachings and example of Muhammad).

But the Koran itself specifically rejects the premise of the Koranists. These are some of the Koran verses that stress the importance of the *Sunnah* of Muhammad:

- *He who obeys the Messenger (Muhammad), has indeed obeyed Allah[.] (4:80)*
- *And whoever contradicts and opposes the Messenger (Muhammad) after the right path has been shown clearly to him, and follows other than the believers' way, We shall keep him in the path he has chosen, and burn him in Hell - what an evil destination! (4:115)*
- *Indeed in the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad) you have a good example to follow for him who hopes for (the Meeting with) Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much. (33:21)*
- *And whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad) gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it). And fear Allah; verily, Allah is Severe in punishment. (59:7)*

In the Koran Allah specifically commands Muslims to obey and follow the teachings and example of Muhammad. So where does a Muslim find such teachings and example, including in matters such as how to pray, actions to be taken during the Hajj, or ablution? They are not in the Koran, they are in the *Sunnah*.

The Koranists not only ignore the words of Allah, but they ignore the words of their prophet Muhammad:

Yahya related to me from Malik that he heard that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "I have left two things with you. As long as you hold fast to them, you will not go astray. They are the Book of Allah and the sunna [sic] of His Prophet.

Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas, 46.3

So in defiance of the commands and teachings of their god and prophet, the Koranist Muslims ignore the *Sunnah*.

Personal Interpretations of Salad Bar Islam

This approach is probably the one most used among the aspiring Americanized Muslim reformers and was the genesis for my first article about Fantasy Islam (<http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/259380/lure-fantasy-islam-dr-stephen-m-kirby>). With this approach, changing Islamic Doctrine runs the gamut from a few tweaks here and there, to Islam being simply whatever the individual Muslim wants it to be. The common denominator is that the changes are based on the personal opinion of the aspiring reformer.

With this approach, *hadith* collections that have been considered authoritative since the 9th Century are questioned, with certain *hadiths* among them actually being deemed false, solely on the basis of the individual Muslim's opinion.

Verses of the Koran that are specific can be deemed allegorical, the eternal words of Allah can be judged applicable only to a specific time period, and verses of the Koran can be completely dismissed, solely on the basis of the individual Muslim's opinion.

With this approach, the Doctrine of Abrogation, based on 2:106 of the Koran, is frequently dismissed. This Doctrine is fundamental to understanding Islam, and it states that if there is a conflict between the messages of two "revelations" in the Koran, then the most recent "revelation" is the one to be followed. Consequently, a "revelation" made in Medina would supersede a similar, earlier "revelation" made in Mecca if there was a conflict between the messages of the two. The significance is that the "revelations" in Mecca tended to be more peaceful and accommodating toward non-Muslims than the verses later "revealed" in Medina. The verses from Medina are generally more belligerent and intolerant, and more inclined to make sharp differentiations between Muslims and non-Muslims. By ignoring the Doctrine of Abrogation, the aspiring Muslim reformer can concentrate on the Meccan verses, which, however, while more appealing to non-Muslim ears, simply don't carry the weight of Islamic Doctrine anymore.

This approach also dismisses centuries of accepted Muslim scholarship in the form of authoritative Koran commentaries (*tafsirs*), such as the *Tafsir Al-Qurtubi*, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, and *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*. This approach also dismisses such 20th Century *tafsirs* as *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan* and *Tafsir As-Sa'di*. Dismissing authoritative *tafsirs* allows the aspiring reformer to then rely on new, personal interpretations of the meaning of verses in the Koran, even though such interpretations might directly conflict with the writings in authoritative *tafsirs* over the centuries. These new interpretations are based solely on the individual Muslim's opinion.

These aspiring reformers apparently ignore the fact that Muhammad had his own opinions about Muslims following this approach:

Muhammad bin Jarir reported that Ibn 'Abbas said that the Prophet said, 'Whoever explains the Qur'an with his opinion or with what he has no knowledge of, then let him assume his seat in the Fire.'

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, pp. 32-33

Muhammad said: The most truthful speech is Allah's Speech, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. The worst matters are the newly invented (in religion), every newly invented matter is an innovation, and every innovation is a heresy, and every heresy is in the Fire.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 2, p. 588

Inaccurate Historical Information

It is not unusual to find Americanized Muslim reformers presenting historical information that is simply inaccurate. Here are three common examples:

The peaceful conquest of Mecca: You will hear that when Muhammad led an army of 10,000 Muslim warriors against Mecca in 630 AD, the Meccans surrendered peacefully and there was no bloodshed. You might even hear that Muhammad specifically prohibited the killing of any individuals. In reality, there was some resistance by the Meccans that resulted in the battle deaths of 2-3 Muslims and 12-13 Meccans. And before entering Mecca, Muhammad had ordered the killing of nine specific individuals, including four women. Some of these individuals were subsequently captured and killed, while others saved themselves by converting to Islam before they could be killed. As Muhammad explained it:

If anyone should say, The apostle killed men in Mecca, say God permitted His apostle to do so but He does not permit you.

The Life of Muhammad, p. 555

The Verse of the Sword is a pejorative term created by non-Muslims: You might hear Muslims claim that non-Muslims created the term "Verse of the Sword" to disparage 9:5 of the Koran. Here is the first part of that verse:

Then when the Sacred Months have passed, then kill the Mushrikun [non-Muslims] wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every ambush[.]

In reality, Muslim scholars have referred to this verse as the “Verse of the Sword” for centuries (e.g. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 4, pp. 375 and 377).

The Verse of the Sword was revealed before it was revealed: You might hear Muslims claim that 9:5 was among the verses “revealed” during the early period of Islam, when aggressive threats by militarily strong non-Muslims were being made against the young, weak Muslim community. You might also hear the claim that this verse was applicable only to a particular time period and/or circumstance in the past (e.g., Zuhdi Jasser (<http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/259380/lure-fantasy-islam-dr-stephen-m-kirby>) claimed it was “revealed” in and applicable only to 623 AD).

In reality, 9:5 was among the verses “revealed” in late 630 AD and early 631 AD. By this time Muhammad had already conquered Mecca, and the remaining non-Muslim tribes on the Arabian Peninsula, confronted by the burgeoning Muslim armies, were flocking to Medina to convert to Islam. And these verses were not related to a specific battle or to a specific tribe, but rather were directed toward all non-Muslims (*Life of Muhammad*, pp. 617-619; *The History of al-Tabari: The Last Years of the Prophet*, pp. 77-79; and *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 4, pp. 370-376).

And there is no basis in Islamic Doctrine for the claim that 9:5 has no relevance today. Such a claim ignores the facts that Muslims believe the Koran consists of the eternal words of Allah, and Chapter 9 of the Koran was the last chapter to be “revealed” to Muhammad. Consequently, the commands found in Chapter 9 were Allah’s final, timeless instructions to the Muslims on how to deal with non-Muslims.

Their Audience Appears to be Mainly Non-Muslims

Americanized Muslim reformers appear on non-Muslim media and in front of non-Muslim organizations on a frequent basis, and almost always after a major *jihadi* attack.

But what I have yet to hear about is the number of mosques and Muslim organizations that allow these aspiring reformers to come in and advocate for their personal version of Islam. The Muslim reformers are vocal about their appearances on non-Muslim media and in front of non-Muslim organizations, but when it comes to any occurrence of similar appearances in mosques and in front of Muslim organizations, there seems to be silence.

Based on my research into the Tri-Faith Initiative in Omaha, Nebraska, I think these Americanized Muslim reformers are silent because they seldom, if ever, are allowed to present their personal version of Islam in a mosque or in front of a Muslim organization. The Tri-Faith Initiative is an experiment in interfaith dialogue and coexistence between Muslims, Jews, and Christians. However, in a series of articles I have shown that Islamic doctrine prohibits such a venture and actually maligns, and preaches violence against, Jews and Christians (here (<http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/dr-stephen-m->

kirby/islam-and-the-omaha-tri-faith-initiative/), here (<http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/dr-stephen-m-kirby/dont-take-jews-and-christians-as-friends/>), here (<http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/dr-stephen-kirby/the-fraud-of-omahas-tri-faith-initiative/>), and here (<http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/dr-stephen-m-kirby/the-omaha-tri-faith-initiative-nebraskas-potemkin-village/>). And I have also shown that most of the money for this initiative comes from non-Muslim organizations and a few aspiring Muslim reformers, with apparently no support for the initiative from mosques and Muslim organizations in Nebraska (here (<http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/dr-stephen-m-kirby/the-omaha-tri-faith-initiative-nebraskas-potemkin-village/>) and here (<http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/dr-stephen-kirby/nebraska-muslims-and-omahas-tri-faith-initiative/>)).

When I have corresponded with Tri-Faith partners and proponents, and Nebraska mosques and Muslim organizations, about what Islamic Doctrine teaches and the lack of support for the Tri-Faith from the greater Muslim community in Nebraska, there has been only silence from the Muslims and character attacks on me from the non-Muslims.

Conclusion

Here are reasons why Americanized Muslim reformers are failing:

1. They create their own versions of Islam, relying on their own personal opinions and interpretations, and arbitrarily dismissing parts of Islamic history and centuries of established Muslim scholarship.
2. They claim to follow the Koran, but actually go against verses of the Koran by arbitrarily dismissing one of the two columns upon which Islam rests: the *Sunnah* of Muhammad.
3. They go against the commands of Allah in the Koran and the teachings of Muhammad by picking and choosing, and actually dismissing verses in the Koran.
4. They personally decide which *hadiths* are authentic, again arbitrarily dismissing centuries of established Muslim scholarship.
5. As a result, their beliefs are heretical. And as Muhammad said above, every heresy sends one to the Fires of Hell.
6. Because these reformers are heretics, they have little, if any support for their reforms from the greater Muslim community in the United States.
7. Consequently, the reformers have to appeal to non-Muslims to help them reform Islam. This would be as if Martin Luther had relied on Muslims for his main support during the Reformation.
8. So what are the chances of success for an Americanized Muslim heretic and his non-Muslim followers to change Islam from that which was taught by Muhammad to that which is advocated by the heretic? Zero.

Does it really matter that Americanized Muslim reformers are going around trying to create personalized, "modern" versions of Islam? Yes, because they are relying on non-

Muslims for support. And to get that support, the reformers are presenting “the true” Islam as a religion of peace, similar to Christianity and Judaism, and able to be modified and modernized. And the reformers are presenting the *jihadists* as outliers who have perverted and hijacked that religion. But the reality is that the Muslim reformers are perverting and hijacking the religion, and it is the *jihadists* who are following the Islam taught by Muhammad.

How one understands a religion, whether correctly or incorrectly, is a major factor in how one welcomes its adherents. In terms of the mass migration of Muslim “refugees” into Europe, the European leadership and many Europeans in general appear to think that Islam is as the aspiring reformers have presented it. So the Muslim “refugees” have been generally welcomed with open arms. But would there have been such a welcome if the realization had been more wide spread that the reformers are heretics with little support in the greater Muslim community?

There is support in the United States for the Obama administration’s call to bring in tens of thousands of these Muslim “refugees.” But before allowing this to happen, we must ask the question that the Europeans should have asked, but for whom now it is too late to ask: Will these Muslim “refugees” follow the Islam of our Americanized Muslim heretics or will these “refugees” follow the centuries-old intolerant, supremacist, violent teachings of their god Allah and their prophet Muhammad? The fate of Western culture lies in the answer.

Just as it is obligatory to accept the commandments proven by the textual evidence from the Qur’an, and that it is utter disbelief to reject them, so are the commandments proven by the hadeeths of the Messenger of Allah. It is obligatory to act by them, and it is sheer disbelief to deny them.

Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan, Vol. 1, pp. 622-623

◆ **Tags:** Islam, Moderate, reform

ABOUT DR. STEPHEN M. KIRBY

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby is the author of three books about Islam. His latest is "Islam According to Muhammad, Not Your Neighbor."