Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muhammad Iqbal: Symbolizing Martin Luther in the Quest for Islamic Reform

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Abstract

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century marked a pivotal transformation in Catholic Christianity in Europe. Spearheaded by Martin Luther (d. 1546), the movement challenged the Pope's supreme authority, criticized the sale of indulgences, and advocated justification by faith and grace alone. The Reformation led to profound changes across Europe. Luther's teachings symbolized reform within religious tradition, aiming to eliminate rigid orthodoxy. Similarly, they inspired Muslim modernists seeking comparable reforms in response to modernity. These reformers valued Reformation ideals, emphasizing individual interpretation of religious texts, the separation of religious and worldly realms, and the exclusion of religious scholars from political authority. Reformers like Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī admired the Reformation's impact on Christianity and saw himself as a Luther within Islam. Muhammad Iqbal analysed the possibility of a Reformation-like movement in the Muslim world in his 1930 Allahabad Address and poetry. This article describes the Protestant Reformation and Luther's theology, highlighting its relevance to and impact on Muslim modernist thought. It focuses on al-Afghānī and Iqbal, exploring the idea of a Luther-like figure in Islam to enact similar reforms.

Keywords

Protestant Reformation, authority, Islam, modernism, reformation.

Introduction

The reconfiguration of societal norms and the needless adherence to antiquated, fallacious religious customs have stood as enduring motifs within the annals of modern global history. Various faith traditions possess inherent mechanisms for and approaches to correcting erroneous practices and adapting to shifting circumstances. The advent of modernity

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ushered in unprecedented challenges for all religious and traditional societies, particularly for the Muslim world. Having grappled with colonization, they sought solace in the reformation of religious practices as a primary means to instigate societal transformation. In this pursuit, they discovered a precedent in the form of the German theologian Martin Luther (d. 1546) and the Protestant Reformation, which they perceived as the starting point of Western advancement towards its eventual global domination. This article furnishes a concise insight into the Protestant Reformation and its reverberations within the realm of Muslim reformers, holding it up as a paramount exemplar. It elects to spotlight two important figures, i.e., Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897) and Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), who drew upon Luther as a point of reference. It is worth noting that this exposition refrains from examining the theological debates, complicated historical details in which the Reformation took place, and arguments raised by Luther, concentrating primarily on the symbolic nature of Luther's name among Muslim modernists.

Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation,[1] a movement of the sixteenth century, marks one of the great epochs in the history of Western civilization. It was a complex theological movement that posed considerable political and theological challenges to the authority of the Catholic Church. Martin Luther, the originator of the Protestant Reformation,[2] is widely credited with challenging the Pope and the Church hierarchy[3] and for making Christian teachings more accessible to the laity.

Luther's theological concerns were primarily aimed at reforming the church and addressing its tribulations, where political, economic, and moral motives[4] were combined against the dominance of the Roman

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[1] Some historians problematized the use of terms Reformation and Protestantism, as other similar movements characteristically differed from each other. See Robert D. Linder, *The Reformation Era* (London: Greenwood Press, 2008), 3-4.

[2] Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era 1500-1650* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), 45-47; Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reforms 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 23-45; Lewis W. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972), 100-45; Harris Harbison, *The Age of Reformation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955), 55-60.

[3] Martin Luther, "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate 1520," in *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes*, trans. C. M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), 2:48-116.

[4] Andrew Johnston, *The Protestant Reformation in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1991), 10-14.

Church.[5] Luther's rallying call for reform within the church was deeply rooted in his belief in the authority of the scripture. His famous Ninety-Five Theses (1517) attacked the sale of indulgences,[6] advocating that true repentance cannot be bought or sold[7] and emphasized that salvation can be attained through God's grace alone. Later events as Pope Leo X's excommunication of Luther (1521) and support of Luther from German princes, set in motion a series of events that led to the founding of Protestantism.[8] *Sola Fide* (justification by faith alone),[9] *Sola Scriptura* (by scripture alone), *Sola Gratia* (grace alone), individual reading and interpretation of the Bible, one's own understanding of biblical teachings, priesthood of all believers, rejection of the idea of purgatory,[10] distinction between spiritual and worldly realms, rejection of the Pope's authority in worldly matters,[11] emphasis on the importance of a personal relationship with God,[12] obedience of constituted authority, and decentralization of the church structure[13] were the main features of

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[5] John Herman Randall, *The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 166; David West, *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 10-11.

[6] Martin Luther, "Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," in *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes*, trans. C. M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), 1:29-38; Luther, "A Sermon on Indulgence and Grace," https://lutherquoted.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/sermon-on-indulgence-and-grace-april-1518.pdf.

[7] Luther, "The Ninety-five Theses," 1-5, http://reverendluther.org/pdfs/The_Ninety-Five_Theses.pdf. Theses 15–82 are the core arguments by Luther against indulgences and the tactics of the preachers who were selling letters of indulgence in Germany. Ibid.

[8] Ozment, *Age of Reforms*, 182-232.

[9] Martin Luther, "Martin Luther's Definition of Faith: An Excerpt from 'An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans,' Luther's German Bible of 1522," https://www.projectwittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-faith.txt; Luther, "Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (1535)," trans. Theodore Graebner (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1949), 216-36, https://www.projectwittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/gal/web/gal5-14.html; https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1549/1549-h/1549-h.htm.

[10] Luther, "The Ninety-five Theses"; Luther, *First Principles of Reformation* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1885), 2-13.

[11] Luther, "Open Letter to the Christian Nobility," https://www.projectwittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/nblty-05.html.

[12] Luther, "Concerning Christian Liberty, with Letter of Martin Luther to Pope Leo X," https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1911/1911-h/1911-h.htm#:~:text=A%20Christian%20man%20is%20the,make%20excellently%20for%20my%20purpose.

[13] Declan Marmion, "From Foe to Friend: Martin Luther's Legacy in Catholic Perspective," *The Furrow* 68, no. 10 (2017): 523-31.

Lutheran reformed theology.[14] This theological framework promoted individualism, leading to significant social, political, and economic conflicts. Moreover, the shift from a universal Christian ethical framework to distinct national ethical systems played a crucial role in the conflicts of the Great War in Europe.[15] The theologian Ernst Troeltsch (d. 1923) emphasized that the Reformation's original aim was church reform rather than modernization.[16] It resulted in the establishment of national churches, as Protestantism relied on government authority to shape its vision, confining it within specific national boundaries. Reformation created a new world order, as Toby Huff explained, "The Reformation claimed to replace a corrupt modern order by the true primitive order. . . . It proved to have many new elements, different in structure not only from those which had prevailed in the Middle Ages, but also from those which had characterized the apostolic community of the early church."[17] Max Weber argued that the "spirit of capitalism" arose from the Protestant ethic, especially Calvinism, which viewed disciplined work, frugality, and wealth accumulation as moral obligations. This shift in religious values promoted a cultural focus on economic gain, driving the development of modern capitalism.[18]

The call for reform by Luther had far-reaching consequences not only for Christianity but also for other religions, including Islam, that sought reform from within. Luther's legacy is of such profound significance that any discussion of or approach to religious reform in the modern era remains incomplete without acknowledging it.

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[14] J. Bronowski, *The Western Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1960), 89; Vivian Hubert Howard Green, *Renaissance and Reformation: A Survey of European History Between 1450-1660* (London: Edward Arnold Publishing, 1974), 23; Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922).

[15] Randall, *Making of the Modern Mind*, 165-68; R. H. Murray, *The Political Consequences of the Reformation: Studies in Sixteenth-Century Political Thought* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1926), 56.

[16] Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2013), 24, 35; Troeltsch, "Renaissance and Reformation," in *The Reformation: Material or Spiritual*, ed. Lewis W. Spitz (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1962), 17.

[17] Benjamin Nelson, "Conscience and the Making of Early Modern Cultures: Beyond Max Weber," in *On the Roads to Modernity*, ed. Toby E. Huff (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), 75.

[18] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2005).

The Tradition of Reform in Islamic History and the Reform of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

The history of reform in Islam and maintaining the purest form of the religion is as old as Islam itself. The emphasis on removing discordant elements within Muslim societies is longstanding, with its religious significance affirmed by Prophetic *ḥadīth*.[19] Scholars such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 CE), and Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624 CE) were revered as *mujaddid*s (revivalists) of their times, who opposed corrupt and heterodox practices among Muslims. They advocated reforms in their respective eras, encouraging a return to the roots of Islam as practised during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). However, by the second half of the nineteenth century, reform efforts among Muslims were increasingly driven by the challenges of sudden social changes and ruptures brought on by encounters with Europe. Initially prompted by the material threat posed by European expansion, these reforms gradually reflected a growing awareness of the cultural and intellectual challenges that accompanied this confrontation. The advent of modernity further intensified the urgency for reform across the Muslim world.

One of the earliest systematic reflections on the need for reform in response to European encounters came from the Egyptian scholar Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ al-Ṭahṭāwī (d. 1873). He provided Islamic guidance to the Egyptian students sent to France by Muhammad Ali Pasha (d. 1849), the autonomous Ottoman governor of Egypt, in 1826 to acquire practical knowledge for modernizing state institutions.[20] This initiative was part of a broader recognition of the need for change, spurred by the rise of the West in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the concurrent decline of Muslim powers. Reforms like Selim III's *Niẓām-i Jadīd*[21] (1789-1807), the *Tanẓīmāt* reforms (1839-1874),[22] and modernizing initiatives by figures such as Khayr al-Din Pasha (d. 1890) in Tunisia aimed to establish

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[19] Prophet Muḥammad said, "Allah will raise for this community at the end of every hundred years the one who will renovate its religion for it." Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. al-Ashʿath, *Sunan*, kitāb al-malāḥim, bāb mā yudhkar fī qarn al-miʾah, ḥadīth 4291, https://sunnah.com/abudawud:4291.

[20] Ahmad S. Dallal, "The Origins and Early Development of Islamic Reform," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6:141; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Masrot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 120-26.

[21] Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III, 1789-1807* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), viii.

[22] Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 166-69.

industries, implement land reforms, abolish slavery, found educational institutions, and develop infrastructure such as railways and telegraphs. These reforms reduced the power of the *'ulamā'* and promoted the rise of a Westernized professional class, accelerating secularization. Collectively, these initiatives reflected the efforts of Muslim reformers to address and reverse the perceived decline within the Muslim world.[23]

Despite these efforts, the sheer magnitude and ruthlessness of Western imperialism, along with its devastating impact on Muslim lands,[24] led to a deeper realization that political, military and administrative adaptations alone would not suffice. This recognition spurred new discourses on diagnosing the causes of Muslim decline and proposing solutions to regain past glory. One prominent response was a call for reform and revival[25]—a return to the original practices of Islam from the Prophet's era and the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, rejecting Western ideologies and reforming any perceived innovations within the faith.[26]

In stark contrast, another group of reformers, later known as Muslim modernists, emerged. They argued that while adhering to foundational sources of Islam such as the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, it was essential for Muslims to adopt modern Western ideals to uplift themselves politically and materially. They believed it was crucial to liberate Islam from the shackles of rigid orthodoxy and implement reforms that would make it adaptable

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[23] Ira M. Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 615-16; Humaira Ahmad and Muhammad Hammad Lakhvi, "Early Patterns of Change in Muslim Societies: A Review," *al-Qalam* 20, no. 1 (2015): 1-18.

[24] Mansoor Moaddal and Kamran Talattof, "Introduction," in *Contemporary Debates in Islam: An Anthology of Modernist and Fundamentalist Thought*, ed. Mansoor Moaddal and Kamran Talattof (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 1-21, at 5.

[25] John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 51; Derek Hopwood, "Introduction: The Culture of Modernity in Islam and the Middle East," in *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond*, ed. John Cooper, Ronald Nettler and Mohamed Mahmoud (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 3-9; Moaddal and Talattof, "Introduction," 1-21; Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Islamic Modernism," in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, ed. Armando Salvatore and Martin van Bruinessen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 240-57.

[26] Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762) and Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 1824) in India, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792) in Arabia, Ḥājjī Sharī'at Allāh (d. 1840) in Bengal, Sayyid Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Sanūsī (d. 1859) in Libya, Muḥammad Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī (d. 1885) in Sudan, and Sa'īd Nūrsī (d. 1960) in Türkiye, are a few examples of such reformers, who called for the reformation of Muslim societies on religious lines and tried to eradicate the heretical innovations (*bid'āt*) from Muslim societies. John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), 87-89; Ira M. Lapidus, "Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40, no. 4 (1997): 448-58.

to modern life and its complex demands.[27] These modernist reformers advocated for the reinterpretation of Islamic teachings and the adoption of contemporary concepts and practices among Muslims.[28] They embraced the nation state and supported the separation of state and religion.[29] They challenged the internal stagnation of the Muslim world[30] and called for new thinking that could reconcile Islamic principles with the realities of the modern age.

While seeking a model for religious reformation and challenging orthodoxy, Muslim modernists praised the Protestant Reformation, believing Muslim societies needed a similar transformation.[31] They argued that the Reformation provided the Western world with intellectual and philosophical freedom, leading to rapid advancements in science, technology, and rational thought. Without a substantial reformation of Islam, they believed, the Muslim world had little chance of achieving significant material and scientific progress.

Despite the differences in social and political contexts, many Muslim modernists viewed Martin Luther[32] as a saviour of Christianity, portraying him as a reformer who sought to curb corrupt clerical practices and restore the progressive spirit of religion. However, they often overlooked the specific circumstances of the Reformation, the complex theological debates surrounding it, and the turbulence that followed it. These modernists drew parallels between Protestant principles, such as the individual interpretation of sacred texts and Luther's criticism of church authorities, and Islamic ideals, particularly the role of the *'ulamā'* in Muslim societies. Pioneering Muslim modernist Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) of Egypt argued that in the West, the desire for knowledge intensified, and a strong resolve emerged to curb the authority of religious leaders and return to the simplicity of faith,

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[27] Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of Reform Movements Inaugurated by Muhammad Abduh* (New York: Russel and Russel, 1933), 177.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 84-85.

[30] Cemil Aydin, "Globalizing the Intellectual History of the Idea of the 'Muslim World'," in *Global Intellectual History*, ed. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 159-86.

[31] Mazheruddin Siddiqui, *Modern Reformist Thought in the Muslim World* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1982), 5-7.

[32] Niazi Berkes, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization: Selected Essays of Zia Göklap* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959), 222; Charles Kurzman and Michaelle Browers, "Introduction: Comparing Reformations," in *An Islamic Reformation?* ed. Michaelle Browers and Charles Kurzman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), 5-8.

mirroring Islamic principles.[33] Syed Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), the pioneer of Islamic modernism in the Indian subcontinent, proclaimed that India needed its own version of Luther.[34] Musa Jarullah Bigiev (Russian Tatarstan, d. 1949),[35] Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935),[36] Hadi Atlasi (Tatarstan, d. 1940), and Shihabuddin Marjani (d. 1889), the founder of Muslim modernism[37] in Russia, also found inspiration in Luther for reform.[38] Each of them advocated for a revival within Islam, mirroring the European Reformation model. They were critical of the ʿulamāʾ, whom they considered ignorant and responsible for the conservatism and stagnation of the Muslim masses. These reformers argued that the decadence of Muslim society could not be curtailed until people rid themselves of the mullahs (religious scholars).[39]

Those familiar with the writings of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muhammad Iqbal will recognize their mention of Luther as a reformer in their writings and addresses. Both al-Afghānī, a trailblazer of Muslim modernism and advocate of Pan-Islamism, and Iqbal, an esteemed intellectual, philosopher, and poet from the Indian subcontinent, remain influential and widely cited figures today. Cognizant of the decline of Islamic civilization, they believed that a glorious future for Muslims was unattainable without adapting to the modern world and embracing the scientific method while remaining true to Islamic principles. To achieve this, they strongly advocated for *ijtihād*. Al-Afghānī's struggle against colonialism was the first stone cast into calm waters, while Iqbal's influence resembled the ripples that followed. Despite Iqbal's widespread recognition, Al-Afghānī had a greater impact in the Middle East due to his writings and speeches in Arabic.

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[33] Kurzman and Browers, "Introduction," 5.

[34] Siddiqui, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 5.

[35] Elmira Akhmetova, *Ideas of Muslim Unity at the Age of Nationalism: A Comparative Study of the Concept of the Ummah in the Writings of Musa Jārullāh and Said Nursi* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009), 24; Ahmet Kanlıdere, *Reform within Islam: The Tajdīd and Jadīd Movement among the Kazan Tatars (1819-1917); Conciliation or Conflict?* (Istanbul: Eren, 1997), 58-71.

[36] Muhammad Rashid Rida, "Renewal, Renewing and Renewers," in *Modernist Islam 1840-1940: A Source Book*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 77-85.

[37] Kanlıdere, *Reform within Islam*, 57.

[38] Kurzman and Browers, "Introduction," 5-8.

[39] Esposito, *Islamic Threat,* 55-56; Ira M. Lapidus, "Islam and Modernity," in *Patterns of Modernity*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1987), 2:100; Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, 25-110.

Al-Afghānī, a Self-Proclaimed Luther of the Muslim World

Al-Afghānī was born in Iran during the Qajar Dynasty.[40] He received a traditional Islamic education, studying Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy, before starting his career as a teacher and preacher. In the 1860s, he became involved in the struggle against European imperialism, which was beginning to threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Muslim world.[41] Al-Afghānī travelled widely, visiting Egypt, India, and Europe, and emerged as a leading voice in the movement for Islamic reform. Being a polyglot, he was proficient in Urdu, Hindi, Pushto, Persian, Turkish, English, and French. His influence extended to political revolutionaries and esteemed scholars. His contributions to Muslim modernism and Pan-Islamism continue to attract scholarly attention.

Al-Afghānī conducted an in-depth study of the ailments afflicting Muslim society,[42] identifying causes such as the loss of political consciousness, economic depravity, and intellectual stagnation.[43] He believed that the Islamic world was in crisis and needed to reform its institutions and practices to compete with the West.[44] Al-Afghānī viewed Islam as a progressive religion capable of adapting to changing circumstances and embracing modernity without losing its essential character. He is recognized as one of the "first Muslim revivalists to use

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[40] For details of al-Afghānī's life events, see 'Abd al-Qādir al-Maghrabī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī: Dhikrayāt wa Aḥādīth* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1948); Qāżī 'Abd al-Ghaffār, *Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī* (Delhi: Anjuman-i Taraqqī-i Urdū, 1940); Sharif al Mujahid, "Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani: His Role in the Nineteenth Century Muslim Awakening" (master's thesis, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1954), 16-45; Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Taʾrīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīlah, 2003), 1:27-38; Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1966), 7-35; Nikkie R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "Afghani"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 6-15; Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, 4-17; Nikkie R. Keddie, *Syed Jamal ad-Din "Afghani": A Political Biography* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); Muhammad Ikram Chughtai, ed., *Majmūʿah-i Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2006).

[41] Keddie, *Syed Jamal ad-Din "Afghani*," 10-22.

[42] Jamal ud Din Afghani and Abdul Hadi Hairi, "Afghānī on the Decline of Islam," *Die Welt des Islams* 13, nos. 1-2 (1971): 122-25; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh, "Māḍī 'l-Ummah wa Ḥāḍiruhā wa 'Ilāj 'Ilalihā," in *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā wa 'l-Thawrah al-Taḥrīriyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Bustānī (Cairo: Dār al-'Arab, 1957), 13-22; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh, "Inḥiṭāṭ al-Muslimīn wa Sakūnuhum wa Sabab Dhālika," in *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā wa 'l-Thawrah al-Taḥrīriyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Bustānī (Cairo: Dār al-'Arab, 1957), 30-35.

[43] Afghani and Hairi, "Afghānī on the Decline of Islam," 124-25.

[44] H. A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 27-28.

the concepts of Islam and the West, as connoting correlative—and of course antagonistic—historical phenomena," as Smith noted.[45]

Al-Afghānī sought to revitalize Islam by re-orienting the study of the Qur'ān without venturing into the reconstruction of modern *'ilm al-kalām*.[46] He stressed the need for a new approach to the consensus of the *'ulamā'* and attributed the decline of Islamic thought to the political ambitions of the Abbasids, which created a division between the *khilāfah* and *ijtihād*, unlike the unified practice of the four orthodox Caliphs. This division led to various schisms and heresies within Islam. Al-Afghānī proposed establishing regional centres for *ijtihād* based on the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, connected to a universal centre, where representatives would collaborate on a unified *ijtihād* to strengthen the *ummah* against external challenges.[47]

On the political front, al-Afghānī called for the unity of the Muslim world and ardently supported Pan-Islamism. His Pan-Islamist views were tied to a revivalist interest in historical Islam. He argued that the independence of one Muslim country was integral to all, condemning the fragmentation of *dār al-Islām* into petty states reliant on European powers, which led to decadence and oppression.[48]

His upbringing in the Iranian Intellectual sphere brought him face to face with the philosophical tradition of the early Muslim rationalists, and he was particularly influenced by the rationalist approach of Avicenna (d. 1037 CE).[49] He believed that reason, modern science, and Islam can co-exist side by side without getting into conflict with each other.[50] While he lamented the current decline of the Muslim power and placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the orthodox and rigid *'ulamā'*, he still rejected the critique of Ernest Renan (d. 1892) on Islam's

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[45] Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 49.

[46] Aziz Ahmad, "Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, Jamāl al-dīn al-Afghānī and Muslim India," *Studia Islamica* 13 (1960): 63.

[47] Ibid., 70.

[48] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh, "al-Waḥdah al-Islāmiyyah," in *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā wa 'l-Thawrah al-Taḥrīriyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Bustānī (Cairo: Dār al-'Arab, 1957), 67-73 and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh, "al-Waḥdah wa 'l-Siyāsah," in *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā wa 'l-Thawrah al-Taḥrīriyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Bustānī (Cairo: Dār al-'Arab, 1957), 74-79.

[49] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, *al-Radd 'alā 'l-Dahriyyīn*, trans. Muḥammad 'Abduh, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Mawsū'āt, 1320 AH), https://www.loc.gov/item/70214124; Jamal ud Din Afghani, "The Benefits of Philosophy," in *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "Afghani,"* ed. Nikkie R. Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 109.

[50] Ibid., 109-22.

hostility towards the scientific and rationalist spirit.[51] Instead, he claimed that the Arabs had grasped the power of reason and scientific spirit much before the Europeans.[52] His belief in rationality and social solidarity as drivers of progress and development in the West inspired him to reinterpret Islam as a belief in reason, progress, and civilization rather than merely a set of religious doctrines.[53]

Al-Afghānī, in his quest to understand the decline of Islamic civilization and propose ways to regain its past glory, drew inspiration from the Protestant Reformation. His admiration for the Reformation was also partly influenced by the ideas of French Protestant historian François Guizot (d. 1874),[54] whom al-Afghānī read fondly. Guizot argued that while the Catholic Church promoted intellectual pursuits, it simultaneously stifled independent, critical thinking. Guizot believed that the Reformation broke this stagnation, allowing Europe to progress intellectually and materially. Al-Afghānī found this perspective compelling and integrated it into his own thought.[55]

Recognizing the vital role of religion in Muslim society, al-Afghānī saw a similar potential for revitalization in Protestantism. He believed that the Islamic world needed a movement analogous to the Protestant Reformation to dismantle myths that hindered intellectual growth and promote dynamism. Al-Afghānī stated, "It must be a religious movement. If we consider the reasons for the transformation of Europe from barbarism to civilization, we see that it was only the religious movement raised and spread by Luther."[56] He argued that once such a reformation reached its peak, Islam would be as dynamic and compatible with the modern world as any other religion, ready to fulfil its essential role as a moral guide.[57]

In his *al-Radd ‘alā 'l-Dahriyyīn*, al-Afghānī claimed that Islam, like post-Reformation Christianity, was founded on critical thinking and

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[51] Jamal ud Din Afghani, "Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani's Answers to Ernest Renan's Criticism of Islam, May 18, 1883," in *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*, ed. Akram Foud Khater (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 30-35.

[52] Ibid., 28-29.

[53] Ibid., 29-31.

[54] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 114.

[55] François Guizot, *History of Civilization in Europe*, trans. William Hazlitt (New York: The Colonial Press, 1899), 181-82, 189.

[56] Al-Maghrabī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī*, 95-96.

[57] Ibid., 96-100.

rational proof.[58] He wrote, "The Islamic religion is the only religion that censures belief without proof; . . . reproves blind submission; seeks to show proof of things to its followers; everywhere addresses itself to reason."[59] Although this ideal did not always align with contemporary Islamic practices, it reflected historical roots in Islamic philosophy and the Mutazilite movement, which valued human reason.[60]

Al-Afghānī's admiration for the Reformation led him to view Luther as a key figure in driving religious reform. He saw Luther as a symbol for the potential religious reform to bring about positive social change. By invoking the symbolism of Luther and the Reformation, al-Afghānī hoped to inspire his own society to embrace similar reforms. For example, he said, "I cannot keep from hoping that Muhammadan society will succeed someday in breaking its bonds and marching resolutely in the path of civilization after the manner of Western society."[61] The sole cause of the transformation of Europe from barbarism to its current civilized state was due to "the religious movement raised and spread by Luther. Al-Afghānī argued, "This great man, when he saw that the peoples of Europe had declined and lost their vigour due to the long period that they had submitted to the heads of the church and to (religious) imitation, not based on clear reason, started that religious movement. . . . He reminded them that they were born free, and so why were they submitting to tyrants?"[62] Indeed, the idea that "Islam needed a Luther . . . was a favourite theme of al-Afghani's writings, and he may have seen himself as that Luther."[63]

Using Luther's reformed theology as an example, he believed that his emphasis on the authority of the Bible, rather than the church, could be applied to Islam. Having learnt from Luther, al-Afghānī also criticized the class of *'ulamā'* and likened them to Western clergy responsible for the decline of Islamic civilization. The *'ulamā*, he was of the view, were

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[58] Al-Afghānī, "al-Radd 'alā 'l-Dahriyyīn"; Afghani, "The Truth about the Neicheri Sect and an Explanation of the Neicheris," in *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 171-72.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Richard C. Martin, Mark R. Woodward, and Dwi S. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 25-29.

[61] Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, "Lecture on Teaching and Learning *and* Answer to Renan," in *Modernist Islam 1840-1940: A Source Book*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 103-10, at 108.

[62] Al-Maghrabī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī*, 95-96.

[63] Al-Maghrabī, *al-Bayyināt fī 'l-Dīn wa 'l-Ijtimā' wa 'l-Adab wa 'l-Ta'rīkh* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Salafiyyah, 1925-26), 1:4; Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 122.

responsible for the stagnation, blind imitation, and conservative outlook among Muslims.[64] Therefore, any reform and progress of Islam is impossible without the transformation of the conservatism of the *'ulamā'*.[65] In his address to Indian *'ulamā'*, he said, "Why do you not raise your eyes from those defective books and why do you not cast your glance on this wide world? Why do you not employ your reflection and thought on events and their causes without the veils of those works? Why do you always utilize those exalted minds on trifling problems?"[66] Al-Afghānī strongly condemns the Muslim *'ulamā'* for their lack of insight and negative attitude towards modern science and technology.

> The strangest thing of all is that our *ulama* these days have divided science into two parts. One they call Muslim science, and one European science. Because of this they forbid others to teach some of the useful sciences. They have not understood that science is that noble thing that has no connection with any nation, and is not distinguished by anything but itself. Rather, everything that is known is known by science, and every nation that becomes renowned becomes renowned through sciences.[67]

Islamic reform, according to him, had to be inclusive of the following: 1) similar to Luther's call for a return to the Bible, al-Afghānī's Islamic reform was a return to the Qur'ān alone[68] but as a progressive scripture that was compatible with modern life; and 2) the door of rational interpretation of the Qur'ān (*ijtihād*) should be reopened to reinvent the true spirit of the Qur'ān and critique of *taqlīd* (imitation) which extolled the power of reason, rationalism, social and political progress, and uplifted Islamic civilization. For al-Afghānī, the Qur'ān was itself rational if interpreted rationally, and he emphasized that the proper interpretation of the Qur'ān should be rational, progressive, philosophical, and scientific, to counter the static and fatalistic interpretations of the conservative *'ulamā'*.[69]

Al-Afghānī's enduring legacy as a reformer continues to resonate in contemporary discourses about the future of the Muslim world. His focus was not on abstract theological reconstructions but on addressing the

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[64] Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 127.

[65] Afghani, "Lecture on Teaching and Learning," 106-7; al-Afghānī and 'Abduh, "Inḥiṭāṭ al-Muslimīn," 30-35; al-Afghānī and 'Abduh, "al-Qaḍā' wa 'l-Qadar," in *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā wa 'l-Thawrah al-Taḥrīriyyah al-Kubrā,* ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Bustānī (Cairo: Dār al-'Arab, 1957), 49-58; al-Afghānī and 'Abduh, "al-Jubn," in *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā wa 'l-Thawrah al-Taḥrīriyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Bustānī (Cairo: Dār al-'Arab, 1957), 142-46.

[66] Afghani, "Lecture on Teaching and Learning,"109-22.

[67] Ibid., 104-5.

[68] Al-Maghrabī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī,* 57-59, 68.

[69] al-Mujahid, "Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani," 57-58, 80, 100, 184-85.

tangible needs of historical Muslim communities. Throughout his career, he advocated for Islamic solidarity in the face of colonialism. Despite some contradictions in his religious ideas, his political objectives were notably consistent. Al-Afghānī's significant achievement was his ability to mobilize both popular and elite support for political and religious revival, effectively politicizing Islam within the context of colonialism.[70] Smith observed that the ideas of twentieth-century Islam are foreshadowed in al-Afghānī's thought.[71] This assessment is accurate in several respects, including al-Afghānī's use of the Islam-West dichotomy, his unapologetic emphasis on Muslim unity,[72] and his advocacy for Islamic revivalism. Later reformers such as Muḥammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā, Ali Abdel Raziq (d. 1966), among others across the Muslim world, adopted and championed these themes, reflecting the enduring influence of al-Afghānī's ideas.[73] His vision for a revitalized and united *ummah*, rooted in the original principles of Islam and capable of facing modern challenges, remains a powerful and relevant message and was also mentioned by Iqbal in his writings and poetry.[74]

Muhammad Iqbal: Reconstructing the Islamic Tradition

Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) was a distinguished Muslim intellectual, philosopher, writer, and politician from South Asia, renowned for his Urdu and Persian poetry, his contributions to the development of Muslim sociopolitical thought, his advocacy for the revival of Islamic civilization, and his efforts in the reconstruction of religious thought.[75] Iqbal's ideas were shaped by a range of intellectual and cultural influences, ranging from Western philosophers as Immanuel Kant (d.

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[70] Dallal, "Origins and Early Development of Islamic Reform," 142.

[71] Smith, *Islam in Modern History,* 47.

[72] Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 39-41, 52.

[73] Nikki R. Keddie, "Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnema (London: Zed Books, 1994), 24-29; "Syed Jamal ud Din Afghani," https://www.cis-ca.org/voices/a/afghni.htm.

[74] Muhammad Iqbal, "The Sphere of Mercury: Visitation to the Spirits of Jamal al-Din Afghani and Sa'id Halim Pasha," in *Javed Nama*, trans. A. J. Arberry (London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1966), 53-54.

[75] David Lelyveld, "Iqbal, Muhammad (C. 1877-1938)," in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard C. Martin (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 1:356; Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Islam and Open Society: Fidelity and Movement in the Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, trans. Melissa McMahon (Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2010), 17.

1804), Johann Goethe (d. 1832), Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900), and Henry Bergson (d. 1941),[76] to Eastern mystics such as Rumi (d. 1273 CE).[77]

He was born in Sialkot, Punjab, India (now Pakistan), and received his education in Lahore, Cambridge, Munich (1908) and Heidelberg (1907).[78] Iqbal's writings, speeches, and poetry addressed a wide range of topics, including religion, politics, philosophy, and culture.[79] His exposure to Western thought led him to become critical of the various Western ideologies as capitalism, democracy, nationalism, and communism, on one hand, and of the intellectual and cultural stagnation that he saw in Muslim societies, on the other. Iqbal recognized the necessity and significance of reconstructing Islamic thought. He believed that Islam was a dynamic and revolutionary movement, but centuries of stagnation had accumulated layers of dust over its religious philosophy.[80] He was a strong advocate of the revitalization of Islamic civilization and wanted Muslims to regain their intellectual heritage and develop their own social and political system to address the challenges of modernity. His ideas were influential in shaping the modern Islamic world, and his vision of a new Islamic civilization continues to inspire Muslims around the world.[81]

Like al-Afghānī, Iqbal also drew parallels in several of his discourses between the historic Protestant Reformation and the contemporary Muslim world. One of the ways in which Iqbal drew on Luther's ideas was in his advocacy of individual freedom and the rejection of dogmatism and religious hierarchy. He saw Luther as a figure who had challenged the corrupt and oppressive practices of the Catholic Church and sought to return Christianity to its original sources.[82] Similarly, Iqbal believed

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[76] Syed Abdul Vahid, "Note on Nietzsche," in *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, ed. Syed Abdul Vahid (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), 238-46; Nazir Qaiser, *Iqbal and the Western Philosophers* (Lahore: Muhammad Suheyl Umar, 2011); A. B. A. Bawhab, "Henri Bergson and Muhammad Iqbal," *Iqbal Review* 33, no. 1 (1992): 105-14.

[77] Muhammad Ajmal, "Iqbal and Mysticism," *Iqbal Review* 29, no. 3 (1988): 10-26; Bishop Michael J. Nazir-Ali, "Iqbal and Rumi," *Iqbal Review* 29, no. 3 (1988): 27-39; Nazir Qaiser, *Creative Dimensions of Iqbal's Thought* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2012), 97-104.

[78] Khurram Ali Shafique, *Iqbal, His Life and Our Times* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2014), 16-62.

[79] Diagne, *Islam and Open Society*, 17-18.

[80] Khurshid Ahmad, "Iqbal and the Modern Renaissance of Islam," *Iqbal Review* 3, no. 1 (1962): 78-90.

[81] Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986).

[82] Muhammad Iqbal, "Muhammad Iqbal's 1930 Presidential Address to the 25th Session of the All-India Muslim League, Allahabad, 29 December 1930," https://www.iqbal.com .pk/allama-iqbal-prose-works/speeches-writings-statements-of-allama-iqbal/991-

that the Islamic world needed to be reformed and invigorated to address the challenges of the modern world. He saw the Muslim world as being under threat from imperialism and Westernization and believed that the key to revitalizing Islamic civilization was to return to the original sources of the faith and to develop our own system to address the sociopolitical challenges of the time. He, however, believed in the inherent dynamic nature of Islam. In his speech "Islam as Moral and Political Ideal (1908)," Iqbal finds Islam's vigour in the Protestant Reformation and regards Luther as the emancipator of European humanity from the despotic rule of the popes and their attitudes.

> Luther, the enemy of despotism in religion, and Rousseau, the enemy of despotism in politics, must always be regarded as the emancipation of European humanity from the heavy fetters of Popedom and absolutism, and their religious and political thought must be understood as a virtual denial of the Church dogma of human depravity. The possibility of elimination of sin and pain from the evolutionary process, and faith in the natural goodness of man, are the basic propositions of Islam, as of Modern European civilization, which has, almost unconsciously, recognized the truth of these propositions in spite of the religious system with which it is associated.[83]

Iqbal apprised Luther and also explored the moral and political ideals of Islam while asserting the shared values of Islamic and European civilization (i.e., the conviction in the innate goodness of humans).

In his lecture on "The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam," delivered at Aligarh in 1929, Iqbal again accentuated on the importance of learning from the lessons of Luther's movement. He noted that the Reformation was essentially a political movement, leading to the gradual displacement of Christianity's universal ethics by systems of national ethics. This trend ultimately resulted in the disastrous Great European War (1793-1815), which failed to reconcile the two opposing systems of ethics. Iqbal warned and alerted Muslim leaders to grasp the true significance of the European Protestant Reformation experience before embarking upon any reformation. He advised them to proceed with prudence and a clear understanding of Islam's ultimate goals as a social polity:[84] "It is the duty of the leaders of the world of Islam to-day to understand the real meaning of what has happened in Europe, and

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prose-works/speeches-writings-and-statements-of-allama-iqbal/1680-1930-presidential-address-allahabad-allama-iqbal.

[83] Iqbal, "Islam as an Ethical and a Political Ideal," Iqbal's First Speech in English (Lahore, April 1908), http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_iqbal_1908.html#:~:text=The%20ethical%20ideal%20of%20Islam%2C%20then%2C%20is%20to%20disenthrall%20man,worth%20of%20all%20human%20actions.

[84] Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 129-30.

then to move forward with self-control and a clear insight into the ultimate aims of Islam as a social polity."[85]

In his renowned "Presidential Address of All India Muslim League (1930)," Iqbal believed that while Luther was justified in challenging the corrupt and authoritarian structure of the Church, he failed to recognize that his revolt would eventually lead to the displacement of the universal ethics of Jesus by a plurality of narrower, national systems of ethics.[86] In his "Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," Luther argued that Christians must differentiate between their spiritual obligations to God and their earthly duties, such as wealth, honour, and obedience to civil laws. While Christians were to obey civil laws in worldly matters, their ultimate allegiance was to God alone. Luther envisioned Christian princes who would allow their subjects to live freely according to their understanding of the Gospel while cooperating with local authorities to maintain social order. Rulers were seen as having a divinely ordained duty to govern in a manner that was faithful, loving, judicious, and just—aligning their rule with both divine principles and secular responsibilities.[87]

However, Luther's ideas contributed to a broader shift where power moved from the universal authority of the Catholic Church to secular rulers, fragmenting Western Christendom into multiple competing regions with distinct religious and political systems. This development led to new theories that blurred the lines between religious and secular authority. Luther's "two kingdoms" doctrine, for instance, gave rulers the power to enforce both divine and human laws, resulting in state laws often supplanting church governance in Lutheran regions. Calvinists took this separation further, distinctly dividing spiritual and civil roles. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648) later solidified the principle that rulers could determine their region's religion (*cuius regio, eius religio*—"whose realm, his religion"), further entrenching this move away from a universal Christian ethical framework.[88] Thus, while Luther initially sought to reform the church's corrupt practices, his movement inadvertently paved the way for a

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[85] Ibid., 130.

[86] Iqbal, "1930 Presidential Address."

[87] Martin Luther, "Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed," in *Works of Martin Luther* (Albany: AGES Software, 1997), 3:181-215, https://media.sabda.or/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/LUT_WRK3.PDF.

[88] John Witte Jr. "Reformation: The Protestant Reformation of Constitutionalism," in *Christianity and Constitutionalism*, ed. Nicholas Aroney and Ian Leigh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 127, 131, 139-41.

fragmented ethical landscape governed by national interests, proving him to be more of a warning sign than a guiding light.

Iqbal also appraised the premises of Reformation, which led to the separation of spiritual and temporal realms. In his view, this influenced European religious and political thought, resulting in the exclusion of Christianity from the life of European states. This has created a situation in which nation states are dominated by national interests rather than human interests.

Iqbal affirms the perspective of Islam on the relationship between spirit and matter, and how it differs from that of Europe. According to him, Islam does not divide humanity into a dichotomy of spirit and matter, as it views them as interconnected and integral to one another. In contrast, Europe has traditionally accepted this dualism, likely stemming from Manichaean thought.[89] Iqbal pinpoints that this separation of spiritual and temporal spheres has had a significant impact on European religious and political thought, resulting in states dominated by national interests rather than human ones. He asserted that in Islam, God and the universe, spirit and matter, and church and state are considered organic to one another. This means that there is no separation between the physical and spiritual aspects of human existence. According to Iqbal, this differs from the European view that has caused Christianity to be excluded from the life of European states, resulting in a set of mutually ill-adjusted states.[90] Iqbal enunciates that Europe's mistake of separating spiritual and temporal spheres has led to a need for a federated Europe. This unity was originally provided by the Christian church organization, but was destroyed under the inspiration of Luther. He argues that instead of reconstructing this unity in the light of Christ's vision of human brotherhood, European states have continued to prioritize national interests over human ones.[91]

Iqbal highlights the challenges facing the Muslim world in modern times, particularly in relation to the concept of nationalism. He argues that, unlike Christianity during the Middle Ages, Islam does not have a centralized church organization that can be reformed or restructured by a figure like Luther. Instead, Islam is governed by a universal polity, with its fundamentals believed to have been revealed but its structure in need of renewed power through fresh adjustments. He also discusses the potential fate of the national idea in the Muslim world, noting that it may be assimilated and transformed by Islam, as it has done with other ideas in

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[89] Iqbal, "1930 Presidential Address."

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

the past. However, he also acknowledges the possibility of a radical transformation of Islam's own structure by the force of this idea.[92] This implies that the national idea may challenge traditional Islamic beliefs and practices, leading to a period of significant change and adjustment.

In his famous poem *Masjid-i Qurṭubah* (1932), Iqbal once again drew parallel imagery where he mentioned Germany, France, and the Romans passing through the same upheavals as Muslims are facing:

> Germany witnessed the upheaval of religious reforms
> That left no trace of the old perspective.

> Infallibility of the church sage began to ring false.
> Reason, once more, unfurled its sails.

> France too went through its revolution
> That changed the entire orientation of Western life.

> Followers of Rome, feeling antiquated worshipping the ancientry
> Also rejuvenated themselves with the relish of novelty.

> The same storm is raging today in the soul of the Muslim;
> A Divine secret it is, not for the lips to utter.

> Let us see what surfaces from the depths of the deep.
> Let us see what color, the blue sky changes into.[93]

In this context, Iqbal advised that the soul of the Muslim world is undergoing a similar ferment. He refers to this as a "divine secret," which the tongue is unable to express. He acknowledges that it is difficult to predict what will emerge from this ferment, but he suggests that it is a significant moment for the Muslim world, and one that should be embraced. Iqbal's use of the ocean and the sky as metaphors is significant. The ocean is a symbol of the vast and powerful forces that are at work in the world, and the sky represents the limitless possibilities of the future.

Besides these direct mentions of Luther in his speeches and discourses, Iqbal's thought also reflected the currents of Reformation teachings as *sola scriptura* and individual interpretation of the Qur'ān. His "approach to the Qur'an was based on personal realization and insight (*tahqiq*) as opposed to conformity to authoritative teachings or interpretations (*taqlid*)."[94] Iqbal had already expressed in an Urdu couplet this notion of reading the scripture with an attitude of "maximum receptivity, with a mind that is open and willing to be shaped by whatever it happens to receive, as a necessary condition for

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[92] Iqbal, "1930 Presidential Address."

[93] Iqbal, "Masjid-e-Qurtuba: The Mosque of Cordoba," http://iqbalurdu.blogspot.com /2011/04/bal-e-jibril-124-masjid-e-qurtaba.html.

[94] Ahmed Afzaal, "Iqbal's Approach to the Qur'ān," *Iqbal Review* 49, no. 4 (2008): 9-32.

untangling the knotty problems and questions both of scriptural interpretation and of human existence itself."[95]

He was critical of the backwardness of *'ulamā'* who had limited knowledge of moral and religious values of Islam and who did not understand the needs of modern times. He argues that "in order to persuade the people to adopt in their lives the moral and religious values of Islam, it is necessary for a preacher of today to be not only familiar with subjects like history, economics and sociology, but he must also have complete knowledge of the literature and modes of thinking of the community."[96] While being critical of *'ulamā',* he was fully aware of their role in Muslim society, and he asserted on the education and training of *'ulamā'* to reconstruct *'ilm al-kalām* and Islamic jurisprudence to meet the contemporary needs.[97]

Discussion

While discussing the history of reform in Islam during modern times, it is evident that various movements have sought to reform Muslim thought and practice, often in response to perceived stagnation or the addition of foreign elements within the religious establishment, as mentioned earlier.[98] For instance, the Wahhābī movement in eighteenth-century Arabia aimed to purify Islam by returning to the practices of the early Muslim community, reflecting similar movements across the Muslim world.[99] However, a different type of Muslim reformers emerged later in the nineteenth century, known as Muslim modernists. This modern reformist discourse primarily developed in response to the modernity introduced by colonial occupations in Muslim lands. It sought to reconcile religious and socio-religious developments with Islamic fundamentals. In addressing these challenges, intellectuals across the Muslim world produced numerous writings aimed at reforming religious practices perceived as outdated or incompatible with modernity.

Muslim modernism, as a movement, was multifaceted and embraced a wide range of perspectives. It included rationalists, Salafi revivalists, critics of Western ideologies, and adaptationists. The movement engaged in debates on various issues such as the nation state,[100] Islamic

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[95] Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyāt-i Iqbāl* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1990), 402.

[96] Javid Iqbal, "Iqbal's View of Ijtihad and a Modern Islamic State," *Iqbal Review* 49, no. 4 (2008): 198-211.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Voll, *Islam*, 87-89.

[99] Dallal, "Origins and Early Development of Islamic Reform," 107-39.

[100] Esposito, *Islamic Threat*, 62.

socialism,[101] feminism, and the validity of *ḥadīth*,[102] as well as the dichotomy of *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* and *jihād*.[103] These diverse viewpoints and debates contributed to the complexity and depth of Muslim modernism. Notable examples of Muslim modernist efforts include Rifāʿah al-Ṭahṭāwī's nationalism, Syed Ahmad Khan's reconstruction of *ʿilm al-kalām*, Syed Ameer Ali's (d. 1928) apologetic elevation of Islamic history,[104] and Muḥammad ʿAbduh's rationalist approach.[105] These efforts represent key components of earlier Muslim modernism, reflecting the broader intellectual engagement within the movement. The legacy of Muslim modernists remains a subject of considerable debate, with interpretations ranging from viewing them as apologists to identifying them as neo-Mutazilites and *ḥadīth* rejectionists.[106] However, all proponents of the movement agreed on one fundamental point that Muslims needed major reforms and that intellectual stagnation had to be addressed. As Smith aptly noted, "The fundamental malaise of modern Islam is a sense that something has gone wrong with Islamic history. The fundamental problem of modern Muslims is how to rehabilitate that history: to set it going again in full vigour, so that Islamic society may once again flourish as a divinely-guided society should and must."[107]

The example of Luther was particularly influential for many modernist reformers, as mentioned earlier, including al-Afghānī and Iqbal, who travelled extensively, observed Western progress firsthand, and witnessed the deteriorating state of the Muslims. They saw Luther as a figure who critiqued corrupt practices and advocated for a personal relationship with God, bypassing priests. Relating to Luther's efforts, they sought to reform and revitalize Muslim societies by promoting modern interpretations of the Qurʾānic text and challenging the *ʿulamāʾ*. Luther symbolized the challenge to orthodoxy and the reform of

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[101] Sami A. Hanna, "Al-Afghani: A Pioneer of Islamic Socialism," *The Muslim World* 57, no. 1 (1967): 24-32.

[102] Sheila McDonough, *The Authority of the Past: A Study of Three Muslim Modernists* (Chambersburg: American Academy of Religion, 1976), 83; J. M. S. Baljon, Jr., "Pakistani Views of Hadith," *Die Welt des Islams* 5, nos. 3-4 (1958): 219-27.

[103] Moulavi Cherágh Ali, *A Critical Exposition of the Popular "Jihád"* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1885).

[104] Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam: The History of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam with a Life of the Prophet* (Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, 1981).

[105] Charles Wendell, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Identity: From Its Origins to Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1972), 295-313; Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 206.

[106] William E. Shepard, "Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 307-35.

[107] Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 47.

religious dogmas, emphasizing individual interpretations of sacred texts and rejecting centralized religious authority. Their admiration for Luther stemmed not from a desire for similar turmoil in their own lands but from his success in challenging and reforming religious practices. Although they did not always consider the specific historical context of the Reformation or the subsequent conflicts in medieval Europe, Luther remained a powerful symbol for their reformist aspirations.

Despite their deep interest in Luther's ideas, al-Afghānī and Iqbal significantly differed in their interpretations of his teachings. For al-Afghānī, Luther was the historical figure who rebelled against the corrupt practices of the Catholic Church and advocated for a more direct relationship between the individual and God. Al-Afghānī saw these ideas as particularly relevant to the Muslim world, where he believed that the *'ulamā'* had become overly dogmatic and disconnected from the people's needs. He called for a return to the original sources of Islam and advocated for adopting modern scientific and technological knowledge, emphasizing the Qur'ān alone, akin to Luther's focus on individual interpretation of the Bible. However, his understanding of the Protestant Reformation's repercussions and consequences appears superficial, and likening him to Luther is an overstatement. The comparison is valid only in the broad sense that he sought to inspire an Islamic reformation. It is misleading to suggest that he attempted something akin to nailing theses to a mosque's door. Unlike sixteenth-century Germany, which was not under foreign occupation, the political context in al-Afghānī's time was significantly different.[108] Unity among Christian nations was not as crucial in Luther's era as it was for Muslims under European domination in the nineteenth century, and al-Afghānī, being a pioneer of Pan-Islamism, was an advocate of that unity. He, therefore, had to proceed more cautiously than the Reformation leaders, as he believed that radical reforms or theological innovations could undermine Muslim unity and weaken their resistance to European hegemony. His goal was to promote theological reforms to reverse the stagnation of Muslim societies without sparking religious conflicts that could fragment them.[109]

Iqbal, on the other hand, had a better understanding of Luther's ideas than al-Afghānī. He believed that Muslim societies were transforming similar to the one that sparked the Protestant Revolution in Europe. He recognized the importance of Luther's role in breaking down the institutionalized power of the Catholic Church, but also saw

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[108] Margaret Kohn, "Afghānī on Empire, Islam, and Civilization," *Political Theory* 37, no. 3 (2009): 410-15.

[109] Ibid.

the potential dangers of a similar approach in the Muslim world. Unlike the Christian world in Luther's time, the Muslim world was not characterized by a centralized religious authority that needed to be challenged.[110] Instead, Islam already provided a direct relationship between the individual and God through the Qur'ān and the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad. Iqbal argued that the problem with the Muslim world was not a lack of direct access to God, but rather a lack of understanding and appreciation of Islamic teachings among both the masses and the *'ulamā'*. Thus, he believed that the focus should be on promoting a more enlightened and progressive interpretation of Islam, rather than trying to destroy existing institutions.[111]

In terms of their broader views on reform in the Muslim world, al-Afghānī and Iqbal recognized the need for reform in the Muslim world; nevertheless, they differed in their approaches to achieving it. Al-Afghānī was quite appreciative of Luther and envisioned himself as the Luther of the Muslim world who could bring transformation and challenge existing power structures, including the *'ulamā'* and traditional religious institutions. Iqbal, on the other hand, believed that reform should come from within and should be based on a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings, rather than a rejection of them.[112] He argued that the Islamic tradition needed to be reinterpreted and reformed to make it relevant to the needs of modern society. He believed that this required a rejection of the legalism and rigidity of traditional Islamic scholarship and a return to the spiritual and ethical principles of the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad. Both his prose and poetry can be seen as a reflection of his reformist thought.[113] Iqbal, unlike al-Afghānī, also seemed to be better aware of the historical context in which Luther emerged in Europe, and he recognized that a similar figure could not emerge in the Muslim world due to the different structures of the two religions. He saw Luther as a figure who emphasized the importance of individual faith and personal relationship with God, and who rejected the dogmatism and hierarchy of traditional religious institutions. At the same time, Iqbal was critical of Luther's emphasis on individualism and the separation of church and state, which he saw as incompatible with the Islamic tradition. Iqbal believed that Islam offered a comprehensive system of life that encompassed both religious and

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[110] Iqbal, "1930 Presidential Address."

[111] Iqbal, *Reconstruction,* 141-59.

[112] Iqbal, "1930 Presidential Address."

[113] Iqbal, *Reconstruction,* 175-205.

secular spheres, and that the role of religion in society was to provide a framework for the pursuit of social justice and the common good.[114]

Iqbal also saw the potential for the national idea to become a force for transformation in the Muslim world, as it had in Europe. He believed that the national idea could be used to unify Muslims and create a sense of solidarity among them, but only if it was harnessed in a way that was compatible with the fundamental principles of Islam.[115] In his poetry, Iqbal often evoked the idea of a spiritual revolution in Islam, which he saw as necessary for the religion to adapt to the modern world. He envisioned this as a movement that would arise from within the Muslim world and bring about a renewal of the faith. Iqbal's engagement with the legacy of Luther was particularly significant, as it helped him to articulate a vision of Islamic renewal that was grounded in the religion itself and not through rejection of religious belief, as had happened in Europe.

Iqbal quoted Friedrich Naumann's *Briefe über Religion* to highlight the challenge of building a state or establishing social relations solely based on pure Christian doctrine. He believed that Christianity focused too much on spiritualizing life to the point of neglecting the complexities of human social relations. In contrast, Iqbal saw Islam as aligning with Christianity in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, but emphasized that this illumination was not separate from the material world. He criticized Christianity for being overly spiritual and otherworldly in its core doctrine, while not fully realizing the ideals of universal love and mercy advocated by its founder. He also noted a problematic tension between the spiritual and the material, exemplified by the separation of state and church in the sociopolitical realm.[116]

Subsequently, while both al-Afghānī and Iqbal saw Luther as an important historical figure, their interpretations of his ideas differed significantly. Al-Afghānī saw Luther's ideas as a model for challenging existing power structures in the Muslim world, while Iqbal believed that a more enlightened approach to Islamic teachings was necessary. Ultimately, their differing views reflected the complexities of reform in the Muslim world and the ongoing debate over the best strategies for achieving it.

Though al-Afghānī ostensibly understood the Reformation, Iqbal was misled on a few instances. For example, the assessment of Luther promoting the idea of "faith in the natural goodness of man" is wrong.

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[114] Iqbal, "1930 Presidential Address."

[115] Ibid.

[116] Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study of the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 344-45.

Instead, Luther emphasized the total depravity of humanity, believing that salvation comes solely through faith in God's grace.[117] In contrast, Catholic doctrine views depravity as incidental, asserting that the inherent goodness of humanity can develop within any culture or religion but is somewhat obstructed by depravity. Moreover, his assessment of Christianity as "a purely monastic order" is flawed. A cursory investigation of medieval Christianity reveals that Christianity has always been deeply involved in politics, law, and even agriculture, making the idea of it being completely otherworldly inaccurate. Roman Christianity in the fourth century was far from being apolitical, as evidenced by the life of Ambrose and the history of the Council of Nicaea.[118] Therefore, Iqbal's understanding of the historical context of the Reformation appears to be quite incomplete.

The fascination with the Reformation and Luther has been a recurring theme in Muslim societies, with academics and scholars frequently drawing parallels between various Muslim thinkers and Luther, often labelling them as "Luthers of Islam."[119] This analogy has been particularly significant for twentieth-century reformers, who found it useful to liken their efforts to those of Luther. Moreover, some scholars equate the transformative impact of the twentieth century with that of the sixteenth-century Reformation, highlighting the profound changes brought about in both periods.[120]

The problem facing Muslim modernist reformers is that they are aware of the malaise that hollowed the once vibrant Muslim culture, political power, and civilization, but they are sceptical of the medicine. If the Reformation led to the reawakening of Europe, it also diminished the power of religion and replaced it with reason, rationality, and the scientific method as the driving forces of human existence. The power of the church gave way to the divine right of kings, which ultimately paved

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[117] Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio "On the Enslaved Will" or The Bondage of Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005), http://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/bondage.html.

[118] Stanley Lawrence Greenslade, *Church and State from Constantine to Theodosius* (London: Greenwood, 1954); Nathan Israel Smolin, "Christ the Emperor: Roman Emperor and Christian Theology in the 4th Century AD" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2021); Rugare Rukuni and Erna Oliver, "Nicaea as Political Orthodoxy: Imperial Christianity versus Episcopal Polities," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 1-10, http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5313.

[119] Roman Loimeier, "Is There Something like 'Protestant Islam'?" *Die Welt des Islams* 45, no. 2 (2005): 216-54; Sukidi, "The Traveling Idea of Islamic Protestantism: A Study of Iranian Luthers," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 16, no. 4 (2005): 401-12, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410500252343.

[120] Dale F. Eickleman, "Inside the Islamic Reformation," *The Wilson Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1998): 80-89.

the way for democratic governments governed by secular constitutions and not scriptures.[121] Religion became a personal matter between the individual and God, and that is something Muslim modernists, despite their disdain for tradition and the orthodox *'ulamā'*, find difficult to adjust to. Despite all their talk of reform and assurances that Islam is compatible with the new world, they do not want a rupture between Islam and public life or the affairs of the nation state. Modern Europe is a secular Europe, and that is not acceptable to the vast majority of Muslims in terms of its application to their own societies. Only a bold modernist aspires for a complete separation of religion and state.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is crucial to recognize that while the Christian Reformation and contemporary Muslim reform movements may appear strikingly similar on an abstract level, there are significant structural differences, particularly regarding specific theological questions. Even if comparisons on a religious level are accepted, one must exercise caution while making social or cultural comparisons, as the historical experiences in Christian and Muslim countries differ greatly. Thus, it is not feasible to directly translate the Catholic-Protestant dichotomy of sixteenth-century Europe into contemporary Muslim contexts. Muslim reform movements are intrinsically linked to their own contexts and historical legacies, even if the processes of transformation share similarities in character, expression, and direction.

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[121] Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that have Shaped Our World View* (London: Pimlico, 2010), 233-47.