

Editorial

During periods of social, political or economic discontent leading to communal unrest, people tend to turn against established social patterns in search of saviours to ameliorate their sufferings and restore order. For believing communities, such as the Muslim community, recourse has been made to religion in the hope of enjoying what the Qur’ān calls “*ḥayātan ṭayyibah*” (a good and prosperous life) promised to those who uphold its values. The vanguards of transformation who are the torchbearers in Islamic religious thought are known as revivalists or reformers. Their regenerative activities are often described as *iṣlāḥ* (reform), *ihyā’* (revival), *tajdīd* (renewal), or *ṣaḥwah* (awakening), among others.

Among the prominent early Muslim reformers are al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406). Shah Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1762), Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792), Uthman dan Fodio (d. 1817), and Ahmad ibn Idris (d. 1837) are among the well-known reformers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Rahman, 1970; Voll, 1999). These individuals or movement leaders differed in their approaches; yet their primary concern, as Fazlur Rahman observes, was with the socio-moral reform and reconstruction of Muslim societies based on the values promoted in the Qur’ān and Sunnah (Rahman, 1970, p. 640).

The urge for reform in the Islamic religious context arises primarily from the interaction between revelation and history. As an embodiment of the divine message to humankind, revelation is meant to be upheld as a source of guidance not only by its immediate audience but also by subsequent generations. Yet in human history, this constant and stable message was often preached within the context of changing variables. Such interplay between continuity and change has posed a challenge to generations that are not immediate audiences of the message. The longer the distance between the first revelation and its subsequent interpretations, the more difficult it became to relate the text to the new

context. Such a disparity between time and revelation is addressed in the form of reform.

The Islamic perspective of revival and reform could be further linked with the succession of God's messages and messengers in history as presented in the Qur'ān. As indicated in the Qur'ān, humankind tends to be forgetful or negligent of the divine teachings after a long hiatus of revelation. In one instance, the Qur'ān notes that the heart becomes indurate, mainly due to a long time-lapse of no messenger (57:16). Thus, successive prophets and messengers were sent to their respective nations as reformers to remind of the forgotten or correct the adulterated divine teachings whilst addressing the problems faced by their respective nations (Solihu, 2003). In *Sūrat al-Shu'arā'* (*sūrah* 26), for example, reference is made to the messages brought by Prophets Mūsā, Ibrāhīm, Nūḥ, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lūṭ, Shu'ayb as well as Muhammad (peace be upon them). While there are common and recurrent themes that stretch across these messages, each message was tailored to suit the socio-historical need of the primary target audience. At times, two distinct *sharā'ih* (plural of *sharī'ah*) were contemporaneous (Mūsā's *sharī'ah* with Shu'ayb's *sharī'ah*, and Ibrāhīm's *sharī'ah* with Lūṭ's *sharī'ah*) in order to meet the peculiarities of their respective nations. If the message of Mūsā and that of Shu'ayb were transposed, whereby Mūsā's *sharī'ah* was preached to Shu'ayb's nation and vice versa, or those of Ibrāhīm and Lūṭ were swapped, revelation will not have been *hudan* (guidance) for its target audience and thus would have become irrelevant.

This suggests that what was viable for the past may not necessarily be viable for the present, and what works well for one nation may not work well for another unless the contexts and conditions in which they were operating are properly taken into consideration. Thus, reform should not be construed as an attempt to replicate the past, which unfortunately is often the case, but as a reinvigoration of existential values that happened to be inaugurated in the historical past.

The point here is that the stage must remain dynamic and people active otherwise the situation spontaneously deteriorates. To remain relevant in contemporary times, Muslims need to find suitable ways of expressing Islamic values and its religious tradition without being antagonistic or apologetic nor coercive or submissive. Muslim

leaders need to introduce new ways of serving their nations and educationalists need to improve the structure of Islamic disciplines by updating their content and improving the style of expression and the mode of delivery in ways that will be meaningful and effective to the contemporary target audience. Such a “relephantisation” process has been the mission of the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

This issue of *Intellectual Discourse* contains articles that address reform in political, judicial and religious stratifications. The first article, by Noore Alam Siddiquee, provides a preliminary assessment of the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) introduced by the current Malaysian government as a new model of public service reform. Compared with many developing countries among OIC member states, Malaysia has done remarkably well, particularly in political and economic sectors. Yet with the rising demands and expectations of Malaysian citizens, the government must do better to keep meeting the aspirations of its people. As opposed to past initiatives that were mostly process-driven with weak implementation strategies, the GTP is a performance driven approach to public service reform with measurable outcomes. Its constant monitoring and implementation mechanisms have contributed to its seeming success. The author identifies key areas where the GTP has produced impressive results and highlights limitations and areas in which the scheme could be improved.

In the second article, Abdulfatai O. Sambo and Hunud Abia Kadouf examine the Islamic system of checks and balances by analysing the provisions for judicial review of decisions made by political leaders. To demonstrate the rule of law and the independence of the court in the Islamic system of governance, the authors cite cases where the judiciary checked the leaders’ acts and successfully nullified their decisions that were deemed not in line with the teachings of the Qur’ān and Sunnah. The study argues that failure to exercise constant judicial review of political decisions and political elites has led to the abuse and concentration of power in the hands of the ruling elites resulting in the public uprising against the established pattern of leadership. The paper concludes with the need to reform the judiciary and protect the public from arbitrary rule.

The next article, by Esam Eltigani Mohamed Ibrahim and Ibrahim M. Zein, provides a preliminary assessment of Hasan al-Turabi's ongoing exegetical work titled *al-Tafsīr al-Tawhīdī*. Hasan al-Turabi is a contemporary political ideologist and controversial jurist of note who sought holistic reform in all strata of Muslim society through a complete reinterpretation of the Qur'ān. Through a textual and contextual reading, Mohamed Ibrahim and Zein uncover the ideological postulates of *al-Tafsīr al-Tawhīdī*.

In the last article, Reeshma Haji and Deanna Hall assess the extent to which "quest religiosity", or the tendency to see religion as a personal and lifelong search for meaning in life, would affect one's attitude towards religious outgroups. Against the backdrop of growing concerns over Islamophobia in many Western countries, the research was conducted among the predominant Christian community in Canada where Muslims and Jews represent minority groups. The authors link religious fundamentalism to prejudice and negative attitudes toward religious outgroups while associating quest religiosity with openness and tolerance towards people of other faiths.

The nature of the reforms addressed by these articles relates to human actions among themselves *in* nature, whilst a different form of reform that would address human interactions *with* nature is equally necessary. Modern modes of transportation have in many respects generated comfort in transportation but also occasionally led to disasters, causing great pains to humans as well as nonhumans. On April 16, 2014, the South Korean ferry, MV Sewol, capsized killing 292 people and leaving 12 more missing (as of June 9, 2014). Earlier, on March 8, 2014, the Malaysian airline MH370, en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, vanished with 227 passengers and 12 crew on board. With the most extensive and expensive search operation in aviation history failing to produce any trace or wreckage of the plane for more than three months since its disappearance, conspiracy theories of varying absurdity continue to fill the void. There is a need to improve the safety and environmental sustainability of human technological inventions. Until such a reform is carried out, our heartfelt condolence and prayer go to the victims and the bereaved of what appears to be human-driven or human-precipitated twin disasters.

References

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