FROM DOGMA TO REVOLUTION

Dr. H. Hanafi (b.1935), one of the leading philosophers in contemporary Islamic thought, devoted his hermeneutical studies to the Pakistani Muhammad Iqbal (d.1938), originator of the reconstruction of modern Islam in a secular world. Both philosophers see subjectivity, or if we may say anthropology, as core and kernel of the message of the Koran. Man is the heart of the matter. The adagium "I am the Truth" (Ana al-Haqq) of Al-Hallaj (d.922), transposed by Iqbal from a pantheistic escapism into world-changing responsibility, is radicalized by Hanafi into the truth of the underprivileged. According to Hanafi, the unity of God is not found in scripture or pulpit, not even in the mystical experience of an isolated subjectivity, but is unfolded throughout human history, in the midst of social reality, opposing and annihilating all powers of evil, estrangement and economic oppression.

The thinker who wants to reconstruct a tradition is doomed to loneliness, especially the outsider of that tradition, since he is not recognized as being authentic and genuine in his cultural inspiration. Is he only adapting Cartesian rationalism or Husserlian phenomenology within an Islamic framework without any creativity, as western commentators have said? The thinker is also doomed to loneliness within his own tradition, because fellow-believers do not recognize the religious inspiration of his radical reconstruction. When Hanafi translated and commented Spinoza's "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus" into Arabic, he felt a very close affinity to Spinoza's position as far as Jewish and Protestant orthodoxy accused Spinoza of blasphemy and atheism.

Hanafi intends to renew a tradition which is petrified. In Orthodox Islamic thinking, especially of the Ash'arite type, man lives in a hierarchical or pyramidal world, in which Islam is paradigmatic in a cognitive and normative sense. All spheres of human life are influenced by a comprehensive and vertical theism, overshadowing the historical dimension of the subjectivity of human consciousness. This theistic tendency contributes to pessimism, apathy and resignation, especially among the, mostly underprivileged, masses in the Islamic world. Theistic dualism and hierarchical structures are the main causes of poverty and underdevelopment in contemporary Islam in the Third World. Verticalism, directed to God at the top, leads to a withdrawal from the world. Religious estrangement is the origin of other forms of alienation: physiological, psychological, economic, social, political and so on.
Similar to P. Freire's theory, Hanafi presupposes a total and comprehensive reconstruction of the religio-cultural tradition, on the basis of subjectivity, as a necessary condition for changing daily reality. The Islamic world cannot be liberated by technology or western modernism. Underdevelopment is first of all a psychological mentality because ideas condition people towards resignation and negativism. However, ideas can also change people, especially in the Islamic world where the word of God, incarnated in the Koran, is sacramentally present at every street corner. This attitude towards the religio-cultural tradition as a treasury of revolutionary potential, brings Hanafi together with those Third World-theologians in South Africa and Latin America who transpose the Christian religion into a conscientizing language.

Religion as a revolutionary medium or as a vehicle of rebellion is indeed clearly discernible in recent fundamentalist upheavals within the Islamic community. Many Muslim intellectuals were enthusiastic when Islam advocated a new hope for the future among millions of people. The voice of God was no longer at the top but in the midst of the masses, inspiring them in their historical protest against tyranny and oppression.

In 1980 Hanafi translated the sermons of Khumayni from Persian into Arabic. But his enthusiasm was very soon mitigated and in the end he became disillusioned when the original ideals of equality and justice were destroyed. Fundamentalism could be valued as worthwhile as long as the religious tradition conscientized the masses on the street, but at the same time anthropomorphism in theology has always to be criticized dialectically by a rational reasoning about divine unity. Hanafi's sympathy towards the resurgence of Islam could be compared with Hegel's applause about the happenings in the Bastille in 1789. From Germany Hegel appreciated the ideals of freedom, equality and justice as the unfolding of the Weltgeist in reality. But one year later, when revolutionary commandos endangered the streets of Paris, Hegel's original approval was tempered. Apparently, there is always a danger in identifying the voice of the underprivileged masses with the voice of God. This ambiguity causes a permanent ambivalence to the committed thinker, of which Hanafi is very conscious. Outlining the enormous literary production of dr.Hanafi I limit the interpretation of his philosophical thought to three issues, namely 1. Criticism of contemporary Islamic sciences. 2. Hermeneutical and epistemological options. 3. Religion and ideology.

1. Criticism of contemporary Islamic sciences

In recent philosophical and theological anthropology the Koranic theme of man as deputy of God is repeatedly underlined. This focus on the supreme worth of man as co-operator of Allah, the Creator, is symptomatic for the neo-Mu'tazilite tendency, because