BOOK REVIEW

Muhammed Kamil Hussain, The Hallowed Valley: A Muslim Philosophy of Religion. Translated into English from Arabic by Kenneth Cragg, the American University, Cairo, 1977. pp. 112.

Dr. Kamil Husain is best known for his renowned work City of Wrong (Qaryah Zālimah), warmly received among the academic circles. The title of the book under review, like the previous one, is also based on a Qur'ānic phrase "al-wādî al-muqaddas" (the sacred or the hallowed valley). It has been taken from the verse: "Verily, I am thy Lord, so take off thy shoes, verily thou art in the sacred valley Ṭuwā" (20:12), an address made to Moses by God when he visited the valley of Ṭuwā in Sinai. But in this book the author does not discuss the valley or the story of Moses. By this title he refers to the pure heart, the soul at peace, and the deep faith. In his own words, "When you achieve purity of heart, then you are there in the hallowed valley. When you do not, you are outside it. There is no half-way house." (p. 83). The book falls into seven chapters: The hallowed valley, purity of heart, purity of heart by way of religion, guidance and misguidedness, the eternal realities, the state of being wanting, and the haze of life.

In this work, Dr. Husain, who is a medical doctor, presents a psychological treatment of religion. Religion in his opinion, does not come from without, but it comes from within, from the inner self of man. What he calls the hallowed valley is one's faith and voice of conscience. "It is the place where faith in your convictions is strong and pure, unsullied by doubt and unassailed by weakness." (p. 12). Purity of heart, in his opinion, is essential for the peace of soul. It is purified by faith, love, and goodness, but faith stands par excellence. He thinks that the goal of life is known within oneself. (p. 19). He has his own interpretation of good and evil: Good is that in which one's soul feels entire satisfaction, and where no external factor intervenes. Evil is that action which a man wants subsequently to disavow and which does not in one's innermost soul commend itself as right. (p. 23).

The purpose of human life, in his opinion, is to attain the purity of heart which is the supreme principle of human spirit. In neglecting this the spirit finds no rest. (p. 27). The constituents of religion are: "The soul that seeks guidance, a pole that draws and a quality within the soul that disposes it to the pull of the pole. The third attribute is what we call faith. This is a psycho-cosmic phenomenon." (p. 32). Man's purpose of life is determined by his inward quality, and intellect brings about in actuality what the soul seeks. Its function is restricted to the formulation of faith. (pp. 35, 38). Faith is a power latent in a normal soul deriving from the very nature of its constitution. It differs in expression with the varieties of mind. (pp. 35, 37). The religious acts, according to the author, make man more susceptible to guidance, and more aware of the need of it.
Human capacity to understand the good is enhanced by them. In this respect there is no distinction between religions. Their essentials are: God, one's self, one's faith, and the creed and cults which derived from faith. This inner purification of heart brings man to the hallowed valley — the invitation to soul peace through entire satisfaction. This experience of inward purity would bring about the unity of mankind, religious and non-religious. (pp. 39-40). In his view purity of heart is the end of religion. If beliefs serve this purpose, they are right, if not, people are justified to differ by religions (p. 43).

Guidance, according to the author, begins within the soul and the soul is criterion as to the right guidance. Shirk (polytheism) is ignorance of that by which one should be guided and ignorance of the one to whom one should turn as a guide, or of not having God as God. Kufr (unbelief) is to find oneself without God. In his opinion one's conscience is one's rightly guided self. Hence loyalty to conscience must be secure from compromise. (p. 63).

The differences among various religions can be mitigated by going deep into the eternal realities. He illustrates this point by giving the example of Muslim and Christian approaches to the question of crucifixion of Messiah. Whether indeed he was crucified or it seemed so to those who thought they had killed him. He suggests that people can differ about events without any division among themselves. (pp. 75-76).

He thinks that lack of faith in man is a deformity in his very nature, and a self without faith is not perfectly human. In this very life of the hazy man lives another life. That is the "deep sure life of the soul" where everything is manifest. (p. 105)

These are a few main points of his thesis about religion. One feels that Dr. Husain has developed this thesis vis-a-vis religion, and that his central themes, like purity of heart and peace of soul, are humanistic besides being religious. He has in fact developed in his own form several basic concepts within the Qur'an, as Kenneth Cragg rightly puts it. They are, for instance, imān (faith), huda (guidance), dādal (misguidedness) al-strāt al-mustaqīm (the straight path), nafs mutma'inna (the soul at peace), and others. (p. 4). This work is unique in its approach to the understanding of religion, its concepts and doctrines. It is, however, true that his philosophic idiom, and rational interpretation of certain religious concepts and doctrines are sometimes confusing and one may be misled by such an analysis.

Kenneth Cragg has translated the book into beautiful English. He has added an introduction and a postscript with his valuable comments and criticism on some of his concepts. He has also explained the Christian point of view about some doctrines not rightly understood by the author.

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