BOOK REVIEW

MENSCH UND GESELLSCHAFT IM ISLAM (Man and Society in Islam — An Analysis with Special Reference to the Critique of Religion by Karl Marx and to the Studies in the Sociology of Religion by Max Weber), Ph. D. dissertation presented to the University of Cologne, Germany, by Muḥammad ‘Uthmān Malik of Rajanpur, Pakistan, 221 pages.

Occasionally it appears as if the author makes Marxism the criterion by which the validity of religion in the scientific age is to be judged, as if the yardstick by which to measure Islam is Marx’s critique of religion and Weber’s sociology. This is, however, a mere a tactic adopted as ruse of war in the book under review. What the author really aims at is, if not a refutation, then at least an adjustment of Marx and Weber. The substance of religion, as ‘Uthmān Malik understands it, has not been questioned by the rationalist onslaught at all. Marx and Weber merely subjected to criticism certain empirical forms of the social fabric as evolved over the centuries (23). This is the familiar argument advanced by many apologists against the critics of Islam: ‘Had they only understood the pristine message they would have accepted it; but unfortunately they were misled by certain un-Islamic practices that have crept into the true faith due to a number of historical factors.’

It is certainly remarkable how rigorously ‘Uthmān Malik seems to abjure historical Islam. Few Muslim thinkers are so radical in their return to the undiluted substance, freed from all overlays. But then this is just another inconsistency, for only one page earlier he operates with the complete-code-of-life-slogan. ‘Uthmān Malik holds the religion (of Islam) to be superior to Marxism because it comprehends man in his unity of finitude and infinity. He feels that in his disquisition he has demonstrated this unity of the material and the spiritual realm at the instance of Islam by reverting to its essential substance. A formidable claim indeed! Behind a highly sophisticated vocabulary a pious intention and missionary zeal.

The new wine of sociological and German philosophical terminology has been poured into vessels dating back to the pre-pluralistic age when sermonizing was the order of the day. He does this by quoting over several pages the ninety-nine beautiful names of God (here again he is inconsistent by insisting sometimes on calling the Lord by his Arabic name Allāh and then sliding back to the German Gott). The 99 asmāʿ ḥusnā are given first in Arabic letters, then in transliteration, and finally in translation. (One wonders whether ‘Uthmān Malik supplied each of his examiners with an exotic tasbīḥ and taught them to read the names aloud with the help of the rosary). He obviously intends to tell Messrs. Marx and Weber in their cool graves that they had no inkling of the Qur’ānic concept of God, otherwise they would have converted to the True Faith.

A discussion of Islam in the light of Marxist critique of religion is an imperious responsibility now devolving on the intelligentsia of Pakistan. ‘Uthmān Malik deserves
a pat on the shoulder for having initiated such a laudable effort. And why should he not "refute the Marxist concept of religion at the instance of a concrete example, Islam"? If only the Islam proffered by him were really concrete! He broaches a number of issues, like the above-mentioned unity of finitude and infinity, where others like Iqbal have completed so much groundwork. But whereas we are wont to complain that no one takes up the thread and, at last, leaves Iqbal behind, 'Uthman Malik has not yet even arrived in the Poet-Philosopher's reconstructed edifice of religious thought. Surprisingly enough, we find a quotation, though not a very relevant one, from Iqbal's main prose work in the thesis under review. This compels us to level a serious charge against the author: he should have taken the time to go through his reference books more carefully. Besides, none of the poetry of Iqbal is mentioned in the awe-inspiring long bibliography, although Payam-e Mashriq and Javed Namah have been beautifully rendered into German by Professor Annemarie Schimmel and the author could have easily delighted his professors with some catchy verses by the Poet of the East.

We would not emphasize Iqbal and his exposition of the finality of prophethood so strongly if not for 'Uthman Malik's chapter on "Prophetenrevolution". Weber's ideal of the prophet and the Marxist-Leninist model of the revolutionary, these two archetypes Malik endeavors to synthesize into what he calls the specific concept of a revolution brought about by the Prophet (of Islam).

He helplessly tosses about in an effort to relate concepts of traditional faith to rationalist conceptions of the modern age; this leads to a number of contradictions. At times he outrightly contravenes traditional religion by calling revelation "the dream of the prophets" (127). At other instances he furtively attempts to make some beliefs pass the scrutiny of his Western professors, although with a better knowledge of Islamics he would have come forward with more appealing interpretations that his mentors could hardly have objected to as irrational or unscientific.

A study such as the one under review cannot be meaningful without entering into a dialogue with authorities like W. C. Smith and Montgomery Watt. Cantwell Smith should be especially relevant because he started as a Marxist and wrote an incisive thesis on Modern Islam in India from a Marxist point of view. In his magnum opus, Islam in Modern History, he recanted his former stance and visualized Islam as a religious body true to the democratic national state. Cantwell Smith's conversion and its reflection on his ideas about the meaningfulness of Islam to men and society should not have escaped the attention of 'Uthman Malik.

Montgomery Watt has written a reply to the question 'What is Islam?' (Beiruth, 1969). He answers as a sociologist, one of those who adopt, although in a highly erudite manner, the somewhat smug standpoint that Marx is long out of date. According to Montgomery Watt and scholars of his ilk, man has come to realize that he is not the creator of his self. As in former times man has again understood that he is hardly more than the passive tool of some strange inscrutable destiny. This is a return to a pre-scientific world-view, or rather a disenchantment with science and the promises it once seemed to hold. The awareness that man has not really progressed, that he has simply discovered larger worlds of mystery and more complicated riddles of the universe, Watt draws chiefly from the writings of self-critical scientists. We should hold that this is merely a sobering
down after an era of exhuberance in the scientific world, an exhuberance which led to gross inflations of the role of the scientist. It is going too far if one reads complete helplessness into these sceptical assessments by eminent scientists. Montgomery Watt, however, seems oversawed by such professions of impotence. This leads him to an affirmation of the fatalistic trend in Muslim thought. Whereas fatalism was a favourite target of Westerners in their allegations against Islam, it was emphatically denied by Muslim apologetic writers, who declared it to be a contradiction of 'true' Islam. Montgomery Watt, representing a third development, upholds the belief in *qadā* *wa* *qadr* as something rather positive. This is significant for it determines the perspective in which he views man and society in Islam.

Both these lessons seem to have been lost on 'Uthmān Malik. Western thought is available, ready made so to say. The Muslim student has only to absorb it diligently, make an effort at understanding - not necessarily a very thorough understanding, and reproduce relevant passages from the vast treasures proffered. While reproducing he can be very honest and express the assimilated knowledge in his own words and individual train of thought. But he can also go the easy way of adopting some well ringing and impressive phrases from here and there, inserting them skilfully into his own writing. Sometimes it is even less than that: the materials of others are neatly dismantled and reassembled by the author's own mental apparatus. The only homespun yarn are a few joints, or rather conjunctions, to give the whole a semblance of coherence. If this is done efficiently the 'new' presentation may come forward in a flux of its own and even sway the reader.

In the first part of the disquisition under review the German language is so excellent that one is made to marvel at the genius of the author who seems to have learnt it not only perfectly well but has attained a mastery that could provoke the envy of men born into this language. The explanation of this miracle is given in the second part which is written in a rather ordinary and clumsy style with frequent slogan mongering, often betraying the 'foreignness' of the writer. Thus it is obvious that the first part is little more than a patchwork of epitomizing phrases culled from the works to which the author had recourse. In the second half for which little such material was available in German, the writer was compelled to use his own expressions. The result would not be so dismaying if not for the contrast to the first part which is so competently collected from Marx, Weber, Tillich, etc.

Long passages from the Qur'ān, supposedly proving the fatherlessness of Jesus, etc., are not very relevant to the topic. One cannot help the impression that their main purpose is to enlarge the size of this little treatise. It is certainly indicative of the fact that 'Uthmān Malik has not fully come to terms with the materials he amassed in the first part of his dissertation.

To cite Mawdūdī and flank him by Sayyid Amir 'All and Ṭabārī bespeaks a weird sense of proportion (pp. 144-5). Amir'All may not have been a trained Islamicist, but he was certainly too outstanding a mind to be put on the same footing with a party ideologue like Mawdūdī. This reveals the full dimension of the dilemma, the author obviously left his country as a half-baked Mawdudite. Abroad he obtained a smattering of sociology without, however, simultaneous growth in the knowledge of Islam.
That 'Uthmān Malik was treated by his examiners with exceptional generosity shows a glance at his tawdry bibliography. On page 196, for instance, we find a book by Fazalur Rahman. On page 212 the same author is mentioned again, this time as Rahman, Fazlur. Dr. Malik availed himself of the German translation of the Qur'ān published by the Ahmadis of Rabwah. Why does he not indicate the publisher-translator in his bibliography?

Since the author is an Urdu speaking Pakistani the dissertation was an excellent opportunity to exhaust the material abundantly available in this language. This is a source almost untapped by German orientalists. Therefore he could have gained additional credit and enhanced the originality of his research. It is quite discomfiting that the only Urdu works cited are Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Musulmānun ki qismat ka fayṣla and Mawdūdī’s Tafhim al-Qur'ān. Absurdities such as Islam in Africa by Maḥmūd Brelvi or Islam versus the West by Maryam Jamila should not have been allowed to pass in a doctoral dissertation. Besides being so utterly unacademic they are in no way related to the topic; but this applies to a major portion of the bibliography.

—Detlev Khalid

* * * * *