

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN ISLAM

Mohammad Iqbal. Edited by M. Saeed Sheikh. Published by Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1986.

M. Saeed Sheikh's edition of *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* is a pleasant surprise to the readers and scholars of Iqbal. The *Reconstruction* is a compilation of six lectures Iqbal delivered at Madras, Aligarh and Hyderabad from 1920-30. It also includes a seventh one delivered at a session of Aristotelean Society at London in 1932. This is Iqbal's attempt to reconstruct an Islamic Metaphysics in the light of Quran, accommodating modern science and knowledge.

Throughout the book Iqbal has maintained that the spirit of the Quran is essentially anti-classical, though some Muslim philosophers of the past have erroneously used the paradigms of classical philosophy (Platonic and Aristotelean) in constructing a metaphysics of Islam. In the first two lectures, Iqbal maintains that Revelation, Nature, and History are the three great sources of knowledge. But, with the advent of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) the task of revelation was complete. "The birth of Islam was the birth of inductive intellect". The finality of prophethood meant the affirmation of Nature and History as the future sources of knowledge, supplemented with Religious Experience. However, the revelations of the prophet could be confirmed both by the intellectual and the pragmatic tests. Iqbal further maintains that the Quran gives a dynamic view of the universe in which Nature and History play an active role. It rejects the duality and contrast of Spirit and Nature so characteristic of Christianity (as practiced and propagated); and affirms that reality is a spiritual order of which Nature and History are part and parcel. It is through active contact with Nature and History that the soul of man can grow and participate in the eternal and catch the glimpse of the Absolute.

In the third and fourth lecture Iqbal explains the nature of the Infinite and Absolute Ego (God) and that of finite ego (man). The ego which is the ground of all experience is a rationally directed creative will. Its infinity consists in the "Infinite possibility of its creative activity, of which the

universe as known to us is only a partial expression.” In the manner of God the Infinite Ego, man the finite ego, is also a creative will. He is chosen by God to be his vicegerent on earth, and is a trustee of a free personality and thus responsible to God for his deeds. His finitude does not imply the possibility of annihilation in the Absolute (as thought by some sufis); it rather means immortality. The highest state attainable by man is complete affirmation of his self.” The climax of his development is reached when the ego is able to retain full possession, even in the case of a direct contact with the all embracing ego.” Says Iqbal, “this is the ideal of perfect manhood in Islam which stands wholesome before every intellectual test.

The fifth lecture is dedicated to establishing the anti-classical spirit of Quran. Here Iqbal combats Spengler’s charge that there is an overlaying of Magian crust on Islamic culture in which revelation plays a vital role in all stages of its development. Rejecting this charge, Iqbal argues that declaring the finality of prophethood (which is an important element of a Muslim’s faith), the Quran has shown the direction in which man should look in future for guidance and knowledge. This should not be Revelation any more, but Nature and History. Thus, science becomes the greatest companion of man in his search for knowledge and fulfilment.

The sixth lecture, “The Principle of Self-movement in Islam” is a very precious note on the value of Ijtihad. Here Iqbal complains that the Islamic culture all over the world is suffering from stagnation. He expresses the dire need to revise Islamic jurisprudence. If Islam is a living and dynamic force, it must be capable of coping with different approaches to life provided they lead to the final goal which is the ego’s complete affirmation of itself before the Absolute Ego (Allah).

The last lecture “Is Religion Possible?” was addressed to a non-Muslim audience in which Iqbal reviews the possibility of giving a rational basis to religion. Faith, Reason, and discovery, these are the three levels of religious knowledge. It is at the level of discovery that the essence of religion is unraveled through religious experience which establishes the contact with one’s deeper self- the “appreciative self,” and, through that, with the Eternal and the Absolute (God). This experience is different from other normal experiences (sensory, rational etc.),but is not itself abnormal, or psychopathic. It is even different from mystic experience which aims at

assimilation of the finite ego in the infinite. It is a contemplative insight into the meaning of religion which enables man to achieve higher goals. Its rational basis is that, it stands the pragmatic test. Were it psychopathic, the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him), who experienced it in the highest form (revelation) would not have been able to revolutionize the social, moral and ethical structure of the ailing humanity.

The Reconstruction is the most remarkable attempt of Iqbal to establish the philosophical foundation of Islam while showing its compatibility with modern Science and knowledge. However, despite the ingenuity of this work the Reconstruction, as and when written by Iqbal and published in 1930-34, was lacking in documentation. Great philosophers very little care for technicalities. In little time they have, they want to benefit literature and thought to the maximum. Iqbal, therefore, hardly gives complete references. He mentions philosophers or scientists, cites their views directly or indirectly without giving complete details of their work. Nor did he care to add a bibliography, an index or a glossary. This, he rightly thought is the work of his successors, who would perhaps write thesis, dissertation, or other scholarly work on his work, and would interpret and reinterpret him.

M. Saeed Sheikh in his edition of Reconstruction has done enormous scholarly work in giving it the present shape. By adding reference, annotations, bibliography, general Index, Index or Quranic verses etc., he has completely documented the Reconstruction. This was a very tough job, which required not only very vast and deep knowledge of Iqbal's ideas and thought, but also of the whole of Islamic and Western philosophical literature. Above all it required extensive and deep knowledge and understanding of Quran and Hadith.

This laborious, dedicated and challenging job could not have been undertaken by anyone less in calibre than the present editor. M. Saeed Sheikh is a renowned scholar of Islam who has contributed many valuable works to Islamic philosophical literature. Studies in Muslim Philosophy, Sh. Ashraf, Lahore, A Dictionary of Muslim Philosophy, Lahore, 1981, are a few among these. He had also been the Director of the Institute of Islamic Culture. It is actually during the period he was fulfilling this assignment that he undertook this challenging venture.

The nature of the work he undertook here, not only testified the extraordinary command of the editor on Western, Islamic and Quranic literature, but also shows his deep admiration and love of Iqbal. It is, I believe, far easier to write and expound ones own ideas than to search the material and ideas someone else has used from other sources to expound his views and thought, and to interpret them with responsibility and accuracy. You do it for someone only when you love that person and experience some joy in such acts of devotion. Saeed Sheikh's present enterprise undoubtedly, reflects his devotion to Iqbal and also for Islam.

On the cover page of the beautifully hardbound book appears the name of the author "Allama Mohammad Iqbal". It is obvious that Saeed Sheikh has deliberately ignored the modern convention of citing the given and the last name of the author as it is, and has chosen to cite the author's name alongwith his title "Allama" sheerly out of his love and respect of this great genius of the time and reformer of Islamic countries on whom the nation has conferred such titles as "Shair-e-Mashriq", "Pakistan Ka Qaumi-Shair", etc.

Saeed Sheikh's this well documented edition of Reconstruction will not only re-introduce Iqbal's work to the Western readers more effectively, but will also help reinforce his ideas and thought in Pakistan and other Islamic countries. It will greatly encourage the scholars of Iqbal and also of Islam in reading the Reconstruction with greater authority and confidence.

This new edition is such a valuable contribution to Iqbal's work, that one feels overjoyed to see it and use it. An addition of transliteration of Arabic, Persian and Urdu words, a glossary, and a brief outline of the contents of the book, is all that one can suggest for the future editions.

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