

# THE VALIDITY AND USEFULNESS OF THE "LITERATURE OF INDICTMENT"

Dini Avaz Vol 3; No 5-6

Faribourz Nariman

Broadly speaking, it could be said that there are two different types of expository literature: the first is the pure scholarly type and the second may be called the "literature of indictment." Though exegesis is the aim of both, the former attempts to achieve it with the help of scholarship only-no adverse criticism, either of a personality or an idea, is made; the latter tries to arrive at the same goal by means of scholarship discreetly blended with a critique. The superiority of the former is beyond doubt, but this superiority is in no way an invitation to disprize, denigrate or shun the later. The accusers of the latter are many, most of them laymen, both intelligent and other-wise, but off and on, a few scholars, too, choose to express their disapproval in this regard. As the title suggests, we shall try to show that such accusation and disapproval are uncalled for. We shall attempt to study the *raison d'etre* of the "literature of indictment" in order to establish its legitimacy. For the sake of convenience, the study shall be divided into two parts: the first shall deal with the validity and usefulness of the "literature of indictment" in the modern world in general, and in the second, we shall touch upon the subject keeping in view the twentieth century Parsi community in particular. It may be mentioned that our viewpoint shall be that of traditional orthodoxy.

## I

Tradition, far from being popular habits

or customs, is the transmission of wisdom, the origin of which is necessarily superhuman. If, along with this, we bear in mind that "Orthodoxy contains and guarantees infinitely precious values which man could never draw from himself,"<sup>1</sup> the meaning of 'traditional orthodoxy' would not be difficult to understand. It must be emphasized that hundred percent adherence to tradition (or orthodoxy), that is to say, the orientation of every thought, word and deed in accordance with the traditional norm, would be well nigh impossible in the modern world, particularly if one considers the dominant banalities of urban life. But to be unable to follow the traditional path in certain respects is one thing, and to disbelieve, ignore, reject and denounce the same in favor of something "up-to-date" another. With disbelief is sown the seeds of error, which when "adequately" nourished, transforms into a tree, the fruits of which are nothing but a pertinacious denial of truths. We must, however, be careful to ascertain whether a man is in error or heresy. If disbelief is not subdued in the light of wisdom, it leads one to ignore that which one disbelieves. In other words, it amounts to relegation or deviation from the traditional norm, followed by a rejection of the same, which, in turn, paves way for denouncement, and, perhaps, subversion of tradition- more or less complete triumph of heresy.

It must be noted that all heretics are schematics, though the converse is not true. Schi

smatic tendencies were not unknown in the distant past. History of great religions tells us about the attacks of heretics and apostates, of diverse mentality and character. The method of propagating heresies may vary from heretic to heretic, and hence the "achievement" of a heretic of a particular period may not compare "favorably" with that of his counterpart belonging to a period far removed from his own. In spite of this, all heretics have at least three things in common. Firstly, it is not possible for "ordinary" men to be authors of heresies, only the "exceptional" ones have that "privilege". Secondly, only the "exceptional" ones have that "privilege." Secondly, there is always an indication, implicit or explicit, that whatever is propagated is with a view to ensure "purification;" all "encrustations" are to be done away with, so that the

doctrine could be "restored" to its pristine purity. And thirdly, nothing worth mentioning is "purified" nor is anything "restored." the only change brought about is the spiritual impoverishment of the gullible victims.

Speaking of heresy, one of the greatest exponents of traditional wisdom, Ananda Coomaraswamy, says: "The word 'heresy' means choice, the having opinions of one's own, and thinking what we *like* to think: we can only grasp its real meaning today, when 'thinking for oneself' is so highly recommended (with the proviso that the thinking must be 100 per cent), if we realize that the modern equivalent of heresy is 'treason'."<sup>2</sup> Thus, no sooner one says regarding certain constituents of a tradition: "I like this and, therefore, accept the same; I do not like that and, therefore, reject

it," than a heresy is perpetrated. It may be recalled that it was in this connection that Cardinal Newman had to assert "You must accept the whole or reject the whole; attenuation does but enfeeble, and amputation mutilate."<sup>3</sup> Almost every "reformist movement" starts with "attenuation," "enfeeblement" and "amputation" of this or that part of tradition; the mentality of those who "prescribe this procedure is undoubtedly anti-traditional. But it is not the aim of the anti-traditional movement to annihilate tradition, because a number of heretics are disinclined to destroy, even if they could, the whole edifice of tradition: their diplomacy lies in their "choice"-to leave standing a considerable part of the structure and it is to this truth that the dictum "they survive by the truth they retain" is related. Nevertheless the "movement" gathers momentum-in some cases gradually, in others, quickly- when some well known gentleman<sup>4</sup> having "good intentions", support it publicly, The reason is not far to seek; it lies in the fallacy that a man who has "good intentions" is necessarily principled, whereas in fact he could be as unprincipled as any other person having bad or evil intentions. More often than not, the heretic concerned is not frank enough to call his "choice" his *own*, he imposes the same on the scriptures. The danger of this sort of religious colouring is greater today than it was, say, in the medieval times, the so-called dark ages, which, as a matter of fact, were full of intellectual light. There are three main reasons for this: (1) in the dark ages, the traditional way of life was held in great respect and a departure from it was treated with considerable sternness, (2) literacy was not considered as a synonym of education, and since the frenzied yearning for being literate", as practically unknown, very few could read and write, and (3) the limited means of communication and transport auto-

matically restricted the diffusion of heresies. What would have been almost impossible a few centuries ago, is possible today. Means of communication and transport rarely pose a problem in the modern world, The propagation of heresies, made easy by highly mechanized printing processes, is further buttressed by "democratic values" which hold sway over the minds of modern men. Any Henry or Conrad, however ignorant he may be in the field of metaphysics or religion, has a "fundamental right" to publish his "interpretations" interspersed with the "opinions" and "comments" of those who may be equally ignorant,

if not more, provided the financial side of the venture could be taken care of. The hostility or indifference displayed by a number of specialists towards tradition and the departure from the devotional way of life—a characteristic feature of tradition—by the masses have gone a long way to help heretics and apostates in different parts of the world

We have seen in outline the various stages in the development of anti traditional outlook: disbelief is the starting point and its dominion ends with the rejection of a part of traditional wisdom. The reign of counter-tradition begins when traditional wisdom is totally rejected, and what is worse, even denounced. The denouncement requires, both in theory and practice, the uprooting, as it were, of the base. Otherwise stated, a tendency to subvert<sup>5</sup> becomes the rule of the day; inversion of values or

"Spirituality inverted" gain control of the mundane affairs. It is said that Satan "transfigures himself into an angel of Light,"<sup>6</sup> or, as Shakespeare puts it, "the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape,"<sup>7</sup> and we may add that his "power" becomes manifest with the real meaning of the dictum "Satan is the ape of God."

It must be noted that, in the final analysis, the distinction between the traditional and the anti-traditional or counter-traditional outlook is nothing but the distinction between good and evil, *rita* and *unrita*, *dharma* and *adharmā*. Once the symptoms of the malady are recognized in their true colour, the distinction is as good as established. The establishing of the distinction may be compared with the correct diagnosis of a disease, after which the diagnostician can proceed to prescribe the regimen.

In the medieval times, excommunication and the gibbet were, perhaps, the most powerful regiminal instruments of ecclesiastical discipline and, generally speaking, they were utilized with utmost sobriety and circumspection. The Prince of Scholastics, St. Thomas Aquinas (circa 1225-1274), also called the 'Angelic Doctor,' declared: "If forgers and malefactors are put to death by secular power, there is more reason for excommunicating and even putting to death one convicted of heresy;<sup>8</sup> What Aquinas prescribed in the thirteenth century, Kartir, the high-priest of Iran, had already carried out about a thousand years before. It may be recalled that Mani, the heresiarch of his time, was *flayed alive* at Kartir's instaone. Moreover, in his great inscription Kartir informs us that he "chastised, upbraided and improved" many heretics and apostates "within the Magian community,"<sup>9</sup> These examples of identical approach of two great masters of tradition, separated by a millennium in terms of history and by thousands of miles in terms of geography, help us to conclude that, from the standpoint of tradition, the perpetration of heresy is bad enough, but the toleration of heretics is worse, However, since the days of Kartir or Aquinas, the dominion of intellectual light has been diminishing with the consequent intensification of spiritual darkness: the veneration for and implementation of theocratic and aristocratic mandates have been replaced by a demagogic clamour for "democratic values" and "secularism;" righteousness, propriety and studious approach have been practically done away with in favor of the casual or *laissez-oller* type with reliance on "freethinking." It is true that those who know the way are few-this is almost equally true of the traditional as well as the

modern world, but whereas in the former, the followers of the few who knew the way were many; in the latter, genuine followers are hard to find because a vast majority is swept away in the main-stream of "civilization" and "progress."

## NOTES

- Frithjof Selmon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, London 1954. IV.
- 2 Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Paths That Lead to the Same Summit* in *Am I My Brother's Keeper ?*, New York 1967.
- 3 Cardinal Newman, *Development of Christian Doctrine*.
- 4 The possibility of the "gentleman" turning out to be the devil cannot be ruled out, for, as Shakespeare says: "The prince of darkness is a gentleman," (*King Lear*, Act iii, sc. 4, 1.147)
- 5 In the etymological sense of the word-Latin *sub-vertere* (lit. to turn under), to over turn, to pervert, to overthrow.
6. Rene Guenon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, London 1953, 237 et seq.
- 7 *Hamlet*, Act ii, sc. 2.1.627.
- 8 *Summa Theologica*, 2.
- 9 M. Sprengline, *Third Century Iran, Sopor and Kartir*, Chicago 1953, 47, 52.