Fanaticism, Fundamentalism and the Promotion of Reflexivity in Religious Education

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Introduction

In its fourteenth biennial conference in 2004, that took place in the United States, in Villanova near Philadelphia, the International Seminar of Religious Education and Values (ISREV) addressed the theme of *Religious Education and Violence*. John Hull, emeritus professor in theology and religious education of the United Kingdom, presented one of the keynote papers, entitled "Can one educate out of religious fanaticism?". So the concept of fanaticism was foregrounded, rather than other currently much-used concepts, such as religious fundamentalism and religious extremism or radicalism, which appear in often heated debates on the so-called Muslim terrorism. Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden on the one side and on the other side the "War on Terror" of the US Bush administration, officially presented as response to the 2001 *9–11* attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, provide the context of such debates. Education, especially religious education and yet more in particular Islamic education, is often touched on in that connection. Clearly this recent history also inspired the ISREV conference theme of 2004 (see Astley et al. (2007) for papers of this conference).

In this chapter contributions from quite varying corners to the present debate on religious fundamentalism and radicalism and on the role of education in that connection are reviewed: first, the mentioned lecture to the ISREV conference in 2004 by the Christian theologian John Hull; second, the essay *How to Cure a Fanatic?* of 2002 by the Israeli author Amos Oz; third, the study, also of 2002, of the French Islamic scholar Olivier Roy as to the blossoming of fundamentalist Islam on the internet; and, fourth, the alternative to Muslim fundamentalism, already developed in earlier decades, by the Muslim modernist Fazlur Rahman, who died in 1988. In conclusion, the possible role of a hermeneutical religious education, providing an antidote to fanaticism and fundamentalism by furthering reflexivity, will be considered.

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A Christian Theologian on Religious Fanaticism

In his conference paper, "Can one educate out of religious fanaticism?" Hull, addressing an international seminar on religious education, took a theological perspective on fanaticism. Although political, economic, psychological and other factors contribute to the emergence of a "culture of violence", he said, a theological perspective is relevant when violence takes place in the Name of God and the involved religious believers regard themselves as called in obedience to the absolute demands of faith itself. In their eyes, criticising and relativising religion would come down to compromising or diluting the faith. Moreover, even the faculty of criticism itself, human reason, is subordinate to the divine revelation. Precisely at this point, Hull demonstrated the possibility of a fundamental shift in theological interpretation. With their finite human reason human beings can never fully grasp the truth, the finite cannot fully understand the Infinite. Religious truth is essentially unattainable for human beings. Therefore, the religious life is a *quest* for truth and not a confident *possession* of truth. Arguing from Christian theology (Paul Tillich was for example among his references), Hull discovered a parallel in the Islamic concept of the unity and greatness of God. God is always Greater. The believer is called on from unrelieved obedience to a single absolute point towards a more humble and developing discipleship (Hull 2004). In this way, Hull contrasted religious fanaticism as an attitude of "absolutism" with an attitude that accepts a fundamental uncertainty.

Psychologically, according to Hull, fanaticism can be regarded as a form of false consciousness. A fanatic is obsessed by a narrow-minded, rigid and exclusive devotion. Fanaticism is characterised by a desire for certitude and compulsion for consistency, text literalism or even fetishism, and a rejection of doubt as the assumed opposite of faith. In this line of argument, Hull further suggested that fanaticism is non- or even anti-hermeneutical, whereas most contemporary pedagogies of religion share a hermeneutical approach to religious truth. A direct connection with religious fundamentalism was given in the aspect of text literalism that Hull identified as an element of fanaticism. Generally speaking, fundamentalism in religious belief consists in taking a Holy Text from cover to cover, as literally the Word of God. A further characteristic is that fundamentalism directly applies the Holy Text in a fragmented, literal and unhistorical manner to the lives of the believers, thereby taking it as a Permanent Norm that is universal and straightforwardly applicable to any context. This is indeed in perfect opposition to a hermeneutical approach, according to which interpretation of texts is an ongoing, never-ending and essentially historical enterprise, a continuous process of contextualisation and re-contextualisation. A hermeneutical approach therefore cultivates a questioning and critical attitude, it values the *quest* for truth, to use Hull's expression. This has clear educational implications: according to a hermeneutical approach, "good religious education" is of a reflexive nature and seeks to promote understanding of religion, as opposed to promoting faith as a form of firm and unquestioning "religious belief". It is the perfect opposite of the fanatic rejection of doubt that simultaneously eliminates the possibility of self-criticism.

An Israeli Author on Fanaticism

In his essay "How to cure a fanatic?" the Israeli author Amos Oz addresses the same currently topical question. He speaks from personal experience, from his Jewish upbringing in Israel up to the present, post *9–11* situation in Israel/Palestine – in the use of this double name for his country he expresses his alliance with the Israeli Peace Now movement, in which he is one of the leading figures. This is how Oz's essay opens:

> So, how do you cure a fanatic? To chase a bunch of fanatics through the mountains of Afghanistan is one thing. To struggle against fanaticism is another one. I'm afraid I don't have any particular ideas on how to catch the fanatic in the mountains, but I do have one or two thoughts about the nature of fanaticism and the ways, if not to cure it, then at least to contain it. The attack on America on September 11 was not simply about poverty versus wealth. (. . .) No, this is a battle between fanatics, who believe that the end, any end, justifies the means, and the rest of us, who believe that life is an end, not a means. (. . .) The present crisis in the world, in the Middle East, in Israel/Palestine, is not about the values of Islam. It is not about the mentality of the Arabs, as some racists claim, not at all. It is about the ancient struggle between fanaticism and pragmatism. Between fanaticism and pluralism. Between fanaticism and tolerance. September 11 was not even about the question of whether America was good or bad, whether capitalism is ugly, or whether globalization should stop or not. This was about the typical fanatical claim: If I think something is bad, I kill it along with its neighbors.
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> Fanaticism is older than Islam, older than Christianity, older than Judaism, older than any state or any government, or political system, older than any ideology or faith in the world. Fanaticism is unfortunately an ever-present component of human nature, an evil gene, if you like. People who blow up abortion clinics in America, people who burn mosques and synagogues in Europe, differ from bin Laden only in the scale but not in the nature of their crimes (Oz, 2006, pp. 39–41).

Oz explains that it was his own childhood in Jerusalem that rendered him an expert in "comparative fanaticism". He describes himself in retrospect as "a Jewish Intifada child", throwing stones at the British patrols in Jerusalem, and as "a brainwashed little fanatic", self-righteous, chauvinistic, deaf and blind to any view different from the Jewish Zionist narrative of the time. Fanaticism often begins at home. Oz's 1995 novel *Panther in the Basement* feeds on this childhood experience. It comes about that an experience of "friendship with the enemy", a secret friendship with "a very sweet, ineffectual British police sergeant", brings a sense of ambivalence to the boy's life, inescapably. Black-and-white views have to be abandoned, the fanaticism and chauvinism of his childhood left behind. There is a price to be paid. From now on "he is no longer a child, he is a little grown-up, a small adult. Much of the joy and fascination and zeal and simpleness of life has gone away" (Oz, 2006, p. 44, 45).

According to Oz, the seed of fanaticism lies in "uncompromising self-righteousness" on which religions certainly have no monopoly. Anti-smokers "who will burn you alive for lighting a cigarette near them!", vegetarians "who will eat you alive for eating meat!", pacifists, environmentalist, etc. etc. – fanaticism is almost everywhere. Fanaticism is opposed to pluralism and tolerance of plurality. Fanatics are monomaniac, unwilling and unable to face and endure ambivalence, uncertainty

and plurality. They have the desire to force other people to change – rather than let them be. "Conformity and uniformity, the urge to belong and the desire to make everyone else belong, may be the most widespread if not the most dangerous form of fanaticism". This observation brings Oz to introduce a cure against fanaticism, which is not a quick and easy remedy, but it "may help": "injecting some imagination into people may help cause the fanatic to feel uneasy" (Oz 2006, pp. 53–54). Here he points at the significance of literature and reading, although he admits that only too often in history, stories and poems have been used to inflate hatred and nationalistic self-righteousness. But nevertheless, there are works of literature that "may help" – "in a small way, in a cautious way", as "a partial and limited immunity to fanaticism".

He mentions Shakespeare ("every form of fanaticism in Shakespeare ends up in a tragedy or in a comedy"), Gogol ("Gogol makes his readers grotesquely aware of how little we know, even when we are convinced that we are 100% right"), and Kafka and Faulkner (Oz, 2006, p. 62, 63). Then he comes to humour, for, indeed, literary art is the domain of humour. The human condition of finiteness and insufficiency is reflected upon in comedy as much as in tragedy. "Humor contains the ability to laugh at ourselves. Humor is relativism, humor is the ability to see yourself as others may see you, humor is the capacity to realise that no matter how righteous you are and how terribly wronged you have been, there is a certain side to life that is always a bit funny" (Oz 2006, p. 65). The ability to laugh at ourselves is part of the cure Oz proposes, as is the related ability to see ourselves as others see us. The ability to picture oneself into the situation of others, to imagine the predicament of others, is also related.

> [I]n my own personal background, in my own personal life story and family story, I can't help thinking, very often, that with a slight twist of my genes, or of my parents' circumstances, I could be him or her, I could be a Jewish West Bank settler, I could be an oriental Jew from a Third World country; I could be anyone. Many years ago, when I was still a child, my very wise grandmother explained to me in very simple words the difference between Jew and Christian – not between Jew and Muslim, but between Jew and Christian: "You see," she said, "Christians believe that the Messiah was here once and he will certainly return one day. The Jews maintain that Messiah is yet to come. Over this," said my grandmother, "over this, there has been so much anger, persecution, bloodshed, hatred. . . . Why?" she said. "Why can't everyone simply wait and see? If the Messiah comes, saying, 'Hello, it's nice to see you again,' the Jews will have to concede. If, on the other hand, the Messiah comes, saying, 'How do you do, it is very nice meeting you,' the entire Christian world will have to apologize to the Jews. Between now and then," said my wise grandmother, "just live and let live." She was definitely immune to fanaticism. She knew the secret of living with open-ended situations, with unresolved conflicts, with the otherness of other people (Oz 2006, pp. 68–69).

At the end of his essay, in bringing up this memory of his grandmother, Oz nuances its beginning. I started out by saying that fanaticism often begins at home, he says, let me conclude by saying that the antidote can also be found at home. "Wait and see" and in the meantime "just live and let live" – this opposite of fanaticism,

was what his storytelling wise grandmother taught him. This is about learning to exist with open-ended situations and perhaps even about learning to enjoy diversity.

A French Islamic Scholar on Muslim Fundamentalism

Oz demonstrated that fanaticism often begins “at home”. This probably should not be taken in the most literal sense. The boy’s neighbourhood and the peer group were, for example, as much involved as his “home” in the literal sense of his parents and the family and household he belonged to. Looking at what Muslim children in the pluralist West-European societies of the present learn “at home” there is a significantly different pattern to be discovered. Muslim youngsters in these multicultural societies explicitly identify with Islam and turn to Muslim sites on the Internet for knowledge on Islam. Rather than identifying with their parents and the imams of the mosques in their new country, i.e. with the first generation immigrants, who still adhere to the Islam of the often rural cultures in their countries of origin, they turn to the net with their questions about what it means to be a Muslim.

In his book on the globalisation of Islam, Olivier Roy identifies and discusses the phenomenon of the *virtual Ummah* (*Ummah* being the community of all Muslims). The internet is teeming with web sites, created by Muslims about Muslims and Islam, and also with MSN groups and discussion forums where young western Muslims ventilate their questions about life. It is mostly highly educated western Muslims, and newly converted youths, so-called born-again Muslims, who are launching and managing these web sites – in the Islamic world itself the ITC infrastructure does not allow for participation on a large scale. The medium of communication is the national language, or else the English of a transnational, world audience. It is larded with formulae written in the Arabic of the Qur’an, which function as identity markers and no longer as the language of communication, the *lingua franca* of Islamic scholars. There are no authoritative scholars, *ulema*, here. Everyone is equally learned as the next person and the students, the *taliban*, speak for themselves. The net is pre-eminently the place for the self-appointed man of learning, the *shaykh*, and the self-taught man (Roy, 2003).

Has it really been achieved here: the individualisation and equality that was predicted for the information era, the free exchange of thoughts and unbridled creativity? [1] As far as unbridledness is concerned, this is certainly the case: there are an infinite number of sites, interconnected by links and mutual references, by infinite citing and recycling of the same body of ideas, together forming the virtual Ummah.

[1] Roy makes use of Eickelman & Anderson to paint a picture of the information revolution, as an opening in his chapter on the virtual ummah on the Internet (Roy, 2003, 153–172). Eickelman & Anderson are indeed rather optimistic about the possibilities of ICT when it comes to the renewal of Islam and the Islamic world by ‘re-intellectualising’ and an ‘emerging public sphere’, which is the undertitle of the volume they edited (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003).

However, creativity is hard to find: instead of personal thoughts and original ideas we encounter that characteristic copy/paste style, which the web seems to facilitate. A new eclecticism, as Roy calls it: fast, easy and superficial; not critical demeanour and accountability, but defective anchoring, defective sources and a poor referential system (Roy, 2003, pp. 154–155).

According to Roy, this all boils down to a trivialisation of Islam: it sends out a generalised and uniform message, in which clichés have taken the place of original insight and judgement. Rather than supporting the predicted creative, free, new interplay of opinions, the net turns out to foster clichés and a distinct tendency towards orthodoxy. Or rather, orthopraxis: for fundamentalists religion is a code of behaviour and a religious commitment, a code denoting what is allowed and what not, what is *halal* and *haram*. The western context is no more than a new area to which the code is to be applied: may you eat a Big Mac? Are you allowed a credit card? According to the Dutch anthropologist, Martijn de Koning, these are often typical "teenage questions" concerning sex, soft drugs and alcohol. For example: "When I think about sex during Ramadan, 'does this break my fast?' The 'key question' being: 'How far can you go and still be a Muslim in the Netherlands?' " [2]

This does go to show that it is not all about radicalism, although that is the general concern about Muslim sites on the Internet. As of radicalism, it is true of fundamentalism, that it is "nicely simple", as Roy put it in an interview in a Dutch newspaper in January 2005 (cf. Meijer, 2009). Pure, universal Islam, which the born again Islamic youth of the West discover through the Internet, rejects the entire intellectual history of Islam, and simply wishes to base itself directly on the Qur'an and hadith. The Islam of the Internet is therefore fundamentalist in the strict sense of the word: directly anchored in fundamental texts of the religion, the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet. Their eternal truth, their universal context-free validity and their pureness, go hand in hand with striking simplicity and normative unambiguousness. One is looking "for a norm that can be applied to strongly diverging contexts, or rather, a norm that can ignore context: this explains why the "Salafi" doctrine is the most suitable to inform the virtual Ummah" (Roy, 2003, p. 162). Salafism entails the wish to follow the *salaf*, in other words: the companions of the Prophet and devout Muslims of the first generations of Islam.

Fundamentalism and the orientation towards a code of behaviour makes the born-again Muslim a direct counterpart to the born-again Christian, also a common sight in the west at the current time. They are equally fundamentalistic in that they both apply a Holy Word of God to their lives in an individualistic and unhistorical manner, simply taking Holy Texts literally from cover to cover: what are the dos and don'ts of a good Muslim or a good Christian?

[2] De Koning in an interview in the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, November 27/28, 2004. At the time, De Koning was preparing his PhD thesis that appeared in 2008.

A Muslim Modernist Alternative to Fundamentalism

In the second half of the twentieth century criticism of traditional Muslim education was clearly voiced by the Muslim modernist Fazlur Rahman. In his book *Islam and Modernity* (1982) this Muslim modernist laments the proliferation of commentaries and of "commentaries upon commentaries", which have eclipsed the original works. Even "a vibrant and revolutionary religious document like the Qur'an" was buried under the débris of grammar and rhetoric (Rahman, 1982, p. 36), instead of itself being read again and again, also in the *madrasas* and Islamic universities of the higher education after the Qur'anic school or *kuttab*. According to Rahman the study of commentaries instead of original texts degenerated into hair-splitting and a preoccupation with irrelevant details, while fundamental questions were not being posed. Rahman's conclusion is severe: the stagnation of intellectual culture and the culture of education in the Islamic world is a given. "From the thirteenth/fourteenth century onwards there was an era of manuals, commentaries, and super-commentaries (. . .) [I]n an overall view this literature is singularly unoriginal, pedantic and superficial" (Rahman, 1982, p. 45).

Rahman is one of the modernists to trace the line through to the Egyptian reformer Muhammad 'Abduh, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. 'Abduh had criticised the dominant role of memorising in traditional religious education, from the elementary level of the *kuttab* to the highest level of the *Azhar*, the famous Islamic University in Cairo dated back to the Middle Ages. From his point of view this ought to be replaced by understanding and insight. He also wanted to get rid of the rigidity of educational content and method. In order to become truly educational schooling, instead of a curious enclave, a museum of Medieval Islam, he thought it essential to keep the dialogue alive between the Islamic intellectual tradition, on the one hand, and modern western sciences, on the other. In the educational reform of the *Azhar* envisaged by Muhammad 'Abduh, two things went hand in hand: on the one hand the introduction of new subjects, even if these originate from another, modern scientific and secular tradition, and on the other hand, allowing students to study classic, original texts within the existing Islamic curriculum, instead of the usual second-hand explanations and commentaries of lesser minds (Rahman, 1982, 66/67). The primary sources of Islam need to be dusted off.

In order to understand what Muslim modernists and reformers of traditional Islamic education are proposing, we need to know that traditionalistic, Sunni Islamic thought is regulated by the *usul al-fiqh*, the principles or sources of justice or juridical reasoning (Hallaq, 1997). The first source is the Qur'an, the second source is *sunna*, the traditions or the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad as delivered in *hadith*, the third source is *ijma*, the consensus of authoritative Islamic juridical thinking, and the fourth is *kiyas*, which is the reasoning, as a rule the reasoning by juridical analogy, that is necessary for new questions and cases for which the first three sources of juridical thought do not yet supply straightforward answers. The process of reasoning, the intellectual effort and the research of the *mujtahid*, the

Muslim scholar of law, resulting in a judgment for a new juridical case, is called *ijtihad*. In traditional Sunni Islam, there is only room for *ijtihad* in case new questions arise for which the first three sources of Islam do not yet contain ready answers. It is against this background that one can understand the call of Muslim modernists to return to the very first source of Islam, the Qur'an.

Contemporary liberal Islamic thinkers renew Muhammad 'Abduh's plea to return to the original texts of Islam, with the Qur'an at the forefront. Like Fazlur Rahman, the Muslim modernist Abu Zayd is an example here. He wishes to be rid of the orthodox Islamic restriction of the Qur'an to a text of law: why consider the part of the Qur'an which has juridical relevance as its actual message? By the traditionalist, past-oriented Islam, the entire universe "was divided into what is permitted and what is forbidden. That is a worldview which is dished out to the pupils from the first school year onwards, a worldview which divides life as a whole into permissible and forbidden acts" (Abu Zayd, 2002, p. 126). According to Abu Zayd, the Qur'an is in need of re-reading and must be freed "from all those cumulative layers of interpretations" (Abu Zayd, 2002, p. 79).

Fazlur Rahman advocated something comparable. The original powers of expression of Islam, those of the Qur'an and the prophet Muhammad, must be brought back to life and retrieved from under the dust of the "conformities en deformities" of the history of Islam. Ironically enough, it seems as if Muslim modernists and Muslim fundamentalists are arguing the very same point, Rahman says, viz. "that Muslims must go back to the original and definitive sources of Islam and perform ijtihad on that basis" (Rahman, 1982, p. 142). However,on closer examination there is a crucial difference of orientation between modernists on the one hand and fundamentalists on the other. Rahman declares Muslim fundamentalism intellectually bankrupt. Its greatest weakness, according to him, is the total lack of Islamic learnedness and the replacement of true intellectuality by dealing in clichés. This does Islam an extreme disservice. Fundamentalists do say, and according to Rahman there is much to say for this, that the learnedness of the conservative traditionalist *ulema* has caused Muslims to turn away from the Qur'an, instead of directing them towards it. However, the way in which fundamentalists themselves read the Qur'an boils down to selecting isolated fragments with which Muslims may distinguish themselves from "the modern west". In comparison with the traditionalist *ulema*, who undeniably manage an imposing heritage of learnedness, the fundamentalists are extremely superficial. They are unfamiliar with the Islamic intellectual tradition, and their repeated claim that the original Islam excels in simplicity and pureness is ill considered.

In his *Islamic Methodology in History* published as early as 1965, Rahman gives a characteristic translation of *ijtihad*: re-thinking, and elsewhere in the same study: fresh thinking (1965, p. 105, 149, resp.). Just like Abu Zayd, judging by the title of his oration to mark his acceptance of a professorship at the University of Humanistics in Utrecht in 2004: *Rethinking the Qur'an*. To put it concisely, these reformers link *ijtihad* directly to the re-reading and re-interpretation of the Qur'an. The interpretive frameworks put forward by tradition and intellectual consensus, *hadith en ijma*, are thus overcome. At the same time the restriction to a juridical

reading of the Qur'an is overcome: it is no longer the object to read the Qur'an as a mere book of law, as a book of rules for what is permitted and what is forbidden, halal and haram. This implies, furthermore, that the interpretation of the Qur'an can no longer be the monopoly of the *ulema*, the traditional Islamically educated jurists or *mujtahids*.

Abu Zayd and Rahman wish to re-read, to re-think the Qur'an without limiting themselves to the margins of interpretative freedom that hadith and classic jurisprudence would grant them. This, by the way, definitely does not imply that they neglect and ignore Islamic tradition and intellectual history, quite to the contrary. Their knowledge of this history is excellent and they take it extremely seriously, although not just affirmatively, as a normative, indicative framework, but rather as *Wirkungsgeschichte* (history of effects) in the sense of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960, 1989), the Western hermeneutical philosopher, who is no stranger to either of these two Muslim intellectuals. In other words, they see it as a history of interpretation, not to be continued as a matter of course, but perhaps actually deserving awareness, critical reflection and possibly also dismantlement, in order to clear the way for a renewed reading and interpretation of the Qur'an.

In contrast with the fundamentalistic, Salafistic presupposition that the Qur'an is directly accessible and can simply be taken literally, hermeneutics advocate a methodical approach, aiming at freeing the view to allow for a renewed, liberated reading and interpretation of the Qur'an. If Islam is considered a living tradition, also to be relevant to the new context of current western societies, then that should be able to follow from the re-reading and re-interpretation of primary sources. This would include lively and critical interchange about differences of interpretation. It is obvious that there is a role for education here. The atmosphere accompanying the search for meaning and understanding, in which differences of interpretation requiring critical reflection inevitably appear, is an ideal climate for education. In *Islam and Modernity* Rahman states: "To insist on absolute uniformity of interpretation is therefore neither possible nor desirable" (1982, p. 144). This ideal educational climate, characterised by intellectual vitality, was lost in the traditionalist madrasa, and current-day fundamentalism, or "Revivalism" as Rahman calls it, also by no means provides it. In characteristic concise wording Rahman expresses it as follows:

> The traditional educational system of Islam had become so narrow, barren, and starved of any originality that it was inconceivable that any great problems would be posed or any new intellectual adventures undertaken. Indeed, so far as education (i.e. the formation of the mind of the coming generations) is concerned, the Revivalists, by simplifying the curriculum (i.e. by 'purifying' it from the intellectual disciplines developed over the medieval period, and retaining for the most part only the Qur'an and the Hadith, without developing any methodology of how, for example, the Qur'an was to be taught and understood) represented a terrible retrogression from the medieval madrasa (Rahman 1979, p. 319).

The outcome of fundamentalism (Revivalism) was even greater intellectual poverty. When it comes to the content of their views there is often very little difference between the traditional *ulema* and the neo-fundamentalists who claim freedom of *ijtihad*, but do not live up to this. Although they reject the authority of the *ulema* and the medieval heritage, they in fact often actually confirm the consensus of that

intellectual heritage. Their Salafistic principle, wishing to return to the pure Islam of the first centuries, the age of the Prophet and the Companions, is not supported by a method that would make it possible to detach that original Islam from the consensus of the *ulema* that developed later on in intellectual history, and allow it to speak once more. And so they are destined to continue that tradition unconsciously and uncritically, in spite of appearances to the contrary, in the light of their pretence of following the Salaf.

Finally, modern higher education, for example in western universities, also fails to apply the, according to Rahman, much-needed historical hermeneutical approach to Islam. Western islamologists approach Islam from the outside, "merely as a historical datum, as a dead body, so to say, to be analysed" (1979^2, p. 252). Although this has yielded valuable knowledge and insight, the crucial question of the validity and the power of expression of the tradition in the current context cannot be answered in this way, and that very question constitutes the intellectual challenge for Muslims. What Islam is about: that is what has to be re-thought through and re-articulated for a new cultural–historical context.

In the epilogue of the second printing from 1979 of his book *Islam*, originally published in 1966, Rahman anticipates a subsequent book, which he announces under the title *Islamic Education and Modernity*.[3] He states that it would be a mistake to think of the interpretation of Islam and its sources as a task that only falls to the elite of the *ulema*. Of course it is worthwhile to offer education on the subject of the Qur'an and its historical context of origin and the history of its interpretations, and to systematically study such matters. This is in fact vital for encouraging critical and reflexive reading habits. But that is not the monopoly of an elite. In an intellectual culture in which, although *ijtihad* is indeed directed towards achieving *ijma*, *ijma* on the other hand does not restrict the scope of *ijtihad*, critical questions are in place, whoever asks them.

Furthermore, it is according to Rahman not the task of the *ulema* to make laws, but to offer leadership to the Muslim community – through the sermon, and also through education and public debate:

> The Ulama's real creative direct link is only with the public. If there is more than one opinion on a certain issue – and there is bound to be difference of opinion on most issues – let the public be persuaded through discussion and debate, for there is no other way in a democratic society (Rahman 1979^2, p. 261/262).

What Islam needs in the current context is such an intellectual culture. Basic assumptions can be found in hermeneutics, and this also applies to the kind of education that might be part of such an intellectual culture. Compare the words with which Rahman ends his introduction to *Islam and Modernity*: "the process of questioning and changing a tradition – in the interests of preserving or restoring its normative elements – can continue indefinitely (...) there is no fixed or privileged point at which the predetermining effective history is immune from such

[3] Rahman 1979^2, p. 260. The new book announced here is published in 1982, under the new title *Islam and Modernity*.

questioning" – and this continuous questioning is essentially "what is required for an adequate hermeneutical method of the Qur'an" (Rahman 1982, p. 11).

The Hermeneutics of the Text in an Educational Perspective

Based on their familiarity with Islamic intellectual tradition, Abu Zayd and Rahman have both seen potential in the hermeneutics of the western philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960, 1989). His work, together with the kindred work of Paul Ricoeur (1983, 1985, 1988), is especially intriguing for educational thinking, for this hermeneutical theory allows scope to be read educationally, that is to say as a theory of education. The fact that ideas concerning the quality of Islamic education turned out to be an integral part of Rahman's views on hermeneutics and historicity in Islamic thought points to the same connection. Nor is it a coincidence that Gadamer, at the outset of his principal work *Wahrheit und Methode*, translated as *Truth and Method*, does not choose the method or methodology of science as a guide, but turns to the concept of *Bildung*, (liberal) education, originating in the humanistic tradition (1990, 15 ff.). Both *Bildung*, the key concept of cultural educational theory, and interpretation, the key concept of hermeneutics, have to do with human reality as historical–cultural reality. Culture is passed on from generation to generation. Inevitably, throughout this process questions arise concerning meaningfulness and meaning, and that certainly applies to periods of rapid cultural change and cultural diversity. The model of the reader and the text can be presented as the paradigmatic case of how questions of meaning and significance are, and can be dealt with.

Reading is looking ahead: in the here and now of reading a certain sentence there lies an expectation, a direction, a self-evident anticipation of how the story will continue. That is the primary orientation of the reader. However, in the second instance, reading requires one to constantly look backwards, to re-read sentences and passages – which of course are fixed and will not have changed, to re-read, read again, giving a different reading and ascribing a different meaning. This process is conscious and directed by a question evoked by an unexpected turn in the course of the narrative. It forms a contrast with the self-evident, primary understanding of "looking forwards" and "reading on". At that moment in time the interpretation of the text, which has already been read and which had been self-evident up to then, becomes conscious, reflexive: obviously everything must now find new meaning, be read differently than was previously simply taken for granted. Reflexive reading is conscious, directed by an explicit question concerning meaning, in the realisation that various readings are possible.

Interpretation, the attempt to discover the meaning of the text, is situated in the dialectic or interplay of looking forward and looking backward, of reading on and reading back, of reading and re-reading. In other words, reflexivity is essential to the reading process. Reflexivity, bending back on oneself and one's own history, learning to ask new questions and to open new perspectives when familiar responses

no longer hold, belongs to the opposite side of the coin, to historicity, to living in time and history. It is the prerequisite to the possibility of personal initiative and personal responsibility in spite of the inevitable historicity of existence in time, in history, being inescapably enveloped by time and history, and also to being determined and formed by it. Being determined and formed by the past obviously is not merely a question of one's own individual life experience and personal memories. Individuals stand at a point in a history, which was already under way, long before their individual existence. The concept of tradition is in place here. And when important books play a role in a tradition, also Gadamer's concept *Wirkungsgeschichte* or history of effects, the concept already touched upon in the previous section. This concept gives cause to return once more to the model of the text and the reader, this time with the hermeneutical philosopher Paul Ricoeur to the linguist Hans Robert Jauss who again uses Gadamer's concept "history of effects" in his reception-aesthetics (Ricoeur 1988, p. 171 ff.; cf. Jauss 1982a, 1982b).

Only a text that is read, has meaning, influence, effect (Wirkung). The concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte* or history of effects calls attention to the influence of the fact that a work, a text, a book, has often been read by many generations. According to Jauss the *Wirkung*, the influence a text has had in history must be embodied within the boundaries of the text itself and be taken into account and included in the process of interpreting the text. When someone reads a text with such a history for the first time, it is not a matter of starting from scratch. One begins to read on the basis of a certain horizon of expectations: one really already knows what one is going to find in the text. The starting point of the reader, who has been brought up in a certain tradition, is a natural familiarity with the text, with which one is at home. Perhaps we might even state that certain readings and interpretations of a text are already gained "naturally" before one has even seen and read the text itself. Cultural literacy is, after all, not just a matter of knowing the alphabet and being able to decode texts literally. Years before learning to read in this strictly "alphabetical" sense, the acquisition of cultural literacy begins: it starts at birth and proceeds from there, in the natural process of early childhood socialisation and enculturation.

Thus, the educational relevance of hermeneutics comes into view. Conscious and reflexive reading and interpretation of a text are secondary, as a rule, and have to do with breaking with certain "natural" expectations and primary familiarity. All reading, but certainly reading works of great significance within a certain tradition, originates in a *Wirkungsgeschichte* or history of effects, which manifests itself as a self-evident "horizon of expectations" with which the "first" reading commences. Re-reading and re-thinking, breaking with the pre-given familiarity, and then reflexively re-reading on the basis of new, real, current and actual questions, is thus really already present from the first reading of the text. Re-reading is all about breaking open the perspective on the text, which has been passed down from the past, and about finding new openings, starting points for a new reading. In order to be able to experience the text as new, full of expressiveness and relevance for the present, it is necessary to rupture and overcome the initial familiarity of already knowing what a text has to say.

It is essential in education to stimulate critical reflection on the familiar and so to cultivate an attitude of reflexivity towards one's own tradition. A reflexive form of cultural transmission is, therefore, not *Bildung* in the sense of "formation", furnishing a permanent, fixed "Bild" or "form", but aims at reflexivity, which is the fitting response to inevitable historicity. And so education is the beginning of life-long self-education: the reflexive and responsible determination of one's own position, time and time again, within a perpetually changing historical, cultural context.

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