

Hassan Hanafi's Actual Theology: From Anthropocentrism to Revolution

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Abstract

Religion in the contemporary era is often predicted to lose its relevance, as human dependency on transcendence is replaced by material progress and routine practices. Theocentric discourse dominates theological studies while social reality receives insufficient attention. This research aims to explain Hassan Hanafi's concept of actual theology as a liberation-oriented alternative capable of reconnecting faith with concrete social struggle. This research employs qualitative library research using phenomenology as the analytical framework, centered on Hassan Hanafi's primary text *Min al-'Aqidah ilā al-Thawrah* and supported by his project *al-Turāth wa al-Tajdīd*. The findings show that Hanafi reconstructs Islamic theology by shifting its epistemological axis from a purely theocentric-dogmatic orientation toward a theological anthropocentrism focused on justice, liberation, and historical agency. The research concludes that Hanafi's actual theology offers a transformative paradigm: from creed to revolution, from metaphysical doctrines to social emancipation, providing a substantive contribution to contemporary Islamic theological reform.

Keywords: Actual; Anthropocentric; Phenomenology; Theocentric; Theology

ملخص

غالبًا ما يُتوقع أن يفقد الدين في العصر الحديث أهميته مع استبدال الاعتماد البشري على التعالي بالتقدم المادي والروتين. كما تُركز الدراسات اللاهوتية بشكل أكبر على مسألة الله وحده، تاركَةً الواقع الاجتماعي البشري دون تطور. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى شرح المفهوم اللاهوتي الحالي لحسن حنفي كشكل من أشكال لاهوت التحرير الذي يسعى إلى ربط الإيمان بالنضالات الاجتماعية الملموسة. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على مراجعة



،نوعية للأدبيات وتحليل ظاهراتي من خلال دراسة نقدية لعمله الرئيسي، من العقيدة إلى الثورة"، ومشروعه "التراث والتجديد". تُظهر النتائج أن "حنفي أعاد بناء اللاهوت الإسلامي بتحويل توجهه المعرفي من لاهوت مركزي-عقائدي إلى لاهوت مركزي-بشري، مُركزًا على العدالة والتحرير والدور التاريخي للبشر. تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أن الفقه الحنفي يقدم نموذجًا تحوليًا: من العقيدة إلى الثورة، ومن المذهب الميتافيزيقي إلى التحرر الاجتماعي، مما يُسهم إسهامًا كبيرًا في تجديد الفقه الإسلامي المعاصر

الكلمات المفتاحية : حقيقي; أنثروبوسينية; ظاهراتية; لاهوتية; لاهوتية

Abstrak

Agama pada era kontemporer kerap diprediksi kehilangan relevansinya karena ketergantungan manusia pada aspek transendensi semakin digantikan oleh kemajuan material dan rutinitas. Studi-studi teologi juga lebih banyak berfokus pada persoalan Tuhan semata, sehingga realitas sosial manusia kurang mendapatkan tempat. Penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan konsep teologi aktual Hassan Hanafi sebagai bentuk teologi pembebasan yang berupaya menghubungkan akidah dengan perjuangan sosial yang konkret. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kepustakaan dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis fenomenologis melalui telaah kritis terhadap karya utama *Min al-‘Aqīdah ilā al-Thawrah* serta proyek *al-Turāth wa al-Tajdīd*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Hanafi melakukan rekonstruksi teologi Islam dengan menggeser orientasi epistemologisnya dari teosentris-dogmatis menuju teologi antroposentris yang berfokus pada keadilan, pembebasan, dan peran historis manusia. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa teologi aktual Hanafi menawarkan paradigma transformatif: dari akidah menuju revolusi, dari doktrin metafisik menuju emansipasi sosial, sehingga memberikan kontribusi signifikan bagi pembaruan teologi Islam kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Aktual; Antroposentris; Fenomenologi; Teosentris; Teologi

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A. Introduction

People often mistakenly assume that all forms of theocentrism are inherently traditional and rooted in religion particularly when contrasted with anthropocentrism¹. This assumption is fallacious. Theocentrism is not inherently traditional or bound to religion merely because it employs the term “*God-centered*” in its definition. A key distinction exists between perennial theocentrism and theological or jurisprudential theocentrism. In perennial theocentrism, human consciousness (at all levels) and human presence are oriented toward the *presence* of God. In contrast, theological and jurisprudential theocentrism center consciousness on “method,” or what is often referred to as “method” in religious discourse².

Within this distinction, the wisdom of *al-khalidah* (*philosophia perennis* or traditionalism) is grounded in three concepts: presence, consciousness, and blessing. In Vedanta, these correspond to *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda*. Beyond traditional theocentrism, the concept is highly vulnerable to desacralization and distortion through modern interpretive frameworks. Consequently, theological reasoning is inherently limited, particularly when discourse reaches its terminal point. What often remains is doctrine ossified into dogma. Historically, theological schools of thought have been more prone to conflict even violent confrontation than to mutual reconciliation.

The same applies to theocentric jurisprudence. Here, God is confined within a variable of length by width beginning with “the Word” and ending with “total servitude.” Yet, because jurisprudence is often rigid, the *presence* of God within rituals gradually ceases to be the central concern. Over time, God is replaced by law itself. Indeed, individuals often become more preoccupied with the trivial and minute details of legal provisions than with their underlying essence.

This yields three distinct centers: first, the presence of God in action; second, dogma; and third, law. In this light, what is today called “religion” is often no more than an interpretation, whereas in its essential sense, religion is a *bond*; the bond between humanity and God (*Al-Haqq*).

In the second and third types of centers, religion becomes susceptible to infiltration by modern sentimentality. Through the gap created by the shifting center, modernism reorients religion toward anthropocentrism. A condition in which God is acknowledged yet never truly integrated into the totality of human experience. This is exacerbated by the fact that the foundation of the perennial and the whole is often approached solely through relative reasoning.

¹ Zuhairi Misrawi, ‘Post Tradisionalisme Islam : Dari Teologi Teosentrisme Menuju Teologi Antroposentrisme’, *Millah*, 2.1 (2002), 22–36 <<https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol2.iss1.art2>>.

² Dinar Dewi Kania, ‘Kajian Kritis Pemikiran Epistemologi Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998)’, *Jurnal TSAQAFAH: Jurnal Peradaban Islam*, 10.1 (2014) <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v10i1.65>>.

In essence, anthropocentrism refers to humanity's attempt to resolve all relative matters through relative reasoning and relative solutions. Its roots lie in the abandonment of traditional logic with its hierarchical syllogistic structure. While certain problems may indeed be addressed effectively in this manner, the reverse side of the coin remains: such an approach renders human beings vulnerable.

In pseudo-religion, as in anthropocentrism, individuals are trained primarily in avoidance. To evade confrontation with their true selves, they construct layers of deception and multiple personas. They consciously create many "I's" in order to evade the singular "I." Such individuals drift along the shores of *maya*, neither anchoring themselves in material reality nor immersing themselves in the salt essence of the deep sea.

In the framework of Hasan Hanafi's thought, theology appears to shift from a discourse rooted in theocentrism *an sich* toward an anthropocentric dimension³. However, the term "Hanafi anthropocentrism" requires clarification, particularly because Hanafi ultimately grounds his theology in theocentrism. Within a traditional framework, Hanafi occupies the margins of traditionalism, emphasizing human liberation as the pathway for humanity to ultimately reach God. In Islamic traditionalism of an absolute nature, theological discourse tends to be closed and non-transformative. Here, therefore, the distinction between Hanafi's position and absolute traditionalism must be clearly articulated⁴.

Modern anthropocentrism and the form of anthropocentrism (personality) that develops within religion exhibit distinct styles and tendencies. This divergence arises from the inherent difficulty in separating religion from both God and humanity⁵. It is equally misguided to assume that religion has always spoken solely about God. Religion (in this case, Islam, as will be further elaborated in relation to Hanafi's position) is an integral whole⁶.

A persistent misconception in theology emerges when focus is placed on one particular extremity. Fundamentally, the central point of Islamic theology lies in the universal relationship between God *as He is* and human beings *as they are*⁷. Yet, in

³ M. Gufron, 'Transformasi Paradigma Teologi Teosentris Menuju Antroposentris: Telaah Atas Pemikiran Hasan Hanafi', *Millatī: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities*, 3 (2018) <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v3i1.141-171>>.

⁴ Titis Rosowulan, 'Teologi Dan Filsafat Dari Polemik Diskursif Teosentris Menuju Aplikatif Antroposentris', *Wahana Islamika: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 5.1 (2019).

⁵ S.H Nasr, *Islam Dalam Cita Dan Fakta*, 1st edn (Jakarta: Lembaga Penunjang Pembangunan Nasional(Lappenas), 1981).

⁶ K Shimogaki, *Kiri Islam* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2002).

⁷ Hassan Hanafi, 'Islamologi 1: Dari Teologi Statis Ke Anarkis', in *Islamologi* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2003).

recent developments, this topography has shifted from a framework defined by a single center and its relationship, toward one defined by opposition. Such opposition is rooted in modernism's way of perceiving reality, whereby theology is conceived as being solely about God at one extreme and solely about human beings at the other.

However, although numerous scholars have discussed Hassan Hanafi's ideas through the lenses of liberation theology, Occidentalism, or his critique toward Western domination, most studies remain limited to the socio-political implications of his thought. The systematic reformulation of Islamic theology itself, particularly the epistemological shift from a theocentric and dogmatic paradigm to a theological anthropocentrism grounded in phenomenology, has not been comprehensively elaborated. This research addresses that gap by analyzing how Hanafi reconstructs theology to become an instrument of social transformation. The novelty of this research lies in its conceptualization of Hanafi's "actual theology" as a synthesis between *turāth* (tradition) and revolutionary praxis, positioning theology not only as a formulation of belief but also as a framework for emancipation within the real struggles of Muslim society. In this regard, the central question of this research examines how Hanafi's reconstruction of Islamic theology generates a liberating paradigm capable of linking faith (*al-'aqīdah*) with revolution (*al-thawrah*) in contemporary Islamic discourse.

B. Research Methods

This research adopts a qualitative library research design focusing on textual sources related to Hassan Hanafi's theological thought. The primary data consist of Hanafi's major work *Min al-'Aqīdah ilā al-Thawrah*, which explicitly formulates the shift of Islamic theology from a theocentric orientation toward a liberation-driven anthropocentrism. Secondary sources include scholarly books and journal articles that critically discuss Hanafi's theological and philosophical frameworks. The data were collected through purposive textual sampling by selecting written materials that present significant relevance to the objectives of this research⁸ All textual data were systematically documented using close reading and note-taking techniques to identify key concepts, arguments, and discursive strategies employed by Hanafi. Data analysis in this research applies critical content analysis combined with a phenomenological reading approach. The analytical procedure begins with identifying conceptual statements in the primary text that explicate theological epistemology, followed by classifying these ideas into thematic clusters that reflect Hanafi's epistemological and practical transformation of theology. The interpretive process then synthesizes these thematic concepts to construct a coherent understanding of Hanafi's "actual theology" as a paradigm of liberation that connects creed with socio-political struggle. Trustworthiness of the research is ensured through theoretical triangulation by comparing interpretations of the primary data with authoritative secondary literature

⁸ Matthew Bullock Miles and A. Michael Hubberman, *Analisis Data Kualitatif* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1992).

that engages similar themes. Dependability is maintained through a consistent analytical procedure from data collection to interpretive synthesis, while confirmability is reinforced through transparent citation of textual evidence. Transferability is achieved by providing detailed explanation of conceptual findings, allowing future studies to build upon the analytical framework developed here. As the main references include Arabic texts, translation accuracy is safeguarded through cross-checking with established English editions, standardized transliteration practices, and relevant lexicographical sources. Ethical considerations are observed by maintaining academic integrity, avoiding misrepresentation of Hanafi's thought, and strictly acknowledging all intellectual sources⁹

C. Results and Discussion

1. Intellectual Biography of Hassan Hanafi

Hassan Hanafi (1935–2021) was one of the most influential Muslim intellectuals in contemporary thought. His childhood was filled with traditional Islamic education in Cairo, including mastery of the Qur'an, Hadith, logic, and fiqh. His intellectual interest in philosophy led him to pursue formal studies at the Faculty of Philosophy at Cairo University, where he completed his bachelor's degree in 1956 with a focus on modern thought and rational criticism.¹⁰

As a recipient of an Egyptian government scholarship, Hanafi continued his master's and doctoral programs at the Sorbonne University, France (1956–1966). It was at this institution that he interacted intensively with Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, Paul Ricœur's hermeneutics, and Jean Guittou's philosophy of history. These methodological encounters enriched Hanafi's critical approach to both Islamic tradition and the modern world, which would later become the foundation for his grand project of theological renewal.¹¹

His intellectual experiences in the West did not disconnect him from his Eastern roots. It was precisely through critical dialogue with modern epistemology that Hanafi saw that the internal stagnation of Muslims and the dominance of Western hegemony must be addressed methodologically and practically. From this arose the idea of Occidentalism as an anti-hegemony to Orientalism, and al-Yasār al-Islāmī (Islamic Left) as a theology that sides with the people and social liberation.¹²

⁹ Anton Bakker and Akhmad Charris Zubair, *Metodologi Penelitian Filsafat* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius 1990, 1990).

¹⁰ Riza Zahriyal Falah and Irzum Farihah, 'Pemikiran Teologi Hassan Hanafi', *Fikrah: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah Dan Studi Keagamaan*, 3.1 (2015), 201–204 <<https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v3i1.1833>>.

¹¹ Falah and Farihah.

¹² Falah and Farihah.

For Hanafi, phenomenology is not merely a method of interpretation but a way of returning theology to the empirical reality of human life. He reaffirms the meaning of *tawhīd* as the unity between faith and struggle, between God and human history. Through a synthesis of tradition (*turāth*) and renewal (*tajdīd*), Hanafi offers a transformative theology: moving theology from the doctrinal realm to the realm of social liberation.¹³

2. Phenomenology

The philosophical tension between objectivity and subjectivity has produced two competing orientations of truth for centuries. The first aligns with the philosophy of science, which locates truth in the reality of sentient objects or objectified reality¹⁴. The second centers truth in the subject itself. As philosophical scholars have long affirmed, science is a derivative of philosophy. Yet, it is now apparent that the philosophy of science has waned, as science increasingly distances itself from the speculative claims of philosophy¹⁵.

Phenomenology, as formulated by Edmund Husserl, offers a methodological bridge between subjectivity and objectivity by grounding truth in lived experience (*Erlebnis*).¹⁶ Husserl's concept of intentionality positions consciousness as always directed toward something, allowing the subject and object to be understood in mutual relation rather than rigid separation.¹⁷ This approach provides three essential aspects relevant to Hassan Hanafi's theological project: a foundation for epistemological reconstruction, a methodological tool for textual and civilizational analysis, and a framework for returning discourse to concrete human reality.

Epistemologically, phenomenology challenges theological reasoning that is confined to fixed dogma, enabling theology to rediscover truth through the dynamic consciousness of believers. Methodologically, the phenomenological reduction (*epoche*) becomes crucial to "bracket" inherited assumptions within Islamic tradition (*turāth*), so that meaning is reinterpreted according to present social needs. In practical terms, phenomenology reorients theology toward the experiential dimension of human existence, affirming that faith must manifest in historical and social transformation, not merely in metaphysical speculation¹⁸.

¹³ Falah and Farihah.

¹⁴ Ayn Rand, *Pengantar Epistemologi Objektif* (Yogyakarta: Bentang, 2003).

¹⁵ K. Bertens, *Fenomena Eksistensial* (Jakarta: Universitas Atmaya, 2006).

¹⁶ K Bertens, *Filsafat Barat Kontemporer : Inggris - Jerman* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2002).

¹⁷ Donny Gahral Adian, *Pengantar Fenomologi* (Depok: Koekoesan, 2010).

¹⁸ Joseph Rivera and Joseph O'Leary, eds., *Theological Fringes of Phenomenology* (Taylor & Francis, 2023)

These phenomenological aspects are central to Hanafi's attempt to dismantle what he perceives as the theological and civilizational stagnation of the Muslim world. By redirecting theology from transcendental abstraction toward human liberation, phenomenology allows theology to be both faithful to divine principles and responsive to real struggles of the ummah.

3. Hasan Hanafi's Actual Theology

Hasan Hanafi advances two major ideas supported by a range of theoretical frameworks. These ideas encompass two primary aspects. First is the need to reorient At-Turath (Tradition) scholarship, which has long been rooted in a purely textual approach. Hanafi seeks to address the limitations of classical theology, which is predominantly theocentric and relies heavily on textualist analysis¹⁹.

In traditional theology, language is understood as the intact heritage of Islam, embedded in the heart of the Qur'an and Hadith, and forming a central doctrinal foundation. These sources are regarded as fixed and authoritative. Islam bases both its contemplative and practical dimensions on these two primary sources. For Hanafi, however, the orientation of these foundational aspects should not be confined solely to directing believers toward divine reality (Ilahiyah). Rather, it must also guide them toward the realm of science what Hanafi terms the "method of science" which connects believers to external (empirical) reality and to the rational dimension. This scientific orientation also engages with the historical-prophetic dimension, the concept of Imamate, charitable action, and ultimately, faith itself²⁰.

Hanafi regards this reorientation as essential because, in his view, Islam as a civilizational foundation reached its intellectual zenith nearly eight centuries ago. Since then, discourse in 'ilm al-kalam (theology) has largely remained static, often confined to closed discussions. In contemporary contexts, focusing solely on the divine dimension without addressing actual socio-historical problems renders theology disconnected from lived reality. Hanafi articulates this reorientation through a revised definition of theology:

*"This science, as in the classical definition, is the science of religious beliefs with arguments that give confidence, but it is devoid of any limitations that contain the content of these religious beliefs"*²¹.

When analyzed, Hanafi's statement indicates a strong desire to clarify what is happening internally with what should be actualized. In Islam, if people talk about theology, or kalam, then the discussion revolves around the area of discourse. As is its nature, this discursive dimension does not necessarily become creed. This means that

¹⁹ Hanafi, 'Islamologi 1: Dari Teologi Statis Ke Anarkis'.

²⁰ Hanafi, 'Islamologi 1: Dari Teologi Statis Ke Anarkis'.

²¹ Hanafi, 'Islamologi 1: Dari Teologi Statis Ke Anarkis'.

the science of kalam and creed are two sequential matters. The science of kalam is the theoretical dimension of aqidah, while aqidah is the finished product (if not said to be the practical/applied operational dimension of kalam).

However, this distinction is interesting to study, at least to sort out and direct the focus and attention of Muslims. The attention of Islam today must be directed to the aqidah rather than to the science of kalam. Otherwise, what will happen is endless theoretical acrobatics, far from the goal of freeing humans from the shackles of stagnant thinking²².

This reorientation, as Hanafi asserts in *al-Turats wa al-Tajdid* (tradition and modernization), aims primarily not to abandon tradition altogether, nor to leave the theoretical dimension and recklessly focus only on practical matters. But:

*"We are trying to find a possible solution to the crisis of modernity by referring to the classical intellectual heritage. We also seek the possibility of reconstructing the building blocks of the classical intellectual heritage in order to provide something new for the modern age to achieve progress. The classical heritage, as we have often explained, is the richness of the soul preserved in the consciousness of the masses, and this serves as the theoretical basis for constructing reality"*²³.

Tradition is necessary as a theoretical foundation for building civilization. Eliminating one dimension and prioritizing another is not an option. As both a religion and the religion, the theoretical foundation contained in the text is indispensable. Here, let us expand the meaning of the text to include not only the Quran and Sunnah (in this case, Hadith) but also the intellectual interpretive productions that encompass the Islamic dimension. Thus, in connection with the Quran, its derivatives include tafsir with a variety of analyses and schools of thought; similarly, in the case of Hadith, there are many derivative disciplines, not to mention those specifically addressing theological aspects and aspects of the personality of the Prophet SAW²⁴.

On the other hand, the need for new interpretations that are more analogous to aspects of praxis is so urgent that it may appear as if the theoretical aspects are no longer necessary. In fact, one will encounter a paradox between the dimensions of theory and practice. Especially when compared to what has been the orientation of the West thus far, it is evident that theoretical aspects lacking a strong praxis dimension are

²² Syarifuddin, 'Konsep Teologi Hasan Hanafi', *Jurnal Substansia*, 14.2 (2012).

²³ Hassan Hanafi, *Al-Turats Wa Tajdid (Tradisi Dan Modernisasi, Sikap Kita Terhadap Tradisi Lama)* (Kairo: Dar Al Tanwir, 1981).

²⁴ Hassan Hanafi, *Dari Aqidah Ke Revolusi (Terj. Min Aqidah Ila At-Tsawrah Al-Muqaddimat an-Nazhariyat)* (Jakarta: Dian Rakyat & Paramadina, 2003).

completely disregarded. This can be observed not only in the shift in philosophical orientation but also in the tendency to formulate liberation theology²⁵.

In the Islamic world, theology oriented toward a new praxis was significantly promoted by Hassan Hanafi. Of course, this does not imply that there were no contributions or efforts from other scholars. Rather, it can be said that Hanafi's views are among the most striking and widely recognized by Muslim scholars²⁶.

Islamic traditionalism in the form of at-Turats, if positioned at a single point, represents a theoretical dimension, which also encompasses the esoteric dimension. The term "esoteric" refers to matters concerning the inner dimension. God and the entirety of the revelatory vision He conveyed to the Prophet are essentially a composite of both the exoteric and esoteric aspects. The exotericism of Islam is manifested in the formalism of rites, movements, and praxis-oriented actions, both in forms closely related to the spiritual (morals) and in a broader scope and form (adab). In every religion, exotericism plays a highly significant role. Its outward function serves as a path for humans to reach God, who resides in the esoteric dimension. Hanafi clearly understands the logical consequences of removing or denying a religion's exoteric dimension. Such a removal would result not only in the loss of form but also in the loss of the praxis aspect and of God's intended purpose as a means and path for humanity.

Exotericism is externally binding similar to law (jurisprudence). In Islam, human beings are not only required to contemplate inwardly (himmah) and concentrate their thoughts (dhikr) with God as the central focus, but also to perform concrete actions such as giving and helping one another. The stereotype of Islam in the eyes of the West fails to recognize that the Prophet, peace be upon him, addressed not only the inner and divine aspects but also the outer aspects. In the West, Islam is in fact often perceived as a material religion²⁷. However, internally, the opposite is true, and this is precisely what motivates Hanafi to advocate change from within. In short, human beings are called not only to Iman, but also to Islam, and ultimately to Ihsan. It is essential that they understand not only the core of doctrine, but also the formal dimensions and structures, as well as their practical application in daily life. Neglecting one means removing an integral aspect embedded in the very essence of every religion.

While the esoteric dimension is the inner dimension²⁸, religion possesses this aspect in connection with the fact that every exoteric shell necessarily requires content. The same applies to religion. If rites represent the shell and surface formalism, then

²⁵ Michael Lowy, *Teologi Pembebasan: Kritik Marxisme & Marxisme Kritis* (Yogyakarta: Insist Press, 2013).

²⁶ Shabbín Akhtar, *Merancang Teologi Pembebasan Islam* (Bandung: Penerbit Nusa, 2002).

²⁷ Nasr.

²⁸ F. Schuon, *Proses Ritual Menyingkap Tabir Mencari Yang Inti* (Terj. Sufism: Veil&Quintessence) (Jakarta: Srigunting, 2000).

contemplation and centering the mind on God constitute the content. In Islam, attention to the divine dimension is not only manifested in intellectual acrobatics but in almost every aspect of life. From this, a rough assumption may arise as to why Islam appears to be concerned solely with the divine, or esoteric, dimension of religion excluding everything else.

Obviously, such an assumption is erroneous, just as it is equally mistaken to emphasize only the physical aspect. The esoteric dimension, especially in at-Turats, which emerged as a theological discourse for Hanafi, should possess a vision. This vision is not merely an eclectic and encapsulated description containing a number of propositions and definitions about God and related derivatives. Rather, the discourse must remain open to the dimension of praxis. Hanafi writes:

“Those who are healthy will not submit to rigid and exclusive rational analysis, as it is merely quantitative reasoning concerning the ancient attributes of God in the form of dogmas, which essentially rest on rational practice alone without meaning, while the dogmas rest on themselves—as if they neither reveal reality, nor direct action, nor provide a conception of nature”²⁹.

From this, Hanafi's position is clear. Although he appears to criticize tradition, his ideas are essentially based on Islamic tradition itself. However, his emphasis on tradition is not as dominant as his emphasis on action. Hanafi's critique of tradition is constructive, in the phenomenological method, it is called reduction. Reduction is essential in the goal of clarifying the object from all interests other than its own.

The influence of Husserl's phenomenology on Hanafi's thinking undoubtedly provides analytical foundations and methodological support. In phenomenology, the method of reduction is known to bring closer, one might say, to illuminate the object from the subject's judgments. This is because reality often obscures itself, and this obscurity does not originate from reality itself but from the subject. The subject's judgments and justifications often render the object incomplete: and this is precisely one of the advances in Hanafi's critique of tradition. Muslims have always found it difficult to distinguish between reality that can be seen as an object and that which involves the subject, or both.

In matters of esotericism and a number of theological issues, Muslims view them as inherent without distance. It seems as if the practice of Muslim tradition automatically contains elements of the divine dimension, or aspects of worship rooted in theological dogma. Phenomenologically, what is experienced as distancelessness is fundamentally unproblematic, and it is precisely there that experience becomes sublime. However, this lack of distance (if not the fusion of objects into subjects in a fusion of horizons) complicates analysis and restructuring. Within the human horizon,

²⁹ Hanafi, *Dari Akidah Ke Revolusi* (Terj. Min Aqidah Ila At-Tsawrah Al-Muqaddimat an-Nazhariyat).

something can only be analyzed when it has been placed at a certain distance. This distance is crucial for clarifying the object from judgment. Isolating humans from the object in this case, at-Turats or Islamic theological traditions and dogmas is necessary to discern what it truly is and what its essence is.

Hanafi observed that our interpretation of at-Turats and theological dogma needed to be broadened because, once subjected to the phenomenological method of reduction, the essence of tradition was no longer relevant in the contemporary context. At the very least, it had ceased to be relevant since the mid-20th century, during the period of Hanafi's own intellectual development and this irrelevance extends even into the 21st century. Hanafi formulated his new definition as follows:

*"...now the focus of the science of monotheism has shifted from the attributes of God and His deeds to the land of Muslims and the sources of their natural wealth, as well as their independence, civilization, and unity. At the same time, there has been a change in the theoretical framework of scientific theory, which was previously dominated by patterns of argumentative proof and theories of existence generally centered on discussions of atoms and accidents toward a new theoretical foundation in epistemology, one dominated by direct observation of reality and in-depth research into the object of study. The theory of the existence of God has thus shifted to research on the existence of human beings as social creatures, and to a fundamental understanding of human existence itself, encompassing freedom, justice, democracy, progress, independence, and revival."*³⁰.

Hanafi formulated this shift in definition and focus after conducting both theoretical exploration through phenomenological methods and practical research, as evidenced by his own historical experience. The science of tawhid—the science concerning the transcendental unity of God is indeed a discipline centered on the doctrine of divinity. However, the issue at stake is not solely about God; it is also about humanity. Human history cannot simply be reduced to the transcendent realm, because actual problems demand practical solutions without implying that the transcendent is no longer important. Rather, this is a matter of urgency confronting the Muslim community. It is at this point that we can move to the second of Hanafi's two analyses of Islamic reality.

Hanafi urges the analysis of social reality, beginning with concrete facts on the ground. Such an analytical approach is essential for understanding the historical and social background particularly in relation to the emergence of theology in the early period of Islam and for examining its impact on the social life of the Muslim community itself as its adherents. This constitutes Hanafi's key contribution: the initiation of a contemporary theology. These two ideas are actualized through the application of

³⁰ Hanafi, *Dari Akidah Ke Revolusi* (Terj. Min Aqidah Ila At-Tsawrah Al-Muqaddimat an-Nazhariyat).

phenomenological and hermeneutical methods, with hermeneutics here being an extension of phenomenology. Furthermore, Hanafi employs this phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis to pursue an entirely new interpretation. His liberating interpretation involves at least three phases of analysis: first, historical awareness, which determines the authenticity of the text and its level of certainty; second, eidetic awareness, which explicates the meaning of the text and renders it rational; and third, practical awareness, which uses that meaning as a theoretical basis for action, thereby guiding revelation toward its ultimate purpose in human life.

The analysis of social reality is necessary for Muslims to avoid becoming trapped in the purely theoretical dimensions of theological discourse. Today, however, Muslim attention must be directed toward their lived social reality. Hanafi emphasizes:

*"Social and political realities have undergone profound changes from the era of the classical scholars of kalam to our present time. The Islamic world has experienced a fundamental transformation: from a victorious state and an empire that once ruled over vast territories in the past, to a region occupied by foreign powers in the modern era. It has become a fragmented and backward land, contested by great powers like a feast ready to be carved up its independence seized, its resources exploited, its spirit of unity obstructed, its dignity cast aside, its progress hindered, and its awakening suppressed"*³¹

Hanafi's concerns are rooted in historical realities, as he personally experienced the impact of World War II. Moreover, the rise and decline of Egypt—and particularly its defeat by Israel in 1967 altered Hanafi's own orientation and focus. As he acknowledged: "I shifted from being a theoretical 'academic' researcher to a social researcher, moving from the dominant 'individual consciousness' in my first thesis to 'social consciousness' in order to respond to that defeat, as a thinker, researcher, and scholar"³².

This transition is critical: a movement from individual consciousness to collective, social consciousness. The focus of Islamic theology has thus far tended to remain centered on individual consciousness. This is arguably because social realities indicate that the fixation or rather, the establishment—of theological discourse within at-Turats has been largely detached from social reality. Theological discourse has always been, in essence, sound, but it has lacked sufficient impetus toward more practical interpretation. Hanafi writes:

"The revelation of Islam is a compilation of rational principles that also constitute the structure of reality; both can be substantiated through reason and

³¹ Hanafi, *Dari Akidah Ke Revolusi (Terj. Min Aqidah Ila At-Tsawrah Al-Muqaddimat an-Nazhariyat)*.

³² Hanafi, *Dari Akidah Ke Revolusi (Terj. Min Aqidah Ila At-Tsawrah Al-Muqaddimat an-Nazhariyat)*.

*empirical experience. Creed ('aqidah) serves as the preliminaries of faith, which do not involve an act of affirmation (tashdiq), but rather an act of submission whether through imitation (taqlid) or voluntary acceptance. Among the causes of our present decline is the collapse of the structure of knowledge and the disappearance of the rational endeavor that had continued for eight centuries. Conversely, among the causes of our revival are efforts to restore the structure of traditional knowledge by drawing lessons from our present circumstances, developing various contemporary reform movements, providing them with renewed impetus, and transforming them from mere reform into revival, from religion into civilization, from revelation into history, and from creed into revolution."*³³

From the quotation above, Hanafi identifies several urgent imperatives: first, the necessity of directing theological discourse toward reform; second, promoting reform as a pathway to revival; third, positioning religion as the axis of civilization; fourth, reorienting revelation toward the reshaping of history; and finally and most importantly fifth, moving from creed to revolution³⁴. The implementation of these shifts is therefore essential if Islam, as a nation rather than merely a community, seeks to rise from the position of being "object" to becoming "subject," characterized by collective and social consciousness.

Social consciousness, as Hanafi emphasizes and as partially noted earlier is grounded in reality. Humans exist within reality, and they are simultaneously part of reality, indeed reality itself. This reality, shaped through social interaction, forms a social system: a social order which, in turn, produces collective consciousness. Hanafi thus underscores:

"The existence of human beings as social creatures constitutes the foundation of reality, and reality itself forms the basis of the social system for humankind. Therefore, discourses long familiar to classical scholars of kalam such as the One and the many, essence and existence, cause and effect, being and non-being, the necessary and the possible, the eternal and the temporal, and so forth—hold for us a renewed significance that shapes the intellectual discourse of the younger generation, including concepts such as freedom, progress, equality, humanity, society, and history. In the past, for classical scholars of kalam, reality took the form of intellectual attacks and political victories, whereas for us today, that

³³ Hanafi, *Dari Akidah Ke Revolusi (Terj. Min Aqidah Ila At-Tsawrah Al-Muqaddimat an-Nazhariyat)*.

³⁴ Ali Syariati, *Ideologi Kaum Intelektual: Suatu Wawasan Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 1990).

reality manifests as assaults and the usurpation of our land and water resources"

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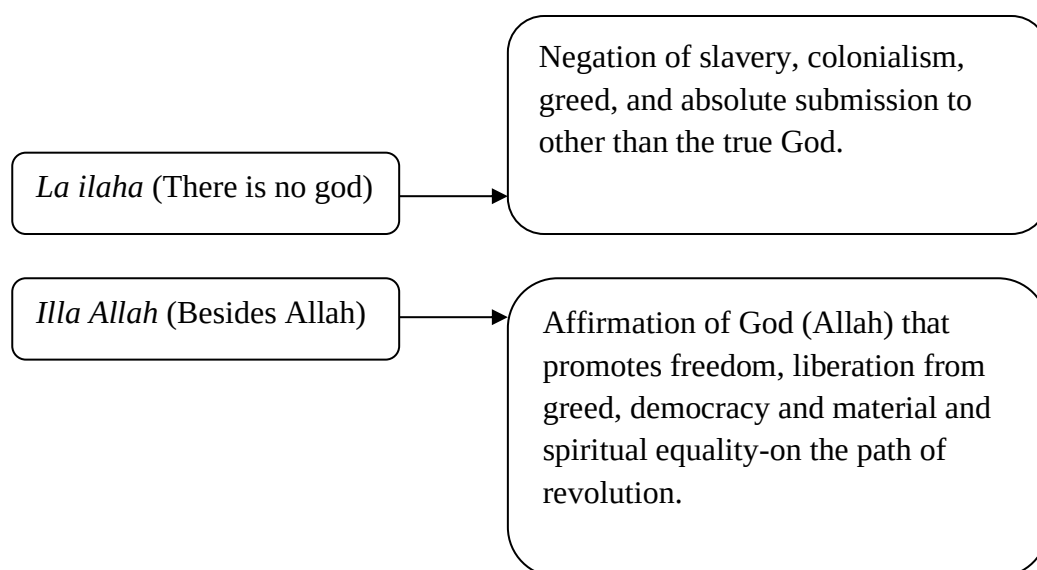
Without social awareness where humans (in this case, Muslims) actively engage in interaction and shape their own realities intellectual vision becomes distorted. Intellectualism will remain confined to theoretical discourse, failing to stimulate social transformation or even revolution. Revolution, in this sense, is the wind of change driven by physical mobilization and collective consciousness.

What kind of collective consciousness must Muslims cultivate to generate revolutionary power? Consistent with Hanafi's thesis, it is clearly a consciousness rooted in both tradition and modernization. However, the modernization in question is one that pivots upon tradition, rather than upon external models or alien paradigms. Accordingly, Hanafi's theology is a theology that remains perpetually relevant, continuously renewed through *tajdīd* (reformation).

The roots of this ever-relevant theology may be traced to the first sentence of the *shahāda*: *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* ("There is no god but Allah"). In this declaration, all implications of God's Being manifest as external reality. It also functions as a summons to unity within a pluralistic world. The phrase "there is no god" negates all forms of enslavement, colonial domination, and absolute submission to greed. Meanwhile, "but Allah" affirms a divine reality grounded in love and compassion. Thus, if a doctrine purportedly in the name of God lacks love and compassion for all humanity, it can only be understood as proclaiming a "god" already denied by this statement.

By contrast, the God affirmed here is a God who elevates humanity to equal standing seated at the same level, standing at the same height. This is a God for whom humanization is indispensable, and for whom liberating humanity from the chains of colonialism, co-optation, and hegemony (as well as the prison bars of both physical and ideological domination) is the most direct path. In Hanafi's actual theology, the true God is conceived as historical, spatial, and temporal: not distant or accessible solely through intellectual acrobatics or the intertextuality of tradition, but embedded, woven into the very fabric of Muslim life.

³⁵ Hanafi, *Dari Akidah Ke Revolusi* (Terj. Min *Aqidah Ila At-Tsawrah Al-Muqaddimat an-Nazhariyat*).

Figure 1. Hassan Hanafi's current theological path Image source: Author

Traditionally, the foundation and orientation of Islamic theology have remained unchanged. The former upholds absolute principles. From the human perspective, however, it is evident that theology functions as a tool, and in this sense it must possess a functional dimension³⁶. Given that no goal can be attained without an instrument, theology here should be regarded as that instrument. What is required of Muslims, therefore, is merely a reorientation of consciousness, as Hanafi emphasizes:

*"If, for those of earlier generations, rational thought served as the theoretical foundation of knowledge, for us today such awareness constitutes a prerequisite for scientific inquiry. If existence, for the predecessors, was understood as a metaphysical reality, for us now it is the social, political, and economic existence of the community connected to the condition and destiny of Muslims, their natural resources, homeland, as well as their unity and strength. These are the very issues once contemplated by reformers before our time, and which are now sought to be transformed by the forces of liberation."*³⁷

It is only through an integrative perspective that the problem of theology in Islam can be properly understood, as Hanafi himself intended. In many respects, the transformation in Hanafi's theology represents a genuine and substantive change. One cannot simply adopt the theoretical dimension while neglecting the actual scientific

³⁶ Hassan Hanafi, 'Islamologi 3: Dari Teosentrisme Ke Antroposentrisme', in *Islamologi* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004).

³⁷ Hanafi, *Dari Akidah Ke Revolusi* (Terj. Min Aqidah Ila At-Tsawrah Al-Muqaddimat an-Nazhariyat).

requirements that must be applied. Likewise, one cannot fully grasp the concrete realities of the people's social, political, and economic existence—realities deeply intertwined with the fate of entire communities without also understanding their metaphysical dimension.

It thus becomes evident that Hanafi's theology is, at its core, traditional because it is grounded in traditionalism (*turats*), yet it is simultaneously actual and contemporary because it is equally grounded in an awareness of modernity (*tajdid*). This is, of course, provided that modernity is distinguished from modernism, with the latter's negative tendencies toward positivism and binary oppositional thinking. Hanafi's phenomenology does not compel him into an absolute reduction, nor does it confine him to a single point of transcendental reduction even though he possesses the intellectual capacity to direct the discourse of Islamic theology in that direction.

4. The Implications of Hasan Hanafi's Theology

Before finalizing *From Faith to Revolution* as a “major personal project,” Hanafi proposed what he called *Al-Yasar al-Islami* (“The Islamic Left”). This initiative emerged as a scientific journal but appeared in only one volume. It is evident that Hanafi drew inspiration from what had become left-wing ideology (socialism). Notably, however, Hanafi's *Al-Yasar al-Islami* does not exhibit the characteristics of absolute socialism³⁸.

One of the foundational elements of socialism is the concept of materialism whether in the form of dialectical materialism, historical materialism, or a synthesis of both. When Marx formulated his theory of materialism, particularly in *Das Kapital* (*Capital*), his work represented both an extension and a reduction of Hegel's theses³⁹. In Marx's thought, the notion of *Geist* or Absolute Spirit was abandoned, while the notion of matter was emphasized to the point of being absolutized. At the same time, Marx adopted Hegel's dialectical structure. Hegel himself was deemed obsolete because the culmination of his philosophy upheld the religious spirit (if not the theology) of the Church. God understood as existing within the course of history was seen as having little tangible effect on change, movement, or the social mobility required to overcome economic decline and material stagnation.

It was for this reason that Marx regarded religion as a counterproductive instrument for mass mobilization, social change, and class struggle of frequently serving as a defender of capitalist power. Religion, in his view, perpetuated dogmas

³⁸ Aisyah, ‘Hassan Hanafi Dan Gagasan Pembaruannya’, *Jurnal Sulesana: Wawasan Keislaman*, 6.2 (2011) <[https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24252/v6i2.1402](https://doi.org/10.24252/v6i2.1402)>.

³⁹ Harun Hadiwijono, *Sari Sejarah Filsafat Barat 2* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1980).

that legitimized power structures aligned with capitalism. This conviction led Marx to formulate his well-known dictum: "Religion is the opium of the people"⁴⁰.

Regardless of how "addictive" religion might be, a clear distinction can be drawn in terms of religious tendencies. In the hands of the Islamic socialist thinker Ali Shariati, religion became a driving force for revolutionary action. The awareness of such a movement aimed at liberation from stagnation rooted in material and spiritual oppression found an authentic place within Islam. Although Shariati himself faced exile and the suppression of his ideas, several studies suggest that the Iranian Islamic Revolution (with Shi'a theology as its mainstream) owed part of its ideological and motivational force to Shariati's thought.

In the Egyptian context, with Sunni theology as the dominant framework, Hassan Hanafi did not generate mass mobilization in the same way. Nevertheless, his ideas contributed significantly to the reorientation of Islamic theology. This reorientation, in turn, paved the way for the emergence of his concept of Occidentalism, positioned as a counter-response to the intellectual dominance of Orientalism. Hanafi recognized that halting the material, political, and economic exploitation of Muslim (if not Arab) societies required more than a theological shift from static to contemporary formulations. He argued for a cognitive shift: a redirection of focus away from the West's hegemonic centrality.

Hegemony, as Hanafi observed, operates differently from material exploitation. It works in the realm of consciousness. Eastern societies had long been objectified by the West, resulting in an entrenched inferiority complex. This inferiority was not solely the product of material colonialism, but also of prolonged mental subjugation—the internalization of the assumption that the West is inherently superior and the East inherently inferior. Compounding this were irresponsible assertions by certain Orientalists portraying Eastern societies as overly religious and contemplative, disengaged from material realities.

Ultimately, Al-Yasar al-Islami stands as Hanafi's contribution to the socio-political dimension of Islamic thought. Kazuo Shimogaki, however, criticizes Hanafi's Islamic Left as overly one-sided, marginalizing the West⁴¹. This critique, however, can be understood in terms of what Hannah Arendt calls the perspective of the "object" or "victim"⁴². Readers of Hanafi must also account for the role of epoché the methodological "bracketing" in appreciating his intellectual struggle, which is deeply bound to the historical trajectory of Egypt as a representation of traditional Eastern (Islamic) culture. While some may view his thought as biased, Shimogaki nonetheless

⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (London: Collins/Fontana, 1969).

⁴¹ Shimogaki.

⁴² Hannah Arendt, *Asal Usul Totalitarianisme* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1995).

regards Hanafi's theological vision as one of the foundations for a robust religious movement. In *Aqidah ke Revolusi* (From Faith to Revolution), Hanafi underscores this urgency:

... "If the science of Usul al-Din is fundamentally reconstructed in accordance with the demands of the times, as it was established by predecessors to address the challenges of their era, it will constitute a theology that responds to the realities of Muslim life, including foreign occupation, backwardness, oppression, poverty, alienation, division, and indifference, as well as the values of liberation, progress, and revival. Many Muslim homelands have been colonized, particularly Palestine. Their natural resources have been exploited by imperialist powers from outside Islam and by dictatorial rulers within the Muslim world itself. Consequently, Muslims can be likened to a person of great wealth whose life remains trapped in poverty: a small minority enjoys affluence and luxury, while the majority lives in severe destitution. This situation is exacerbated by the suppression of the people's freedoms in the name of national goals and external interests.

Concurrently, conservative groups have emerged from the fissures of the contemporary revolutionary movement, as well as from factions opposed to the movement for progress. As a result, alienation has intensified, hindering the processes of thought and intellectual discovery. Thus, a people once united both in heart and in strength centered in their regions, are now fragmented.

If the science of Usul al-Din can address the demands of the present while acknowledging that these demands evolve over time it is our belief that Muslims today must reconstruct the structure of faith, making this process the central subject of the science of Usul al-Din" ⁴³

From this, it appears that although Hanafi's ideas can shift theological orientation from theocentrism to theological anthropocentrism, a number of ambivalences remain⁴⁴. One source of this ambivalence is the persistence of conservative forces, which exacerbate alienation (particularly internal alienation, marked by the emergence of an inferiority complex) and thereby hinder critical thought, ultimately dissolving social mobilization.

In Hanafi's view, the crisis of the Islamic world is a dual ambivalence: one originating from outside the Islamic world, and the other from within it. While solutions must be formulated for external challenges, internal problems also demand resolution.

⁴³ Hanafi, *Dari Akidah Ke Revolusi* (Terj. Min Aqidah Ila At-Tsawrah Al-Muqaddimat an-Nazhariyat).

⁴⁴ Hassan Hanafi, *Agama, Ideologi, Dan Pembangunan* (Jakarta: P3M, 1991).

For this reason, Hanafi grounds his thought in the roots of theology, arguing that only by addressing theological foundations can the conflicts and ambiguities be resolved.

Ultimately, the implications of Hassan Hanafi's theology are most evident when examined in the context of mass mobilization during revolutionary upheavals, or more precisely, in the awakening of consciousness to the roots of Islamic primordialism. This transformation of consciousness, in turn, paved the way for legal reform in Egypt and across the broader Islamic world though the most profound change lies in the transformation of actual theological consciousness.

D. Conclusion

As a result of reading the book *Min al-'Aqidah ila al-Thawrah (From Creed to Revolution)*, Hassan Hanafi's theological scheme is found to be both solid and traditional. This pattern is identified and formulated by the author as "actual theology." Unlike most definitions of Hanafi's theology, which position him within the spectrum of Western modernism, the author finds evidence that Hanafi is, in fact, highly traditionalist. This is why Hanafi does not merely shift theology from theocentrism to anthropocentrism a move that would appear dichotomous, but rather promotes an awareness of theological anthropocentrism. The fundamental distinction between these two terms is clear: the former is characterized by binary opposition, while the latter possesses an integral character.

Islam, as an inner (spiritual/esoteric) religion that brings awareness to the Absolute, does not necessarily disregard the outer (material/exoteric) reality; rather, it integrates the two. This integral formation is evident in the composition of the sentence of testimony in Islam (*shahadah*).

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