

The Faith of a Modern Muslim Intellectual

The Religious Aspects
and Implications of
the Writings of
Ahmad Amin

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Preface

In most general terms, the purpose of this study is to investigate the question of what it has meant to be a Muslim in the Twentieth Century by way of an intensive study of one particular Twentieth-Century Muslim, the Egyptian scholar and writer, Aḥmad Amin (1886-1954). The choice of Aḥmad Amin has been viewed with surprise by some, since he is not generally seen as a religious figure by those Egyptians with whom I have talked, although he has written much that bears on religious matters. Nevertheless, the experience of those who may be considered 'laymen' is certainly no less significant than that of those who are recognized as religious leaders, and exclusive attention to the latter may lead us to miss important dimensions of human religious experience.

I have chosen Aḥmad Amin for two reasons, primarily. The first is that he has committed his personal views and feelings to writing in considerable volume. The second is that while he could hardly be considered a 'typical' Egyptian or Muslim, the movement of his life from the traditional to the modern seems to me something of a paradigm of the collective experience of Egypt and of the Muslim world generally in this century. It appears to me reasonable to assume that in his opinions on particular issues and in his reflections on life in general we will find echoes of much that has passed, and still passes, through the minds of his compatriots who have also experienced the tensions of tradition and modernity but have not published their thoughts for the world to read.

I have concentrated my attention primarily on understanding Aḥmad Amin himself and have not made a sustained effort to compare him with other figures, either modern or classical, although, of course, some reference to others is made. I have done this in the conviction that how consistent and true a man's views are, is finally more important than where they came from. Even the most original thinkers draw most of the elements of their thought from others. What is original is mainly the way in which these elements are combined.

The substance of this work is based on a doctoral dissertation presented to the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences but considerably revised for present publication. I wish to acknowledge my debt to Dr Wilfred Cantwell Smith, my dissertation adviser, whose

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William Shepard

Mount Vernon, Iowa
April, 1975

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