

# Chapter 75: Renaissance in Egypt: Muhammad Abduh and His School

## [A: Life](#)

Nobody has contributed to the renaissance of Muslim thought in modern Egypt more than Muhammad Abduh. He was a great Egyptian philosopher, sociologist, and reformer, and is ranked as one of the most remarkable figures in the modern Muslim world. On his death in 1323/1905 he left numerous disciples and many works of real interest and inestimable value. He was, and still is, commonly given the superb title “al-Ustadh al-Imam” (The Master and Guide); this title alone shows the influence that he had upon his contemporaries.

A young Egyptian writer, Kamil al-Shinnawi, recently described Abduh’s life as a “combination of the life of a prophet and that of a hero.” However, he remained little known: on the one hand, the passion for factions and schools of thought had for over half a century distorted his true personality; on the other hand, a superficial knowledge of his teachings had given rise to erroneous interpretations which everything in the Master’s writings combined to contradict, as everything in his life tended to refute.

We know the essential facts of Muhammad Abduh’s life, thanks to a source which is excellent because authentic. It is a form of autobiography that the Egyptian philosopher himself composed towards the end of his life, by way of replies to questions put to him by his disciple, Rashid Rida. We also possess, written by the hand of the Master, a number of very interesting documents about his family and his early education.

Muhammad Abduh was the son of an Egyptian farmer. He was born in 1266/1849 at Mahallat Nasr, a little village of Beheira Province, where his father enjoyed a high reputation as a man of integrity whose growing prosperity did not mar his altruism and willingness to make sacrifices for the cause of justice; Abduh’s mother was a gentle soul, respected for her piety and charity.

He studied first at Tanta, at the Mosque of al-Ahmadi, where he became so discouraged by the teaching

method of his time, with its suppression of intelligent inquiry, that he would undoubtedly have turned away from his schooling altogether had it not been for the beneficial influence of his uncle, Shaikh Darwish, who was able to awaken in his nephew the feeling and taste for study and meditation.

“I had no one to guide me,” wrote Abduh later, “but Shaikh Darwish, who first liberated me from the prison of ignorance in opening to me the doors of knowledge. He broke for me the chains which had bound us when we repeated blindly all that we were told, and brought me back to true religion.” Shaikh Darwish remained for Abduh, for the rest of his life, a spiritual guide and the director of his conscience.

The great event of the youth of Muhammad Abduh was his entry, in 1283/1866, into the University of al-Azhar, the traditional centre of Islamic studies. However, the young Abduh spent two years there without deriving much profit from the courses that he attended, which circumstance was surely due to the altogether antiquated and stale methods of instruction then employed.

In his book, *The Egyptian Empire under Ismail*, Dr. Muhammad Sabri observed: “They overloaded the memories of the pupils with a welter of grammatical knowledge and theological subtleties designed to narrow the mind and prevent its development.” While at al-Azhar, Abduh went through an inner crisis; he was then to be seen indulging in ascetic exercises and even trying to isolate himself and shun the world. But again the wise counsel of Shaikh Darwish aided him to emerge from this mystical crisis.

Yet another great personality was to exercise on Abduh a profound influence, and to show him the road that he had to follow. This was Jamal al-Din al-Aghfani, already famous as the courageous champion of religious and political freedom for Oriental peoples. Jamal al-Din, on arriving in Egypt, drew many disciples around himself, notably Muhammad Abduh. It was the spiritual direction of Jamal al-Din that made decisive Abduh’s turning away from ascetic practices in favour of an active life.

Abduh gradually broke away from religious traditionalism and studied philosophy, mathematics, morals, and politics, all outside the al-Azhar curriculum. To Jamal al-Din he owed a new vision in the comprehension of classical Arabic works, and equally a taste for Western works translated into Arabic, but above all he owed to Jamal al-Din the awakening of national feeling, the love of liberty, and the idea of a constitutional regime.

Abduh showed his enthusiasm for Jamal al-Din in his first work, *Risalat al-Waridat* (1291/1874). At the same time, Abduh actively interested himself in the political relations between the East and the West, and he admitted the necessity for a complete modification of the political and social life of the East. In 1293/1876 he began writing for journals articles on various subjects of general culture, but he still seemed to have difficulty in breaking loose from the technique and spirit then prevalent in the Azharite circles.

In 1294/1877 Abduh obtained the *al-Alimiyyah* diploma which conferred upon him the title of *Alim* (learned man in the theological sense) and the right to teach in the various branches of Islamic science. He first earned his living by giving private lessons, and then by giving discourses at al-Azhar on

theology, logic, and morals. These courses were distinguished by a new method that attracted a great number of students to him.

Having become a teacher, this man of inquisitive mind did not cease to study and to instruct himself. He applied himself to the general sciences called "modern" because they did not figure in the programme of instruction at the Islamic University. In 1296/1879 he was nominated Professor of History at the college of *Dar al-Ulum* and Professor of Literature at the School of Languages; he fulfilled his new functions still continuing his courses at al-Azhar.

At the same time Abduh devoted himself to the journalistic activity which Jamal al-Din had already recommended. Since its origin, the Arabic Press has been mainly centred in Egypt. At the beginning of the reign of the Khedive Tewfik, Abduh was made an editor of "The Official Journal." He soon became its chief editor, and, by the impetus given by him, this publication acquired a new significance. It was in this journal that there appeared the orientation and effort towards religious and moral reform that characterized the work of Muhammad Abduh.

Then occurred the *coup d'état* of 1296/1879, which precipitated the fall of the cabinet of Nubar Pasha, and some European ministers, the first consequence of the nationalist movement that was beginning to develop. Another, more serious, consequence was the revolt of the Egyptian army under Urabi against the Turko-Circassian officers; it developed into a revolution that resulted in the occupation of Egypt by the British troops in 1300/1882.

After Urabi's failure, Muhammad Abduh, accused of conspiring with the revolutionaries, was condemned to three years' exile. For, although he had not at first been a partisan of Urabi whom he considered to be the mouthpiece of purely military ideas, Abduh with the further development of events, came wholeheartedly to support his cause and became one of the chief voices of the revolutionist government, fighting energetically for the liberty and independence of the Egyptian people.

As an exile he first settled in Syria, but not for long; his spiritual guide, al-Afghani, having returned from India, invited him to join him in Paris. Abduh accordingly joined Afghani in Paris the following year; there they founded a society and started *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* (The Indissoluble Link), a political weekly given to the cause of Pan-Islamism and the defence of the Orientals against foreign domination and internal despotism, and notably against the occupation of Egypt by the British.

*Al-Urwah* was the first Arabic journal to appear in Europe which was conscious of such a mission and which defended it energetically and with eloquence. At the beginning of the summer of 1302/1884, Muhammad Abduh left for England as a representative of his Review. His friend Wilfried Blunt gave him his valuable assistance in winning over public opinion through the English Press and making it interested in the Egyptian cause. He introduced Abduh to a large number of English politicians; among others to Randolph Churchill, the father of Winston Churchill.

Muhammad Abduh next returned to Paris to resume his work. But the banning of his Review in Islamic

countries, as a result of English machinations, made his field of activity restricted, and the Review ceased to appear. In its short life this Review had a decisive influence on the development of nationalism and Pan-Islamism, but, in fact, it little suited the spirit of the Egyptian Shaikh, which leaned more towards education and gradual reform.

In 1303/1885, Muhammad Abduh returned to Beirut. There he was appointed teacher in the Sultaniyyah School, and gave his famous course of lectures on theology which served as a basis for his future treatise on Monotheism (*Risalat al-Tauhid*). His activity as a professor was particularly fruitful, but he did not occupy himself with instruction alone; he founded, with the aid of some others, an association which had one of its aims the bringing together of the three great religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But it seems that his activity in this connection having been interpreted in Turkey in a political sense unfavourable to the interests of the Ottoman Caliphate, Sultan Abd al-Hamid moved against it and took steps to persuade the British Government to ask the Egyptian Shaikh to leave Syria as soon as possible.

It is thus that Muhammad Abduh returned to Egypt in 1306/1888. He was appointed, a Judge in the Native Tribunal and then a Counsellor at the Court of Appeal. As a magistrate he was well known for his sense of equity and independence of his spirit that were never encumbered with the forms of judicial procedure. He now concentrated his efforts on the awakening of Egypt by the spreading of knowledge, by moral education, and by the adaptation of the traditional social institutions to the demands of contemporary life.

Nominated as a member of the Administrative Council of al-Azhar University, Muhammad Abduh threw himself into an indefatigable activity in order to renew and raise the material, cultural, and moral standards of this old Islamic University. The influence of the liberal doctrines he professed was readily felt. He instituted courses in the secular sciences such as history, geography, natural history, mathematics, and philosophy, sciences that had not previously appeared in the curricula of this University.

Nominated in 1307/1899 as Grand Mufti of Egypt, Muhammad Abduh gave this religious post a hitherto unknown prestige. It was in this capacity that his modernizing influence had its far-reaching effects. He himself gave a course of lectures consisting of commentary on the Quran, a course animated from beginning to end by a new spirit.

As Grand Mufti, Muhammad Abduh took three religious decisions (*fatawa*) that clearly showed his tolerance towards other religions. The first of these authorized the Muslims to receive interest and dividends; the second authorized them, while living in non-Muslim countries, to eat the meat of animals slaughtered by non-Muslims; and the third permitted them, if the occasion arose, to wear clothes other than their traditional costume.

It is not difficult to imagine why these decisions aroused so many controversies and even let loose the old Muslim faction and brought down on the Grand Mufti no small number of calumnies of which the

motives were not purely religious. During the same years, he was made a member of the Legislative Council.

Muhammad Abduh was one of the founders of the "Islamic Benevolent Society" which aimed at spreading education among and giving moral and material aid to the poorer classes. He also founded a "Society for the Renaissance of Arabic Books," i.e., for the publication of the masterpieces of classical authors.

In another sphere, he worked for the reform of the religious courts (*mahakim Shariah*); his report on this became well known, and remained a basis for the reform of the judicial procedure in the personal statute tribunals. The principal idea developed by Muhammad Abduh in the report had, as its point of departure, the elementary realization of the importance to the State of raising the intellectual and moral standard of future judges by improving their material conditions, and reorganizing their recruitment on a better basis. The idea of creating a School for Religious Judges (*al-Qada al-Shari*) was also initiated by him.

In 1320/1902, Muhammad Abduh was engaged in a controversy with Gabriel Hanotaux, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, following the publication by the latter of an article entitled "Confronting the Muslim Question." The Grand Mufti pointed out to the French historian how false was the idea held in France of Islam.

In another polemic on the philosophy of ibn Rushd, Muhammad Abduh defended a thesis dear to him, that the fatalism with which Islam is reproached is only a distortion of the Muslim religion, a distortion due to the misunderstanding of the very fundamentals of the faith. On another occasion, an article on ibn Rushd published by the Christian editor of the review *al-Jamiah* drew a reply from Muhammad Abduh which, published at first in a series of articles in the *Manar*, then collected in one volume, *al-Islam wal-Nasraniyyah* (Islam and Christianity), constitutes a piece of the modern Muslim apologetics of great value.

The Grand Mufti was a man of frank and keen intelligence, holding precise ideas on men's conduct and their ability to evaluate events. He was conversant with the principal works of European thinkers, and enriched his wide scholarship with many journeys through Africa and Europe. He often said that he needed these journeys "to renew himself." He had numerous Occidental and Oriental friends, and entered into correspondence with European thinkers, among whom were W. S. Blunt, Gustave le Bon, Herbert Spencer, and Tolstoy.

It must be remembered that Muhammad Abduh played an important part in the creation of the Egyptian University, a part too often forgotten in Egypt.

Loyalty, courage, generosity, love of good, and patriotism were the principal traits of his character. In the prison to which he was condemned for his liberal ideas and enlightened support during the Urabist revolution, Abduh wrote a letter which, in spite of the defection of certain of his friends who, under threats, had come to denounce him before the English and, thus, to betray his confidence, shows him a

magnanimous and loyal associate. He was courageous in opposing the Khedive on an occasion when the favouritism of the latter proposed the awarding of an Azharite distinction to a special Imam unworthy of it.

His gentle quality of kindness found expression in more ways than mere words after the fire of Mit-Ghamr, when he applied himself to the task, a thankless one in Egypt, of exhorting the rich to make donations to the victims of the disaster. After a tour of Egyptian towns and villages, sparing neither time nor effort, Muhammad Abduh succeeded in obtaining the sum of twelve thousand pounds. It is also known that the Mufti distributed his own *waqf* salary among the needy families.

Abduh possessed in his character and conduct many of the mystical traits that he had acquired in the early stages of his education. But it was due to the influence of Jamal al-Din that he developed within him that happy balance between an altogether inner mysticism and an overwhelming need for action.

Muhammad Abduh died on 11th July 1905, in the midst of his work, without having had yet accomplished all his projects of reform. The Egyptian people and Government took the funeral of the Grand Mufti as an occasion of public mourning. He was buried in the cemetery of al-Afifi at Cairo and on his tomb was engraved the famous verse of an Arab poet:

For greatness we have made a resting-place  
And we have interred together religion and the world.

## **B: His Philosophy**

In his philosophy, Muhammad Abduh soon emerged from the Azharite scholastic position and developed pragmatic and humanistic views that made his influence felt and pointed the way to reforms. He was well aware that philosophical reflection cannot always remain speculative or contemplative. To endow our existence with complete consciousness and full experience, it must engage us in the activities of the world, command us to take all our responsibilities, and urge us not to seek a form of refuge in solitary meditation.

Abduh's views even on the science of logic seem to characterize his whole belief in the dynamic relation between true thinking and good action. In his view, logic and the general scientific temper of thought must assume a highly moral character and role. In the beginning of the year 1283/1866, when the young Abduh entered the old theological University of al-Azhar, Islamic philosophy was in so backward a state that it was almost a negation of philosophy.

The only manuals of logic and Muslim rationalistic theology (*Kalam*), which were tolerated at the University, were those that had been composed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of the Christian era. It was al-Afghani who, the first in the whole Islamic Orient, drew the attention of the young people around him to the necessity of studying classics and, in a general way, promoted the renaissance

of Muslim philosophy, encouraging the direct study of original works rather than the customary study of the rather sterile commentaries and super-commentaries.

Al-Afghani himself turned to the study of ibn Sina, the ever-fresh source of inspiration unspoiled by centuries of neglect. According to Muhammad Abduh, this standpoint of al-Afghani was received by the orthodox and by the Azharites as a heresy of an unprecedented audacity. From 1292/1875 on, the young Abduh applied himself to the study of treatises on classical logic, of which many were then only in manuscript form.

Two years later, while still a student at al-Azhar, he wrote an article in which he resolutely defended logic and *Kalam* in view of certain prejudices and certain popular and even Azharite suspicions about them. He pointed out that faith could be strengthened, not weakened, by rational proofs, and that a sound appreciation of logic, the art and science of thinking, was essential to Muslim theology.

During his exile in Beirut, Abduh discovered al-Sawi's treatise on logic, *al-Basair al-Nasiriyyah*, which he later edited with scholarly annotations and enlightening clarifications. His course of lectures on logic at al-Azhar was marked by the same thoroughness and erudition. Muhammad Abduh's own system of logic showed the influences of Aristotle, ibn Rushd, ibn Sina, and, to a lesser degree, of certain Western, particularly French, authors.

He regarded logic not as an academic exercise, but as a positive instrument for true and constructive thinking that led to action. This view rendered the pursuit of logic obligatory for one's moral life. Shaikh Abduh, however, repeatedly expressed the opinion that, to liberate oneself from vulgar prejudices and idols, to be in a position to cultivate a science, in brief to be able usefully to seek the true and the good, force of the intellect in itself is insufficient. Necessary also, and above all, are moral qualities, principally courage, the will for action, integrity, and the love of truth.

Hence Muhammad Abduh constantly upheld the principle of *ijtihad*, that is, the right of unfettered personal inquiry, of thought free from all fetters, and did not cease to fight against *taqlid*, that is, the passive acceptance of dogmas from religious authorities without asking for proof, and without thinking of the rights of free examination and personal initiative.

In fact, he stigmatized the imitator (*muqallid*) to the point of likening him at times to an infidel. The gates of *ijtihad*, said Abduh, far from being closed once for all, as some wrongly pretend, are wide open to meet all the questions raised by the new conditions of life; the last word must no longer belong to the old works or to the authorities long dead, but must be the result of the modernist spirit and the due consideration of the common good. He argued that Islam is essentially a rationalistic religion. "Islam," he said, "has liberated man from the authority of the clergy; it has brought him face to face with God and has taught him not to rely on any intercession."

His philosophy of the history of religion envisages this rationalism in Islam as a final stage in religious evolution. His view shows the progressive stages by which humanity has arrived at last at the perfect

religion, which is Islam. The earlier religions imposed stringent and rigorous rules and, appealing to the senses, pointed to the impressive miracles wrought by the prophets.

When human society had passed this primitive stage, there came the religion which appealed to the heart and spoke the language of sentiments and inner mysteries; but though it preached to its followers rigorous asceticism and contempt for this world, the people did not take long to corrupt its teaching to accommodate it to human needs and interests.

Finally, appealing to the intellectually mature, came the religion of Islam. Addressing itself to reason that it associated with feeling and sense, Islam reconciled reason with nature, and, recognizing neither master nor mysteries, freed minds from the tutelage of authority and brought man through his highest faculties closer to God.

The Egyptian philosopher approaches the problem of free will in a clearly pragmatic way. He is opposed to abstract speculation no less than William James or F. C. S. Schiller. He considers that the theory of predestination “results in negation pure and simple of the divine Law, in the suppression of all responsibility, and in the rejection of the evidence of reason which is the basis of faith.”

Abduh, in the second phase of his intellectual activity, preoccupied more with ethics than with pure metaphysics, rapidly passes over a thousand and one controversies raised by the question of free-will which, in Islam, has set the partisans of free-will (the Qadarites) and the partisans of predestination (the Jabrites) one against the other.

The system of the Asharites (the dogmatic theologians of Islam) was based on the idea of necessity. Following their metaphysics, if one should admit this necessity, then no morality would be possible. As Kant has said, there is no morality without freedom. Faced with this contradiction between ethics and ontology, Abduh, as a pragmatist, opts for the former.

Concerning divine prescience, Muhammad Abduh says: “The omniscience of God embraces that which man will accomplish by his own will; it embraces the fact that at such a moment a man will do such an action which will be good and for which he will be rewarded, or such another which will be bad and for which he will be punished.” According to Abduh, this prescience does not prevent man from being free to a certain extent: “Nothing in the omniscience of God prevents man from choosing, and acting according to his choice.”

From the point of view of reason, the foreknowledge of what will happen can be regarded neither a curb nor an impulsion for action. To establish and define the freedom of man, Muhammad Abduh, like Descartes, almost always appeals to the testimony of conscience. Again, he points to the testimony of common sense that in everyday life attributes to each person the actions he performs.

Further, the divine commandments would have no meaning without free will. “All the commandments in religious Law are based on the principle that man is responsible for what he does. If man’s actions were

not his own, the notion of responsibility would be annihilated and it would then be unreasonable to demand of the individual what exceeds his power or to hold him responsible for what is not the effect of his will.”

But there is no question of inferring complete freedom from this: freedom is absolute for God, but limited for men. “Appeal to your experience,” says Muhammad Abduh. “It is a well known experience to ‘will’ to accomplish something and yet not to be able to do it, or even to realize the existence of a greater power which directs the world.” The Islamic term *qada*, taken by the Jabrites to mean predestination, is interpreted by Abduh as the principle of causation in nature, which makes ample allowance for freedom of will.

In other words, “necessity” applies to the natural and even to the social sciences, but leaves a wide range within which the human will, guided by reason, may act. According to his interpretation, Islam is not, as has often been supposed, a religion of “fatalism.” On the contrary, “Islam,” says Abduh, “is the negation of fatalism. In forty–six verses of the Quran free will is maintained explicitly and unequivocally. If there are other verses liable to suggest the idea of constraint, these are only to establish the general divine laws of the universe.”

He points out that the Prophet and his Companions were men of action whose lives expressed an unshakable faith in the freedom of the human will. In fact, “fatalism” associated with Islam was a later distortion which well served those rulers whose interest lay in exploiting the Muslim peoples. The evil effects of that enervating doctrine were only too visible in Abduh’s own time, and supplied a living argument in favour of his pragmatic appeal to return to the vitality and freedom of the original faith.

Consistent with his attitude to free will is Muhammad Abduh’s theory of good and evil. In his *Risalat al-Tauhid* he devotes several pages to this problem and its relation to dogma and reason. First, he tries to establish a sort of parallelism between the moral and aesthetic points of view, a parallelism which seems to be imposed by the Arabic language in which the term *husn* denotes both “beauty” and “good,” and *qubh*, both “ugliness” and “evil.” He deals with beauty, first in the sensible realm, and then in that of the intelligible, and in this latter respect compares beauty as conceived in the different domains of art, science, and morals.

This parallelism of values is established by Abduh, as by the Muslim rationalists (the Mutazilah), in a way which is now familiar to us, thanks to the teaching of Andre Lalande and to the writings of F. C. S. Schiller and also of so many other contemporary philosophers. “It is our conscience,” says Abduh, “which provides us with the principle by which we distinguish between beautiful and ugly things.” Individual tastes differ, but humanity nevertheless has a sort of general criterion, an innate sense of beauty and harmony.

Muhammad Abduh established a third parallelism between beings (*al-akwan*) and human actions (*al-afal*): “The impression made on our soul by these actions is analogous to that made on it by objects and

beings.” Then Abduh seems to use the term *husn* (good) in the three fundamental senses of the Muslim theologians (*Mutakallimin*), giving, in addition, a finer and more psychological analysis.

First, good is *perfection*, evil imperfection, whether it is found in the moral or in the intellectual order; secondly, good equally designates a relationship of *fitness* (*mulaamah*), in which two subdivisions must be made: of fitness to our nature, meaning the *agreeable*, a distinction hardly differing from that made by the superior animals, and of fitness for the ends which reason pursues, meaning the *useful* in a wide sense, which prevails over the agreeable as one rises in the hierarchy of beings, and is directed by utility, whether for oneself or for society, taking precedence over agreeableness even if it involves temporary revulsion or pain; thirdly, the good comprises the *praiseworthy*, the evil the blameworthy.

The Asharites and the Mutazilites recognized that the good in the first two senses is perceived by reason, but it is with regard to the third sense that disagreement between the two groups of the *Mutakallimin* arises. According to the Asharite theologians, *husn* and *qubh*, neither by their essence nor by the qualities inherent in the things, are such as should make them appear good or evil, beautiful or ugly.

Quite on the contrary, it is the religious Law, the divine decree, which confers on actions their character of being good or evil which we recognize in them. A reversal of values thus remains conceivable, if the will of the divine legislator (*al-Shari*) is pleased to reverse the order and criterion of his judgments and to arrange that good shall become evil and vice versa, as it happens, for example, in the abrogation (*naskh*) of a prohibition (*hurmah*) to make it an obligation (*wujub*).

And so, in the Asharite doctrine, the divine decree, envisaged in its absolute character, appears to conscience something so arbitrary that it could easily be confused with implacable fate. We consequently understand why the moralist that Muhammad Abduh was could not subscribe to a thesis of which the consequences seemed to him to be irremediably compromising the freedom that he had so strongly defended.

It is, thus, deliberately but without ever departing from his customary good sense that Muhammad Abduh ranges himself, on this point, on the side of the Mutazilah, of al-Farabi, and of ibn Rushd, who were certainly aware of a similar difficulty. All of them perceived that the distinction between good and evil was natural and that it was perceived by our common sense. Abduh adds that man finds this distinction by conscience itself.

The sense and natural reason of man are capable of making this distinction in every instance without awaiting the decision of an authority or guidance of revelation. This can be realized from observation of the way in which very young children grasp the meaning of the religious Law, or from the evidence of the history of primitive societies.

The distinction between good and evil is thus, according to Abduh, made by reason without the aid of dogma. Once the principle has been stated, Abduh is not afraid to draw conclusions from it. If, therefore,

he says, a person arrives, solely by reasoning, at the affirmation of the existence of God and His attributes, if he deduces from this rationally acquired knowledge the idea of the immortality of the soul and the joys or torments it may have in the other life, briefly, if a thinker, basing his arguments solely on reason, arrives at the discovery or construction of a completely natural morality, nothing can prevent him from putting forward rules which would be as valid as the rules imposed by dogma.

And Abduh manifestly considers that reason can take him a long way on this path. "Natural morality," he says, "is not only possible in theory, but it has been applied by certain individuals of the *elite*."

Unfortunately, not all humanity is constituted of sages. Man is not a simple creature, and his needs are not as limited as those of animals. Moreover, humanity does not always allow itself to be guided by reason alone; there are other faculties, other factors which exert an influence no less great on the conduct and judgments of men; from them comes the possibility of error and evil; and, besides, reason alone, with rare exceptions, is not sufficient to lead to happiness.

To attain this happiness, most men need a surer guide, a prophet. On the great mass of humanity is, thus, imposed religious morality of which the need is demonstrated by the history of human society. It is thus that revelation has been introduced into morality. Religious morality, abstracting from it the certitude with which it is presented because of its having a divine source, does not fundamentally constitute a teaching entirely different from that of natural morality.

"The sacred Law," writes Muhammad Abduh in his *Risalat al-Tauhid*, "came simply to show us what existed in reality; it was not this Law which created either the good or the evil.... At the same time as the sacred Law imposes certain beliefs on us, it makes their beauty accessible to reason."

The question which has raised many controversies among Muslim philosophers, that of the *elite* (*al-khassah*) and the common man (*al-kaffah*), seems to be settled by Muhammad Abduh in the same manner as was done by Ibn Rushd by differentiating between two kinds of knowledge, one that of the philosopher and the other that of the common believer.

"Prophecy," says Abduh, "indicates to the elite how they may rise above the common level, but it makes obligatory only that which is accessible to all." Nevertheless, the Egyptian philosopher is convinced that no man, whoever he may be, can do without the natural gift, the instinctive feeling, we have for good and evil. There are certain principles of good on which all human beings are agreed, but this does not mean that a thing is good because God has commanded it; on the contrary, God has commanded it because it is good. To use the Kantian terminology, in the judgment of good and evil it is reason which gives us the categorical imperative.

If, in this theory of good, Abduh speaks so insistently of the essential role of reason, it is because in his eyes such an attitude entails important practical consequences in the moral and social orders. By this decision in favour of the renaissance of Mutazilite rationalism, the Egyptian reformer undoubtedly hoped to contribute to the restoration in the Muslim world of the principle of *ijtihad* and of the freedom of

research on every subject.

It is thus, he thought, that the *fuqaha* (the Muslim jurists), for example, would come to treat the religious Law with greater independence and personal initiative, so that when they come to determine the licit and the illicit, to put forward prescriptions and prohibitions, they would be able to judge the spirit of the Law according to reason and not stop as they did in the past at the letter; and rather than restrict themselves to the usage of the single principle of arguing by analogy (*qiyas*), they would be able to examine new facts liberally and to apply to them solutions which would be more suited to the spirit and exigencies of the modern age.

In brief, by this rationalism, Abduh hoped to realize the ideal of emancipating minds from routine, imitation, and intellectual stagnation that had marked the past few centuries of Islam.

As good and evil have a social significance, Muhammad Abduh was drawn at an early stage towards the study of human society. Muhammad Sabri, one of the historians of modern Egypt, speaks of Muhammad Abduh as “the greatest Egyptian reformer and sociologist” who “possessed to the highest point the sense of evolution.”

In 1295/1878, Abduh gave at the college of *Dar al-Ulum*, a course of lectures on the “Prolegomena” of ibn Khaldun, which was as remarkable for its method and novelty as for the wealth of its ideas. These lectures probably served as the basis of a work that Muhammad Abduh, according to Rashid Rida, wrote in the same year, namely, “The Philosophy of Society and History.”

“As the manuscript of this last of Abduh’s work was unfortunately lost during the events of 1296/1879, we are obliged, in order to learn about the sociological theory of Muhammad Abduh, to have recourse to the more or less detailed accounts contained in his various writings. He appears to share the ideas of ibn Khaldun, the great Muslim sociologist and the precursor of Auguste Comte.

Like ibn Khaldun, Abduh conceives history as a veritable science, and it is for him a discipline indispensable to philosophical studies. His evolutionary approach is evident in his *Risalat al-Tauhid* and his commentary on the Quranic verse: “Men form a single nation.”

According to his conception of history, humanity is led by God progressively to realize a certain world-view. Abduh perhaps also belongs to that class of thinkers who see in history a sort of morality in action that must be studied by statesmen and venerated by the people. He is strongly aware of man’s natural and necessary orientation towards social integration, a physical, intellectual, and moral need which makes it difficult for men to live in this world without feeling reciprocal sympathies and without giving one another mutual aid.

Conscious of this need for solidarity, Abduh, in his commentary on the Quran, condemns the indifferent state of mind of certain members of the social group towards others, an attitude which, in his opinion, must lead to the dissolution of social ties. But social solidarity for Muhammad Abduh is not something

purely speculative.

The Egyptian sociologist worked all his life for the common good and always set an example of active co-operation, as a result of which he realized numerous social ends. In societies like ours, this sentiment of solidarity is not perfect. Abduh hopes that it is possible to lead minds to union and agreement by resorting to a new moral education, more effective than the laws imposed by the State.

“Union,” he says in an introductory article, “is the fruit of the tree of virtue.” No morality is possible without union and without love. The new education must, therefore, be essentially altruistic. But this education must begin with the family. “We hope,” he says, “to give our daughters an education worthy of those who will be called on to take responsibilities equal to those of men.” And again, “It is an unpardonable crime to leave women in a state of ignorance and mediocrity.”

Besides, thanks to his experience as a judge, Muhammad Abduh ascertains that seventy-five per cent of lawsuits are those between relatives. Their causes generally are feelings of hatred and antipathy existing between members of the same family, feelings that, according to him, must be attributed to the lack of social instruction and education in social matters. The same remarks can be extended to a wider society. God, in His mercy, has sent men messengers (*rusul*), who are to the human race what intelligence is to the individual.

To Abduh, the evolution of human society has known three stages. The first stage is the age of the senses, when preoccupations of men scarcely rise above physical cares and their beliefs are animistic. The second stage is the age of prophecy, in which men have already been prepared by the experience of the preceding age to gain some understanding of the laws of nature and of the constitution of society. Corresponding to these stages, the first step in the education of society is the experience that it progressively acquires, and the second is the teaching of the prophets who serve as guides to society and adapt their missions to its conditions.

Christ, for example, could accomplish his mission only in the epoch in which he lived, an epoch in which victims of violence and cruelty cried out for mercy and love. Muhammad (S) brought a vital and unifying message to revive men in an epoch of lethargy and of evasion of real spiritual issues in futile quibbling. The third stage, which is still with us, brings the era of error.

As we become distant from the prophets, hearts become hardened and passions predominate; society moves away from sound reasoning and moral principles; theologians falsify the divine teaching and use sacred texts in such a way that religion loses all influence on the souls of men; politics becomes mingled with religion; and discord and misunderstanding reign supreme resulting in error and war.

Muhammad Abduh does not, however, stop at this pessimistic note. He thinks the solution to lie in the awakening of a sort of universal conscience and thereby in the discovery of the right path that society must follow. Reason and morality are essential to this end.

Muhammad Abduh bases this optimism on a general view of humanity, very close to that of Socrates and the Stoics of antiquity, and to that of Rousseau in modern times. He believes that man is not intentionally wicked, and that he has a nature inclined towards good and love for peace. How can it be otherwise, he says, when God has given him a nature superior to that of the animals and “has endowed him with reason by which he has made himself master of the terrestrial world and has been able to have glimpses of the secret of the celestial world?”

Then God has not made the evil more congenial to our souls than the good. The good is so innate in the nature of man that we need only a simple piece of advice or a reminder to realize this good in action. It is thus that “the light which God sends to men through the mediacy of the prophets demands no effort to fix it in their souls and hearts, but it is a reminder to those who are not conscious of what God has already put in their nature.”

To affirm this instinct for good in man, Muhammad Abduh goes so far as to profess the human universalism of the Stoics, a universalism which tends to establish a community between men, in spite of the diversity of countries, religions, languages, and races; for, he says, they are all equal by their reason and their origin. This explains why men tend to associate with one another and to unite and live in harmony. If we regard men thus, we shall see that all humanity is like a single family living on the surface of the same earth and linked by the same morals, relationships, and habits.

“This state of affairs has so influenced the majority of reasonable men that they have tended to serve humanity without attaching themselves fanatically to one race, or one religion, or one doctrine.” If humanity conducted itself by following its nature, and in recalling the good that is innate in it, it would possess the social virtues such as strengthen in people’s minds the consciousness of their original identity, which consciousness would inculcate in them the spirit of concord, sympathy, and peace. Muhammad Abduh even declared in *al-Urwah* in 1302/1884 that virtues in the human race are common; they preserve human society and protect it from dissolution.

Nearly all the biographers of Muhammad Abduh have pointed out that the principal task of his life was the religious reform of Islamic society. This opinion is right to a certain extent. But if we study the activities of Muhammad Abduh carefully and if we consider the import of his teaching, we shall perceive that there are, above all, reasons of ethical order, which explain the basic attitudes of the Egyptian reformer.

More than one theological or philosophical problem is, for him, dominated by moral considerations, and his every effort tends to moral action. If he fights against certain manners and customs and certain popular religious beliefs, if he denounces injustice and social and political abuses, if he strives to modify the teaching methods of al-Azhar, it is always in order to bring about a moral reform in Muslim society.

We can safely say that the movement of religious reform with which Abduh’s name is associated in the Muslim world was only, in the mind of the reformer, a means for the realization of an end, which was

moral reform. The Grand Mufti said it expressly: “The aim of religious reform is to direct the belief of the Muslims in such a way as to make them better morally and also to improve their social condition. To set religious beliefs right, to put an end to errors, consequent upon misunderstanding religious texts, so well that, once the beliefs are fortified, actions will be more in conformity with morality; such is the task of the Muslim reformer.”

Religion is thus, for Abduh, the most effective means of realizing this moral reform. Minds not being mature enough to replace precise dogmas by abstract principles, it is the religious conceptions that we must begin to reform. “If the reformer,” he says, “appeals directly to a morality or to a wisdom deprived of all religious character, he will have to build a new edifice for which there is neither material nor labour. But if religion is able to raise the level of morality, give actions a solid foundation, and urge people to seek happiness by the most appropriate means, if the adepts in religion are much attached to it, and if finally one has less difficulty in bringing people back to religion than in creating something new which they cannot clearly understand, then why not have recourse to religion and why seek other less effective means?”

The aim of Abduh’s reform is, thus, certainly not, as has been wrongly believed, the realization of the political unity of the Muslim countries, and still less the “Holy War” against the non-Muslims. He expressly refrained from holding pan-Islamic ideas, which he considered to be chimerical and existing merely in the imagination of certain dreamers, Europeans and others.

Hence his concentration on moral and educational reform after the disappearance of *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa*. For him, theory and practice were always intimately related, and it was only arbitrarily that one could separate one’s ideas from one’s actions. Abduh was, in fact, a born moralist, and he wished to act directly on people’s conscience rather than to isolate himself to construct a more or less coherent theological system.

Like Plato, Abduh, it seems, considered that only direct contact could light the flame in others. Abduh was above all a creative force; his teachings and his actions had a profound moral influence. More than one theological or philosophical problem was for him dominated by moral conditions, for example, the problems of the attributes of God, prophecy, and free-will.

He applied himself early to the work of reform in education, a condition indispensable in his eyes to the recovery of Islamic morality. He felt the results obtained by this means to be deeper and surer, even if slower than those obtained by a revolution, considering that “only progressive and methodical reforms are able to give the required results.” The educative and moral aspects of Muhammad Abduh’s reform explain in fact the profound and lasting influence he has had, particularly in Egypt and in the entire Muslim world in general.

This predominance of morality appears particularly in his commentary (*tafsir*) on the Quran. This commentary aims at explaining the Quran as a scripture containing moral guidance (*al-hidayah*) on

which rests human happiness in this life and the next. The understanding of the Quran is a duty incumbent on all Muslims without distinction of race or culture.

As the only question for Muhammad Abduh is to explain the spirit and general sense of the Quranic verses without keeping too closely to the letter, he is careful, from the beginning, to discard as unwelcome the purely philological and grammatical considerations with which a great number of Quranic commentators have been conversant.

Abduh, moreover, criticizes the attitude of the Arabic authors who, due to an exaggerated admiration for ancient Arabic poetry, make it the basis of grammar and then find numerous grammatical difficulties in the text of the Quran. For Abduh, it is necessary, on the contrary, to make the Quran the criterion for the rules of grammar.

Equally unwelcome to him is the method of pure erudition dear to certain commentators, which consists in amassing, without any discrimination, all that may have been said by others about such and such a chapter, or such and such a verse, or such and such a word. "God," said Abduh, "will not ask us, on the Day of Judgment, what people may have said or understood, but He will ask us if we ourselves have understood His Book and if we have followed its direction."

For him, then, an exegesis drawn from all sources would very likely mislead the believers and make them stray away from the true aim of the Quran that is, above all, the guidance of conduct. The understanding urged by Abduh is thus that which rises in the depths of a sensitive and circumspect conscience, and is the fruit of meditation on the Book itself. The effort of Muhammad Abduh tends to eliminate from his to/sir all the questions giving rise to differences between the commentators.

And he insisted upon taking the Quran as a whole and not interpreting it in fragments; only thus may we rediscover under the apparent diversity the unity of the original inspiration. Abduh sometimes seems to apply to the Book the Cartesian rule of evidence. He often advises us to give credit only to what is related in a clear and explicit manner and never to abandon a categorical report in favour of a mere hypothetical one, that is, to rely only on traditions the transmission of which appears to be free of disagreement or collusion to fabricate.

Abduh is always opposed to the interpretation of the Zahiriyah and the anthropomorphists, who explain the religious texts literally and without recourse to reason. For example, in explaining the *Surah al-Kauthar*, certain commentators pretended that the Kauthar was the name of a river in paradise that God had given to the Prophet. According to Abduh, there is no such thing; the Kauthar here simply means the great gift that God has conferred on humanity in the sending of prophets.

The condition for the veracity of a religious assertion, he says, is the fact of including nothing in it that can offend *tanzih*, i.e., the transcendence of God over creatures. If we come across a text of which the apparent meaning would imply a certain anthropomorphism, it is necessary for us to interpret it so as to reject the apparent meaning.

Rationalism, combined with marked pragmatic tendencies, seems to render the *tafsir* of Muhammad Abduh a justification of the principle according to which “a religion full of legends and stupid superstitions cannot live in the same mind with an enlightened reason.” It is, thus, impossible that things of the former kind may really be found in the Quran.

Islam is in harmony with enlightened reason; one must, therefore, make a sound and right interpretation that takes account only of categorical proof, or of sure tradition, and not of personal opinions and subjective impressions. Abduh rejects many of the long stories and anecdotes that a good number of commentators have been pleased to invent.

And, contrary to the practice of commentators, who sought to specify precisely the nature of certain places or persons mentioned in the Quranic text but left rather vague, Abduh observes that his method is to abstain from going in the details beyond the positive content of the sacred text, particularly because such efforts of the commentators have not brought any light to bear on the understanding of the text.

For example, in commenting on verse 58 of Sarah 2, which begins “Enter this village...,” Abduh does not wish to specify precisely to which village it refers, but prefers to stress the fact that the children of Israel received the order to enter various countries with the sentiment of humility and obedience to the divine order.

It is the same with the verse which follows immediately: “To the unjust We have brought down torment from heaven,” where Abduh, in accordance with his method, abstains from determining the nature of the torment; that, he would have said, has no practical importance. The *tafsir* of Muhammad Abduh shows a constant concern for affirming the universal message of the Quran, while always fitting this belief into an evolutionistic and progressive conception.

The old commentators often had a tendency to interpret certain Quranic verses by giving them a particular meaning, or relating them to local events which occurred at the time of the Prophet or before him. It is thus that some of them pretended that Sarah 102, for example, alluded to two tribes of the Ansars of Medina who boasted of the large number of their members, to the extent that one of them, feeling itself inferior to its rival in the number of those alive, went to visit the tombs of those who were dead.

For Abduh the verses of this Sarah, like those of so many others, must not be interpreted in so particularized and narrow a manner; the Quran is not addressed to an individual or to a group of individuals. On the contrary, it is to mankind that it is addressed, and it aims at what is most permanent in the beliefs, customs, and practices of peoples. The school of Muhammad Abduh starts with the principle that Islam is a universal religion, suited to all people, to all times, and to all states of culture.

Thus, one of the important traits of his work on exegesis is its spiritualism modified by a kind of pragmatism. The *tafsir* of Muhammad Abduh has largely contributed to the purification of religious belief, as much among the mass of Muslims as among the *‘ulama’* and theologians, by freeing the minds of the

believers from certain legends and ideas that are too materialistic and anthropomorphic. His *tafsir*, as Rashid Rida has put it, tends to offer an interpretation of the Quran in a spiritual sense conforming to reason.

In religious and social life, Muhammad Abduh takes the position of a critic and puts on trial the ideas, morals, and customs that he condemns, whether they are current among the masses or among the educated men of his time. He reproaches the Muslims for having falsified the teachings of their religion.

The '*ulama*' and the representatives of Islam in general, he reproaches either for a rigorous formalism and unhealthy anxiety to observe in the minutest detail such practical rituals as ablution and fasting, or for the use of religious knowledge for lucrative ends. Religion, thus, furnishes them only with some sort of profession.

As for the popular conceptions, they contain, in his eyes, nothing religious except the name; they are all for the most part survivals of fatalistic beliefs. Abduh made the liveliest criticism of the *bidah*, that is, the false innovations introduced into the religious practices of the Muslims in later times. The '*ulama*' in particular, he said, were completely indifferent to the superior interests of their country. Except the commentaries and super commentaries on old texts, which they understood badly and explained even more badly, they occupied themselves with nothing.

Ignorant of the needs and aspirations of their time, they lived almost on the fringe of society. Hence he urged his countrymen to realize their social responsibility towards their country, instead of waiting till reform came to them; he further urged them to build up their culture progressively upon their own institutions rather than blindly imitate Western ideas and customs in a superficial manner. He wanted a real reform from within, rather than the outward show thereof.

## **C: The School of Muhammad Abduh in Egypt**

In July 1935, on the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Muhammad Abduh, "The Society of Muslim Youth" of Cairo held a public meeting to honour the memory of him who had justly been called *al-Ustadh al-Imam* (The Master and Guide). Testimony of Muhammad Abduh's former colleagues, and of his old students, who have now in their turn become masters, demonstrated the extent of the influence exercised by his thought.

In the beginning of the present century, Muhammad Abduh promoted, in Egypt, the cause of science, religion, and patriotism. All the noble and generous sentiments of the Egyptian elite found their source of inspiration in him. When, in 1318/1900, the younger generation sought a guide to lead them out of their confusion, they addressed themselves to him.

One of the characteristic traits of Muhammad Abduh was the profound influence that he exerted upon the people. The words of M. Bougle about the philosopher Frederic Hauh (*Les Maitres de la Philosophie*

*Universitaire en France*, 1938) might equally well have been applied to Muhammad Abduh: “A fisher of souls..., converter, the least dogmatic of all, but the most pressing, the most able to change men, the most capable of preparing and firing young people with the personal effort of inner renewal.” In his courses of lectures, virtually prolonged conversations, he seemed to apply himself to an examination of conscience, revealing a restless soul indignant at hypocrisy, bigotry, and indolence.

While having thrown himself into teaching and work of reform, Abduh was yet able to leave for us books which show the development of his thought and which have perpetuated his name. But in fact the reading of his works is not in itself sufficient to give one an idea of the profound influence that he had upon his contemporaries.

There were, in Egypt, many disciples of Muhammad Abduh other than those in the Azharite circles. It is noteworthy that it is among laymen, and particularly among those who had received European education, that the true disciples of Muhammad Abduh are to be found. First, the personality and the writings of Muhammad Abduh lent valuable support to social, religious, and philosophical reformers, represented by Qasim Amin, Rashid Rida, and Mustafa Abd al-Raziq.

Thanks to the authority of the Master's name, wrote Husain Haikal Pasha, his disciples were able to make the people accept principles that they had never before recognized. Then Abduh tried to reconcile the traditional Islamic method of teaching with the new methods borrowed from the West.

Between these two opposite schools, the modernist and the traditionalist, there was formed a third school mainly recruited from the most important writers of our time, all of whom, in different ways, were disciples of Muhammad Abduh. Egyptian thinkers before Abduh's time were in fact not inspired by any well-defined ideal. And there is good reason to say that Muhammad Abduh gave unity and precision to Egyptian thought.

Henri Bergson wrote: “One measures the significance of a philosophical doctrine by the variety of ideas into which it flowers and the simplicity of the principle into which it is gathered.” This is true of the doctrine of Muhammad Abduh which, in spite of the simplicity of its principle, has led to reform, at least in Egypt, in three different ways: social, religious, and philosophical.

1. *The Social School: Qasim Amin* – One of the ideas dear to Muhammad Abduh was that of the instruction and education of Muslim women, with all that this implies concerning social reform of the conditions and customs affecting their lives in the Muslim world. True Islam, affirmed the Grand Mufti, gives woman perfect equality of rights with man. It is only because the original intention of the Law has been ignored that all kinds of abuses have crept in to harm the moral and social position of women in the Muslim world.

Polygamy, for example, although allowed by the Quran, is basically no more than a concession to certain historical necessities which no longer exist. In any case this concession, properly understood, is equivalent to a refusal and a negation, given the practical difficulty in which one finds oneself the

moment one wishes exactly to fulfill the conditions laid down by the religious Law concerning polygamy.

This shows to those who take the trouble of thinking and of penetrating into the deeper meaning of the Law that the intention of Islam remains in favour of the principle of monogamy, and that it justly considers it to be the most perfect ideal of marriage. The law of inheritance also testifies to this spirit. It is, thus, important that the social condition of the woman should be raised without delay and, if necessary, by appropriate modifications in the actual canonical Law of Islam and by all possible means providing women with better opportunities of education and instruction. It is, he considered, an unpardonable crime to leave Muslim women in ignorance and mediocrity, since they are to carry the heaviest responsibility in national life: the bringing up of children.

If Abduh was not able to see the realization of the social reforms that he ardently wished, it was left for one of his colleagues and friends, Qasim Amin, to distinguish himself by tireless activity in the domain of the defence of feminism in Egypt.

Like Muhammad Abduh, Qasim Amin was above all opposed to the great mass of the conservatives to whom every innovator appeared as a heretic. He showed that Islam, far from degrading woman, as was commonly believed, does, on the contrary, favour her, and that the responsibility for placing her at a disadvantage lay, not with Islam, but with the Muslims of later epochs.

Meditating upon the evils from which Egyptian society suffered, he perceived that half the nation was gripped by a general paralysis of social life, a paralysis the cause of which was the ignorance and mediocrity in which women were kept in the country.

The reform that Qasim Amin wished to introduce in the problems of the Muslim woman can be summarized under two heads. The first concerns the manner of treating woman and her education; the second is an appeal to the Muslim theologians and jurists to become aware of the needs and exigencies of the modern age and, therefore, cease to cling in the application of the laws to the advice of one religious authority more than to that of another; the only valid advice indeed is that which, while arising from the spirit and essential principles of the Islamic law, is in conformity with the interests of the nation and with the new conditions of its evolution.

However, the voice of Qasim Amin, which, during his life, was not well heard, began after his death to be singularly amplified. It was not long before women in Egypt took up journalism. Men appeared who took the reform of women's position as the basis of every true renaissance. Some of them produced a journal named *al-Sufur* (The Unveiled), which had as its aims the preaching of feminism, and insistence on the necessity of the education and liberation of women, as well as on their equality with men.

Thus we see, in 1337/1918, the Egyptian women, in some of the demonstrations, marching before men to vindicate the rights of the nation. Safiya Zaghlul, the wife of the national leader, was venerated by all the people, and was called "The Mother of the Egyptians."

2. *The Religious School: Rashid Rida* – Rashid Rida is considered to be the interpreter of the religious school of Muhammad Abduh. Of all the disciples of Muhammad Abduh he exerted himself most to keep the master's memory alive by recording his thoughts and the history of his life.

He was born in the village of Qalamoun in Syria. On completing his Islamic studies according to the method of instruction followed in the schools of his country, he turned towards religious and literary studies. He devoted himself, at first, to mysticism, but the review *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* of al-Afghani and Abduh exercised great influence on him and urged him to follow a new path.

In 1315/1897, he migrated to Egypt, moved by the conviction that there he would be able to serve his religion and his people, an end which conditions in Syria prevented him from accomplishing. "I decided," he said, "to join Jamal al-Din in order that I might perfect myself, through philosophy and personal effort, to serve the faith.

On the death of al-Afghani, when it became well known that it was the politics of Abd al-Hamid that ruined him, I felt myself suffocated in the Ottoman Empire and decided to leave for Egypt because of the liberty of thought which existed there; what I most hoped to acquire in Egypt was to profit from the wisdom, the experience, and the spirit of reform which Muhammad Abduh represented in that country." Thus wrote Rashid Rida in his *Tarikh*.

Rashid Rida contacted Muhammad Abduh as soon as he arrived in Cairo. He followed the Master, he said, like his shadow. In March 1898, he founded the review *al-Manar* that aimed at arousing the desire for education and at reforming textbooks and teaching methods, besides denouncing the innovations that had been introduced in religious beliefs and criticizing customs and practices foreign to the spirit of Islam.

Following the Master, Rashid Rida did not cease to declare that one could work for effective reform only through the direction of the Book and the Sunnah which are in harmony with human interests in every country and at all times. From the moment of the foundation of *al-Manar* he indefatigably put forth the idea that neither in the dogmas nor in the rites of Islam is it held that the Muslim should imitate any particular Imam.

In following the path traced by Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida was simply continuing the liberal modernism of his Egyptian Master. Nevertheless, because of a reaction against the growing European influence, Rashid Rida, according to Laoust, "became more and more conservative."

There are other things in which the disciple departs from the Master's path. Muhammad Abduh was always, to quote Lord Cromer (Egypt, 1906), "a genuine Egyptian patriot." That is to say, the Master played a role in the awakening of the Egyptian national spirit, which fact is far from being contested. Rashid Rida for himself was an anti-nationalist, an ardent defender of pan-Islamism, and he well nigh regarded nationalism as a principle strange to Islam.

In opposing the development of secular tendencies in Egyptian literature, in denouncing the heterodoxy of the thesis of Ali Abd al-Raziq on the Caliphate and that of Taha Husain's on pre-Islamic literature, Rashid Rida, without being fully aware of it, departs from the line of thought of the Master. In any case, the conservative modernism of Rashid Rida has, at the present time, been superseded by a secular modernism of Western inspiration conforming to the ideas of Muhammad Abduh.

3. *The Philosophical School: Mustafa Abd al-Raziq* – Having graduated from al-Azhar in 1326/1908 at the age of twenty-three, Mustafa Abd al-Raziq continued his studies in France. He studied first at the Sorbonne, where, among other courses, he followed that of Emile Drukheim on sociology; he completed his education at Lyons, at the same time lecturing on Islamic Law and on Arabic literature at that University.

On his return to Egypt he became Secretary General of al-Azhar University, and took active part in its evolution along the lines inspired by Muhammad Abduh. While nominated as inspector of the religious tribunals he also worked, with the collaboration of Egyptians and foreigners, for the realization of a popular university and arranged during the First World War a series of remarkable lectures on cultural subjects. Shaikh Abd al-Raziq himself gave a valuable course of lectures on Muhammad Abduh.

When the Egyptian University was officially founded in 1344/1925, Mustafa Abd al-Raziq was called upon to teach there. He became the first Professor of Islamic Philosophy in that University. In his lectures at the Faculty of Arts, later published under the modest title of "Prolegomena to the Study of Islamic Philosophy," he traced the main trends of Muslim philosophy; while throwing light on the various aspects of the principal problems, he met, with calm and serenity, the attacks of certain Orientalists who had denied the originality of Muslim thought.

He perceived that while the Muslims had admitted into their conception of the world elements borrowed from Greek thought, they had their own method and their own culture. And the real Islamic thought is to be found not so much in the philosophy of al-Farabi and ibn Sina as in the theological speculations of *Kalam* and the principles of Muslim jurisprudence.

Besides his functions in the Universities of al-Azhar and Cairo, Mustafa Abd al-Raziq was a member of the Egyptian Institute and a member of the Egyptian Academy for the Arabic Language. He was many times Minister of Trusts (*Auqaf*), and in the Chamber of Deputies he was President of the Commission of *Auqaf* and Religious Institutes.

In 1365/1945, he was elected Honorary President of the Egyptian Philosophical Society. The crowning point of his career was his nomination, in succession to Shaikh al-Maraghi, as Rector of the University of al-Azhar. In this exceptional position of Shaikh al-Islam he showed initiative and breadth of vision: he introduced the study of foreign languages at al-Azhar, encouraged educational missions abroad, sent Azharite scholars to France and England to prepare themselves for the teaching of languages at the University, sent Muslim missionaries to Uganda, and, lastly, sent a group of research scholars to the

Hijaz to study the faith at the sacred places of Islam.

Shaikh Abd al-Raziq was the author of a number of works on Muslim philosophy. His own philosophy was essentially moral and altruistic, filled with generosity, tolerance, and love of his fellow men. He often said that a great philosophy has existed since the dawn of human thought and has survived the vicissitudes of history: it is the heroic philosophy, the philosophy of those who live for others and not only for themselves, of those who are in unison with the fundamental note of the universe, which, to him, was a note of generosity and love.

Originally practised by the Oriental prophets, this philosophy, he said, was then spread by the great thinkers who, from Socrates to Plato and Aristotle, from Aristotle to the Stoics and Plotinus, from Plotinus to al-Farabi and Descartes, from Descartes to Kant and Gandhi, fall in a single great line. Many by glimpsing the essence of religion, some by deepening it through their meditations, arrive at a philosophy which they practise and live, the philosophy of generosity, which sees love to be a virtue which consists in always giving and giving without calculation.

Mustafa Abd al-Raziq believed, further, that this love is fundamental to each of us, that it is natural, that we have not to create it, that it will blossom on its own when we remove the obstacle which our egoism and our passions place in its way. With all the great philosophers he said that we are part of a whole, that the duty of the part is to act for the sake of the whole, and that the whole of which we are the part is humanity.

He wished our education to be oriented to an awareness of these potentialities – an education truly liberal that would make us conscious of our belonging to the same great family. Likewise, he saw the remedy for our social evils to lie in a moral reform that would extend our powers of sympathy with our fellow men. In that direction lie social harmony and solidarity.

This philosophy, so much of the heart, demanded the self-mastery of the sage. Mustafa Abd al-Raziq practised what he preached, recognizing wisdom in the constancy of conduct which guards against the instability of emotions. Muhammad Abduh glimpsed these qualities in the young Abd al-Raziq, whose faithfulness to his Master was to survive him. Abd al-Raziq aroused in his pupils at the University the desire to learn more of the doctrine of Muhammad Abduh, besides writing upon him and translating into French his *Risalat al-Tauhid*. Thus he sought to keep alive the spiritual flame kindled by the reformer, Abduh.

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