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Inwardness: Comparative Religious Philosophy in Modern Egypt

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ABSTRACT

This article centers the Islamic philosopher ʿUthman Amin in order to explore the intellectual exchange between Muslim and Christian scholars in twentieth-century Egypt. Specifically, I look at inwardness, intellectual dialogue, and interreligious friendships in a field that has traditionally been dominated by scholarship on the relationship between Islam and politics or Islam and the law. I elucidate Amin's philosophy of inwardness and its attendant virtues of seclusion, spiritual contemplation, and the *jihad* of the self—paying particular attention to reading as an illuminative embodied practice—through the lens of an Islamic discursive tradition. How might we understand the concept of an Islamic discursive tradition, as a philosophy of reasoned and embodied religion, within the context of such interreligious encounters? Amin, I argue, was engaged in an *experimentum mentis* in which inwardness provided an angle of lucidity from which Islam and Christianity could gaze upon one another. In so doing, I demonstrate the heuristic value of theorizations of tradition by Alasdair MacIntyre and Talal Asad to studies of interreligious encounter and scholarly exchange.

IN the 1940s and early 1950s, a group of intellectuals met regularly at the Dominican convent in ʿAbbasiyya, a multi-confessional middle-class neighborhood in Cairo. Calling themselves *Ikhwan al-Safa'* (Brethren of Purity), their name recalled the medieval secret society in Baghdad renowned for encyclopedias of science that preceded any known to the Latin world by at least two centuries (Baffioni 2016). The twentieth-century association brought Muslims and Christians into dialogue around questions of religion, philosophy, and science. Father Georges Anawati, an encyclopedist Dominican scholar, presented on "Thomas Aquinas and Mysticism" and the philosopher Yusuf Karam presented on "Henri

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Bergson's *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*," while the Azhari scholar ʿUthman Yahya expounded upon "Avicenna's *Maqamat al-ʿArafin* (On the Stations of the Gnostics)" and Cairo University's Mahmud al-Khudayri, a specialist on Islamic philosophy, presented on "Plotinus in Islam" (Anawati 1980).

A tradition of philosophical and theological inquiry would emerge out of these discussions, centered in part at Cairo and Alexandria Universities and at the Institut dominicain d'études orientales (IDEO). Thus, for example, Yusuf Karam (b. 1886), an Egyptian-born Thomist of Lebanese descent influenced by the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, would later write on metaphysics and the history of ancient and modern philosophy. Karam's student, the Islamic philosopher ʿUthman Muhammad Amin (b. 1905), would eventually write on Islamic and European philosophy, and Amin's own student, Hasan Hanafi (b.1935), would, in turn, become known for his synthesis of phenomenology and hermeneutics and its application to the study of both Islam and Christianity.

This article centers on the thought of one scholar who emerged out of this mid-century milieu, ʿUthman Amin, and his engagement with classical and modern Islamic thought, Western philosophy, and Christianity. Taking the work of Amin as my point of entry into comparative philosophical and religious inquiry, I examine his writing as a prism through which to view interreligious scholarly exchanges in twentieth-century Egypt. Trained in literature at the Egyptian (later Cairo) University and versed in Arabic, French, English, Greek, and Latin, Amin received his doctorate from the Sorbonne and published widely on Islamic philosophy, Islamic reform movements, Stoicism, and European philosophy (Amin 1944, 1949, 1953, 1957, 1958, 1971).[1]

More specifically, I explore Amin's philosophy of inwardness (*juwwaniyya*), and its attendant virtues of seclusion, spiritual contemplation, and the *jihad* of the self, through the prism of the Islamic discursive tradition. Drawing upon Alasdair MacIntyre and Talal Asad's theorizations of tradition, I trace the historical emergence of comparative religious philosophy in the intellectual exchange between local Muslim and Christian scholars in modern Egypt. I read Amin as embedded in the Islamic discursive tradition; his work is in sustained engagement with the founding texts of the *Qurʾan* and *Hadith* (words and deeds of the Prophet) and is rooted within longstanding histories of Islamic rationalism, Islamic reformism, and Sufism. At the same time, his writings contain a dense palimpsestic set of references to medieval and modern Arab, Islamic, and European philosophy and literature, including figures as diverse as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (b. 1058), René Descartes (b. 1596), Muhammad ʿAbduh (b. 1849), Henri Bergson (b. 1859), Rainer Maria Rilke (b. 1875), Karl Jaspers (b. 1883), and ʿAbbas Mahmud al-ʿAqqad (b. 1889), demonstrating the co-constitution of modern philosophical thought and religious studies. Such comparative explorations were often supported by the materiality of intellectual exchange among scholars in all of its varied forms—academic and spiritual friendships, relations of mentoring, institutions that promote religious hospitality, and even reading (Burrell 2000; Moosa 2005; Moore 2015).

How might we understand the concept of an Islamic discursive tradition, as a philosophy of reasoned and embodied religion, within the context of such encounters? Although a robust literature exists on Muslim–Christian relations, often focused on the political status of minorities, on missionary encounters, and on religious polemics, very few studies have substantively addressed the grammar and vocabulary of comparative religious inquiry within Middle

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[1] ʿUthman Muhmmad Amin (1905–1978) was a professor and head of the department of philosophy at Cairo University and taught in universities in Libya, the Sudan, Pakistan, as well as at *al-Azhar* and the Higher Institute for Arabic Studies. Born in Giza, he received his Licence in Literature from Cairo University in 1930 and his Doctorate from the Sorbonne in 1937. For biographical information on Amin, see Najib (1996, 328), Anawati et al. (1980), and Madkur (1979).

Eastern societies in the modern period despite the richness of studies of premodern intellectual history.[2] Here I explore how Islamic thinkers were in continuous dialogue with Christian and particularly Catholic thinkers as well as with secular philosophical traditions. Specifically, I look at inwardness, intellectual exchange, and interreligious friendships in a field that has traditionally been dominated by scholarship on the relationship between Islam and politics or Islam and the law.

Inwardness is crucial for investigating this dialogue between Muslim and Christian thinkers. In his 1964 philosophical treatise on *juwwaniyya* (inwardness), Amin directly addresses Islam as a mediating religion, one that imparts a perpetual spiritual value, mediating between the values of East and West, between a Sufi reliance on and trust in God and a Western materialism (Amin 1964, 189). If, as he argues, Islam is an open religion with an open ethics, it contains within it *juwwaniyya* or inwardness as an open and dynamic philosophy (Amin 1964, 113).[3] Inwardness was not conceived of as the singular activity of a purportedly autonomous individual but rather as a foundational principle, a sensibility, and an embodied practice within Islam. Yet, Amin also draws upon the Christological emphasis on inwardness as a revolution in the direction (*qibla*) and axis (*mihwar*) of religious spirituality and sensibilities, demonstrating that a tradition of comparative ethical inquiry emerged that shaped specific religious sensibilities in the middle of the twentieth century.

The religious and philosophical orientation, or path as Amin terms it, of inwardness is significant because it draws our attention to an ethical coordinate of the self that could be discussed and debated across religious and philosophical traditions; from Augustine to al-Ghazali, the inward dimension of religious life has held an exalted place. It also alerts us to the extent to which inwardness was never quite as separated from the divine and tethered to moral sources solely interior to the self as some contemporary philosophers might have it (Taylor 1989).

Amin, I argue, was engaged in an *experimentum mentis*—one in which inwardness provided an angle of lucidity from which Islam and Christianity could gaze upon one another, not to seek commensurabilities but rather to highlight nodal points of convergence and divergence. I am here reminded of Saba Mahmood's enigmatic final sentence in *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*. Discussing our "collective incapacity to imagine a politics that does not treat the state as the arbiter of majority–minority relations," Mahmood notes "the ideal of interfaith equality might require not the bracketing of religious differences but their *ethical* thematization as a necessary risk when the conceptual and political resources of the state have proved inadequate to the challenge this ideal sets before us" (Mahmood 2016, 213). As Samera Esmeir astutely observes, "This requirement of ethical thematization, which comes with a necessary risk, means that the juridico-political language of political secularism is not the only mode of thought available to communities who live in difference" (Esmeir 2016).

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[2] There is a large body of literature on Muslim–Christian relations within Middle East studies focused on the "minority question" in the region, addressing the question of secularism and sectarianism, with respect to Coptic Christians in Egypt or minorities in Lebanon, for example, and their vexed relationship with the state and with their compatriots (Makdisi 2000; Weiss 2010; Ibrahim 2010; White 2011; Sedra 2014; Mahmood 2016). A related body of work has centered largely on missionary encounters, emphasizing the relationship between missionaries and European imperialism (Makdisi 2007; Sharkey 2008; Baron 2014). Discussions of non-proselytizing Muslim–Christian encounters have tended to focus on the medieval and early modern period (Haddad and Haddad 1995; Salvatore 2007; Khater 2011; Pratt et al. 2015); on Christian–Muslim apologetics and polemics (Waardenburg 1998, 1999); or on renowned Western scholars, such as Louis Massignon, as exemplars of "openness and dialogue" (Busse 1998; Krokus 2017). For studies that explore modern comparative religious inquiry and exchange, see Makdisi (2019), Heo (2018), Avon (2005, 2015), Ryad (2009, 2015), and Wood (2008).

[3] Amin is drawing directly on the distinction made by Henri Bergson between closed and static, on the one hand, and open and dynamic religion, on the other (Bergson 1977). Hasan Hanafi believes *juwwaniyya* to be an Arabic translation of Kant's category of the "transcendental" (Hanafi 2002, 319).

DISCURSIVE TRADITIONS AND INTELLECTUAL NETWORKS

My reading of Amin is unique insofar as I do not view his ideas as simple byproducts of their time through the lens of historicist contextualism.[4] In place of a punctual model—in which ideas are determined by a place-based model of context "that privileges the punctual moment of a text's production," for example, Nasserist Egypt—I employ the notion of discursive traditions or what Edward Baring refers to as an archival model that "does not root a text in such a definitive way" (Baring 2016, 586). Nor do I view Amin as defensively positioning himself in order "to prove, against the 'orientalists,' the originality and value of Islamic philosophy" (Hildebrandt 2008). Instead, I argue that he was creatively engaging the Islamic discursive tradition in conversation with other religious and secular traditions. Rather than reduce Amin's work to a polemic about Nasserism and nationalism or to a simple byproduct of the so-called liberal era, I engage seriously with the *religious* and *philosophical* import of his ideas.[5] This speaks to the importance of understanding religious traditions on their own terms rather than rendering them merely defensive postures, epiphenomenal to relationships of power (Haj 2009).

In particular, I interpret Amin through the lens of the Islamic discursive tradition while turning our attention to the intellectual networks that sustain interreligious scholarly exchanges. Talal Asad has notably formulated the idea of Islam as a discursive tradition, understood as modes of argumentation and embodied practices that relate "to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith" while addressing "conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present" (Asad 1986, 14).[6] This conceptualization relies upon Alasdair MacIntyre's framing of a living tradition as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition" (MacIntyre 1984, 222). I argue that an Asadian approach is heuristically valuable, offering an indispensable theoretical framework for making sense of the interreligious intellectual exchanges that took place within the history of twentieth-century Egypt.

Significantly, an Asadian framework enables a reconfiguration of historical investigations into religious traditions by reimagining the time-space of scholarly inquiry. Tradition-based scholarly inquiry "treats the past neither as mere prologue nor as something to be struggled against, but as that from which we have to learn if we are to identify and move towards our *telos* more adequately" (MacIntyre 1990, 79). Stated differently, tradition-based inquiry troubles the way we think about temporal unfolding by allowing us to contemplate the convivial presence of the past in the historical moments that we are analyzing as well as its co-presence in the present and in the future (Asad 2003, 222–24). As Asad notes, "Tradition links the dead to the living…. To

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[4]   This would render Islamic discourses epiphenomenal to their socio-political and historical context. *Historicism* is a notoriously slippery concept; Ian Hacking has defined it as "the theory that social and cultural phenomena are historically determined, and that each period in history has its own values that are not directly applicable to other epochs" (Hacking 1990, 344). *Contextualism* refers to "the view that a specific context can fully account for all the potentialities of an idea" (Gordon 2014, 33). For a critique of these methods, see O. El Shakry 2021.

[5]   Perhaps the most eminent of Amin's interpreters is his former student, the philosopher Hasan Hanafi (b. 1935). Hanafi argues that Amin represents the first Islamic reading of transcendental philosophy (Hanafi 2002, 319). At the same time, he contends that Amin's emphasis on the inner and esoteric dimension of consciousness may be seen as an excessively individualistic philosophy, reflecting both a personal religious outlook and the values of the liberal era (mind, freedom, democracy) of which it was purportedly a derivative (Hanafi 1979, 463–66). Yet, Hanafi himself would later attempt to renew Islamic theology by recasting it as a study of the human condition, reflecting "consciousness's yearning for perfection and for a relationship between the immanent and transcendent aspects of life" (Daifallah 2018, 305–6). He would eventually become known for his synthesis of phenomenology and hermeneutics and its application to the study of both Islam and Christianity, suggesting that his mentor's shadow might have been longer than he himself imagined. In a likewise historicist vein, Amin's philosophy has even been viewed as a legitimation of the "Egyptian revolution of 1952 and the 'socialist transformations' associated with it," by Ibrahim Abu Rabi' (1988, 138). There is one additional source on Amin, a monograph by Ibrahim Tulba, that I have not been able to locate due to COVID-19 pandemic constraints.

[6]   For Asadian approaches in anthropology that focus on Muslim communities, see Mahmood (2005), Hirschkind (2006), and Agrama (2012). Heo (2018) is exceptional in her focus on Christian–Muslim mediation. For an exemplary approach in religious studies, see Anjum (2012); in history, see Haj (2009).

invoke the authority of the past is a matter of interpretation, of translating the past into the present, which inevitably involves unique potentialities and demands of the present" (Asad 2018, 92).[7] Crucially, this moves us away from accounts that overemphasize contrapuntal socio-political contexts as causally determinative (religious ideas as simply products of, or reactions to, their geo-historical context) and points us toward *longue durée* epistemic analyses.[8] Such *longue durée* analyses are less constrained by rigid ideas of the geographical "provenance of an idea or a practice" and open up "intersecting boundaries and heterogenous notions of practices and time" (Moosa 2005, 26–27).

Further, a tradition-based framework enables us to highlight the endurance of living traditions through processes of contestation and debate. This is an often-misunderstood point within the work of Asad, and by extension MacIntyre. Disagreements over what constitutes the essence of a tradition are foundational to their formulation and reformulation over time. As MacIntyre notes, "Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict" (MacIntyre 1984, 222). Or as Asad frames it, the "'essence' [of a tradition] is not neutrally determinable because it is subject to argument. A living tradition is not merely capable of containing conflict and disagreement; the search for what is essential provokes argument" (Asad 2018, 95).[9]

What I would add to the aforementioned contributions and what has not been, I believe, adequately explored within Asadian approaches are the ways in which distinct, and often times incommensurable, discursive traditions come into contact and dialogue with one another. As Asad notes, "a living discursive tradition aims at mutual interrogation and continuous learning" (Asad 2020, 411). Following Samira Haj, I emphasize the capaciousness and resilience of the Islamic discursive tradition as it encounters other religious or secular traditions: the way it can be adjudicated and re-adjudicated over time, incorporating newer elements into itself, "in the effort to redefine norms and practices" in light of evolving sociohistorical circumstances (Haj 2009, 90; Moosa 2005). Traditions may reconfigure themselves without necessarily engendering historical ruptures and epistemological crises that lead to their demise; in fact, such reconfigurations may lead to the revival and renewal of the tradition.[10]

As such, I situate Amin within a genealogy of teachers and students (a *silsila* or chain of transmission, if you will) that demonstrates the complexity of the history of ideas and institutions and the intermingling of religious traditions in twentieth-century Egypt. Such exchanges, I argue, are foundational to the cross fertilization of ideas and the constitution of social histories of spirituality that often come about through experiences of religious encounter. Amin's formation as an Islamic studies scholar was deeply imprinted by Shaykh Mustafa ʿAbd al-Raziq, a student of the famed nineteenth-century Islamic reformer Muhammad ʿAbduh. ʿAbd al-Raziq was an Azhari-trained scholar known as "the great master" and "the perfect philosopher" who had challenged secular currents and played a formative role in the reintroduction of Islamic philosophy, and the integration of Sufism, into modern Egyptian intellectual life and mainstream academic and religious thought (Abu Rabiʿ 1988, 130; Amine 1953; Amin 1964, 50–51). Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raziq immersed Amin in the study of classical Islamic thought, introducing him to al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), and al-Razi, and greatly influenced the choice of

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7   This is, of course, distinct from the framework of invented traditions, in which the present provides the singular prism through which the past is selectively resuscitated, appropriated, or resituated.
8   This is what Rajbir Singh Judge, following Amos Funkenstein, critiques as contextual reasoning in the scholarship on South Asia; see "The Invisible Hand of the Indic" (Judge 2021).
9   "A tradition," Asad explains, "is a set of aspirations, sensibilities, felt obligations, and relationships of subjects who live and move in the multiple times of a common world—whence the possibilities for disagreement" (Asad 2018, 93).
10   On incommensurability and epistemological ruptures, see MacIntyre (1990, 4–6, 105–26). For a discussion of the ways in which the Islamic tradition has weathered epistemological crises in both the premodern and modern period, see Haj (2009, 86–90). This is in contrast to conventional arguments that posit the fragility of the tradition, presuming it to be somehow "threatened" by other more powerful traditions, such as secularism or modernity, the latter erroneously presumed to be both Western and antithetical to Islamic tradition.

his dissertation topic on Muhammad ʿAbduh (Amin 1944; 1964, 50–51). Importantly, Amin's notion of inwardness drew upon the normative ethics of al-Ghazali, which calls upon the subject to grapple with self-becoming as a *jihad* that requires praxis-oriented virtues to be embodied.

A lesser known fact is that Amin's initiation into Western philosophy came by way of lectures given at the Egyptian University by the philosopher and Thomist Yusuf Karam (b. 1886), who was himself influenced by the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain (b. 1882) (Amin 1964, 48).[11] Karam had famously translated Alexandre Koyré's *Trois leçons sur Descartes* given at the Egyptian University in 1937, and Amin himself would later write a full-length monograph on Descartes (Koyré 1937–1938; Amin 1957). Karam maintained an intellectual interest in Thomism throughout his life and was a member of the *Cercle Thomiste* in Cairo and the author of texts on metaphysics as well as the histories of ancient Greek, medieval Christian, and modern European philosophy (Karam 1936, 1946, 1956, 1959, 1963). In his obituary, Amin paid tribute to Karam's highly introverted personality, asserting that since few people knew him, few were able to appreciate his qualities of seriousness, patience, perfection, humility, and gentleness. Indeed, Karam would provide a source of inspiration and emulation, and Amin would keep in continuous contact with him throughout his career, sharing with him drafts of all his publications. Amin and Karam both shared an appreciation for the aesthetic beauty of the Arabic language, the eloquence of philosophical traditions within the West and the non-West alike, as well as a belief in God as a source of absolute beauty.

Placing Amin within an intellectual network of genealogical linkages between teachers and students demonstrates the depth of engagement across generations with Neo-Scholasticism, Cartesianism, and the Islamic discursive tradition. Taken together, this corpus of writing enables us to reconsider the historical convergence and divergence of Islamic and Christian religious traditions, the co-constitution of philosophy and theology, and the continued influence of the Greek, Latin, and Arabic philosophical traditions within modern religious thought. At the same time, such intellectual networks and intertextual engagements draw our attention to the significance of mentoring and of spiritual friendships and their influence on religious sensibilities, as David Burrell (2000) has argued and as Brenna Moore (2015) has so vividly outlined in the case of the *renouveau catholique*.

My argument is that such a coming together of discursive traditions demonstrates the ways in which the Islamic tradition encountered religious difference not as a threat but as an avenue of philosophical inquiry. As Samira Haj has argued, this "process of injecting and rejecting different knowledges, cultures, and practices" is in fact the means by which the Islamic tradition has survived and remained Islamic (Haj 2009, 88). This is contrary to readings that might see such creative blendings as a "mere ideological weapon, a ruse, or a reaction to European power" (Haj 2009, 28).[12] To be sure, historical context and European colonial power relations are significant, but they are not singularly determinative of Islamic argumentation, and to read Amin as defensively reacting to colonial power relations would be a grave methodological error.

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[11]   Yusuf Karam (1886–1959) was born in the Nile Delta to a family of Lebanese origin. After the Great War, he abandoned his post at the National Bank of Tanta to take a course of philosophy at the Catholic Institute in Paris, being particularly fascinated by Jacques Maritain's presentation of a living Thomism. Although he never received a doctorate, he wrote on Descartes in 1917 for an advanced diploma at the Sorbonne under the direction of Léon Robin. After returning to Egypt in 1919, he spent a period of eight years in almost complete seclusion in Tanta to study Western and Arab philosophy. In 1925 he experienced a long breakdown, which ended in 1929 when André Lalande asked him to assist in teaching philosophy at the Egyptian University. In 1938 he went to teach at Alexandria University, where he taught until 1956. For biographical information on Karam, see Anawati et al. (1958) and Avon (2015).

[12]   As Talal Asad notes, such views see traditions as somehow spurious, as "fictions of the present, reactions to the forces of modernity—that in contemporary conditions of crisis, tradition in the Muslim world is a weapon, a ruse, a defense against a threatening world, that it is an old cloak for new aspirations and borrowed styles of behavior" (Asad 1986, 15).

INWARDNESS AND FAITH: AN *EXPERIMENTUM MENTIS*

Inwardness, ʿUthman Amin argues, is both a form of faith and an ethical embodiment of the path toward the divine in the pursuit of knowledge. Comprised of a spiritual vision of people and things, it is a path that awaits the wayfarers of the day of judgment (Amin 1964, 113). Such an ethical orientation resonates with Jacques Lacan's *experimentum mentis*, an ethical orientation toward the Last Judgment, conceiving ethics as "the relationship between action and the desire that inhabits it" (Lacan 1992, 313; Pandolfo 2018). Such an ethical encounter could only be thought through in relation to the Last Judgment, and it stood in explicit contrast to any notion of ethics structured by commonplace understandings of the Good.

Inwardness, Amin asserts, is a foundational principle, a sensibility, and an embodied practice (both individual and collective) within Islam. The religious and philosophical orientation of inwardness draws our attention to an ethical coordinate of the self that could be discussed and debated across religious and philosophical traditions; from Augustine to al-Ghazali to Jaspers, the inward dimension of life has held an exalted place. Amin draws upon the Christological emphasis on inwardness as a revolution in the direction (*qibla*) and axis (*mihwar*) of religious spirituality and sensibilities.

Quoting from the Qurʾan and *ahadith*, the distinction between essences and appearances, inner (*juwwani*) and outer (*barrani*), demonstrated the internalist perspective of Islam—concerned with a faith (*imān*) that has entered hearts ("he calls Allah to witness as to that which is in his heart…" (Q 2:204) and a righteousness premised on the belief in Allah and the Last Day (Q 2:177; 2:263; 22:37; 49:14; Amin 1964, 118–20). Indeed, the external (Paradise) was premised upon the internal (love) as in the Prophetic hadith: "You will not enter Paradise until you believe and you will not believe until you love each other" (Amin 1964, 114–15, 193). Such a faith was thus internal to the subject: "And remember your Lord within yourself in humility and in fear without being apparent in speech" (Q 7:205; Amin 1964, 120).

The attainment of faith, however, could not occur without *juhd* (exertion) to reform both the interior and the exterior. The reform of the self (*islah al-nafs*), as the Egyptian poet, literary critic, and polymath ʿAbbas Mahmud al-ʿAqqad remarked, is something that strengthens the interior, requiring the purification of consciousness (Amin 1964, 122–23). This inward emphasis or turn, Amin argues, relies upon what might be termed a Christological revolution. Amin's discussion draws heavily on al-ʿAqqad's *The Genius of Christ*, originally published in Cairo in 1953, in which he argues that Christ instituted the "law of love and conscience…which contradicted the law of external matters and formalities," the latter espoused by "inflexible literalists [who] did not take into consideration the human soul" (al-ʿAqqād 2001, 177, 171). "And the law of love allows no letter of the law of formalities and external matters to remain as it is," al-ʿAqqad states, "but it also does not abolish a single letter of the established law; rather, it goes beyond it" (al-ʿAqqād 2001, 172).

Amin's heavy reliance upon al-ʿAqqad was not accidental. Both scholars were deeply influenced by Muhammad ʿAbduh, and not only did Amin consider al-ʿAqqad a quintessential philosophical literatus (*adib*) but, significantly, also a representative of the inward religious perspective (Amin 1964, 310–11). The *Genius of Christ* was, likewise, an inward book that communicated the significance of Jesus within the history of divine revelation and spirituality. Jesus represented the inward choice of direction (*ikhtiyar al-qibla*) within the spiritual lineage of prophethood (al-ʿAqqād 2001, 157–59; Amin 1964, 310–15). According to al-ʿAqqad,

> Christ's concern in reforming the soul was to change motives, not quantities. His concern was to relocate ethics from one center [*mihwar*] to another. And since his goal was to relocate the center, distances and intervals no longer had any value.

Outward displays had been the center around which revolved the lives of the nations and individuals of his time. Instead, it was necessary that one's innermost being become the center of life. The things of the world had been more important than the human soul. Instead, it was necessary for the human soul to become more important than things. It was necessary that gaining the human soul become one's most important achievement; for nothing would be held against the one who forfeited the world as long as he gained his soul. (al-'Aqqād 2001, 180)[13]

The Christological emphasis on the inner, inward, and interior was replicated in Sufism, which Amin argued was "inward in its essence" (Amin 1964, 120). Indeed, Jesus might be seen by some as the perfect Sufi. Much like the teachings of Jesus, the philosophy of inwardness did not stop at the world of appearances, but looked toward inner essences, to the spirit behind the letter (Amin 1964, 113). Yet, he asserts, it was also a path laid out since the time of Socrates, a path of reflection, contemplation, and deliberation (Amin 1964, 121). Amin continuously connected the Christian tradition, and by extension the Islamic tradition, to ancient Greek philosophy, a point to which I shall return.

What I wish to emphasize here is the extent to which Amin is engaging in an *experimentum mentis*—one in which inwardness provides an angle of lucidity from which each discursive tradition could gaze upon the other, not to seek commensurabilities but rather to highlight nodal points of convergence and divergence.[14] The notion of a Christological revolution might thus be viewed as an ethical thematization of religious difference (Mahmood 2016, 213), referring to the ways in which the concept of inwardness both connects to and departs from Christian theological understandings. On the one hand, and in keeping with the Gospels, Christ is presented as having revolutionized the relationship between spirituality and the law through a focus on the spirit rather than the letter (Ford 2001, 62–65). On the other hand, the idea of the "genius" of Christ points to his perfected *humanity*, and thus to the doctrinal incommensurability of the Muslim and Christian traditions regarding the divinity of Jesus and his placement within a lineage of prophethood; after all, his "was not the last mission to appear among humankind," a reference to the Prophet Muhammad as the "Seal of the Prophets" (al-'Aqqād 2001, 181).

The Life of Christ in Arabic

Amin's assessment of the meaning of the life of Christ must be situated within a wider revival of interest in Jesus among Muslim members of the intelligentsia in 1950s Cairo. These mid-century encounters were *experimenta mentis* that occurred in the shadow of aggressively secular state projects that sought to institutionalize and contain religiosity within the domains of al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox Church (Zeghal 1999; Sedra 2014). Indeed, much has been written on the larger historical context of Muslim–Christian relations in modern Egypt, rightly focused on relations between Egypt's Muslims and its largest minority population, the Copts (the largest Christian community in the Middle East). As Paul Sedra has detailed, historical struggles between the Coptic Orthodox Church, the clergy, and the Coptic laity have been foundational to Egyptian politics and Coptic communal dynamics (Sedra 2014). During the Nasser period under consideration here, Sedra argues, "the Coptic church seized the leadership role the state had forced Coptic landowners and industrialists to abandon" earlier in the century, and Pope Kirollos VI and Nasser cultivated what he terms "a millet partnership" in the 1960s (Sedra 2014, 509).

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[13] Amin cites extensively from the chapter in which this passage appears, on "Ethical Living"; see his appendix on "Inwardness in al-'Aqqad's Vision of Christ's Teaching" (Amin 1964, 310–15).

[14] I am inspired here by Stefania Pandolfo's exploration in "Divine Trial and *Experimentum Mentis*" (Pandolfo 2018).

Even though I focus upon Amin as one nodal point in a chain of Christian–Muslim intellectual exchanges, he himself was situated within a larger network of exchanges centered, in part, around the IDEO. IDEO had been transformed from a priory and "an annex of the École Biblique in Jerusalem, which it had been since 1928, to an independent institution devoted to advanced research in Islam and Arabic studies" (Ryan 1994, 4).[15] Under the talented directorship of Father Georges Anawati from 1953 to 1984, IDEO became a hub within the neighborhood of ʿAbbasiyya establishing links with Muslim and Christian communities alike.[16] Anawati was in dialogue and close friendship with the French Islamicist Louis Massignon, Catholic philosopher Louis Gardet, and with local scholars such as Yusuf Karam (who had encouraged him to enter the Dominican Order), Ibrahim Bayumi Madkur, Ahmad Amin, Mahmud al-Khudayri, and Taha Husayn (Frank 1994). Significantly, ʿAbbasiyya was the neighborhood in which both Karam and Amin lived, maintaining contacts with IDEO and Father Anawati, and demonstrating the cross-fertilization of ideas between distinct religious communities.[17]

Although invested in the preservation of Eastern and Coptic Christianity, the scholars (both local and foreign) centered in and around IDEO were to some extent shielded from the changes wrought by the 1952 revolution and the contentiousness of Coptic–Muslim ecumenical and political formations. To be sure, they did encounter difficulties in terms of state surveillance, especially in the midst of the pan-Arab nationalist fervor of the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956. Despite the exodus of largely foreign Christian communities from the Canal zone, as well as Alexandria and Cairo, an agreement was reached wherein religious figures from aggressor nations (i.e., France) could remain in Egypt under the protection of the Vatican (Avon 2005, 627–28). One might say that IDEO, although not entirely aloof from the stain of coloniality, was often viewed as apolitical, or at least as unopposed to state power (Avon 2005, 630). This perception was strengthened by the institute's non-proselytizing mission in philosophy, theology, and mysticism; its commitment to the study and preservation of Islamic scholarship; and by its ties to national institutions such as the Institut d'Egypte, the National Library, the Arabic Academy of Language, and the Higher Institute for Arabic Studies (Avon 2005, 584).

One might further argue that these conversations transpired as a result of earlier histories that predated Nasserism. Indeed, there were numerous precursors to IDEO, such as the *badaliyya*, founded in 1934 as a brotherhood of prayer (for the manifestation of Christ in Islam) and a spiritual substitution for and with Muslims conducted by Louis Massignon and an Egyptian Greek Catholic, Mary Kahil, at an abandoned Franciscan church in Damietta (Ryan 2013; Waardenburg 2005). Other predecessors were the *Cercle Thomiste*, a group of intellectuals looking to Aquinas as their patron and guide that met from 1933 to 1952 in ʿAbbasiyya, presenting papers and publishing them in the *Cahiers du Cercle Thomiste*; and the *Ikhwan al-Safaʾ* (Brotherhood of Purity), 1941–1953, the association of Muslim and Christian intellectuals with which this article began.[18]

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[15]   In the late 1940s, the Vatican asked the Dominican Order to create an institute specializing in Islamic studies "not for any proselytism" but to promote better relationships with the Muslim world (Pérennès 2014, 195). It later housed a Dominican community of friars "whose apostolic project is explicitly to study the Islamic culture and work for a better mutual understanding" and to further advocate the "Muslim vocation of the Order" (Pérennès 2014, 201).

[16]   Father Georges Anawati (1905–1994) was born in Alexandria to a Greek Orthodox family of Syrian origin. At age sixteen, he entered the Roman Catholic Church. In 1934, he entered the Dominican Order of France, completing his studies at the Saulchoir under Marie-Dominique Chenu. Anawati is widely known for his encyclopedic contribution to Islamic studies, including a French translation and edition of Avicenna's *Book of Healing* (1978–1985) as well as a bibliographic treatise on his works; extensive studies on Muslim philosophy (Anawati 1974), including two works coauthored with Louis Gardet, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane; essai de théologie compare* (Gardet and Anawati 1948) and *Mystique musulmane; aspects et tendances, expériences et techniques* (Gardet and Anawati 1961). He was instrumental in groundbreaking positions on dialogue with Islam at the Second Vatican Council. For biographical information, see Ryan (1994), Frank (1994), and Najib (1996, 165).

[17]   There is a copy of Amin's *al-Juwwaniyya* dedicated to Father Georges in IDEO's library; I thank Simon Conrad for drawing my attention to this dedication.

[18]   On the former, see *Cahiers du Cercle Thomiste* (1934, 3) and on the latter, Anawati (1980) and Avon (2005, 555–58).

In an important sense, then, the conversations that took place in and around IDEO were inextricably connected with the West as embodied in the longstanding history of scholarly exchanges between France and Egypt since the Napoleonic invasion, including student missions to France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and culminating in Massignon's well-received lectures at the Egyptian University in 1912–1913. Within this framing, we might better conceptualize intellectual and cultural exchanges among Egyptian Muslims and Francophone Arab Catholics, not as some form of colonial mimicry that aspired to Western epistemologies and institutions but rather, as I shall try to argue, as an angle of lucidity from which *longue durée* epistemic resonances might be found between Patristic and Islamic philosophy; between Augustine and al-Ghazali; and between strands of Christian and Muslim scholasticism and mysticism.

To return to the post-1952 period, we know that IDEO was able to continue its intellectual exchanges with members of the Muslim intelligentsia and, further, that Egyptians close to the Dominicans, most notably Ibrahim Madkur, were called to take up positions of responsibility in the new regime, further enabling a facilitating environment (Avon 2005, 627). ʿUthman Amin himself was sympathetic both to Nasserism and to the spirit of interreligious intellectual exchange (Amin 1964). By my reading, the work of the 1950s and 1960s, of which ʿUthman Amin represents a crucial pivot, signifies a continuation and a deepening rather than a departure from earlier interreligious scholarly exchanges.[19]

In a review of four postwar works on Christ in Arabic, Father Jacques Jomier, a Dominican and active member of IDEO, remarked upon the widespread use of the Gospels in these writings as well as their organizational unity as coherent works of synthesis of the life of Jesus (Jomier 1958). The four texts were: ʿAbbas Mahmud al-ʿAqqad's *Abqariyyat al-Masih* (*The Genius of Christ*, al-ʿAqqād 1953); Kamel Hussein's *Qarya Zalima* (*City of Wrong*, Hussein 1959), Khalid Muhammad Khalid's *Maʿan ʿala al-Tariq, Muhammad wa-l-Masih* (On the road together: Muhammad and the Messiah, Khalid 1958); and Abd al-Hamid Judah al-Sahhar's *al-Masih ʿIsa b. Maryam* (The Messiah, Jesus son of Maryam, al-Sahhar 1959). In fact, Jomier commented, al-ʿAqqad's *Genius of Christ* retained certain expressions from the Gospels, such as the "light of the world," "bread of life," "son of God," and "son of Man," while remaining within the classical mold of the life of Christ genre and within the acceptable bounds of orthodox Muslim interpretations, most notably on the non-reality of the Crucifixion and the non-deification of Christ (Jomier 1958, 368–69n2).

Father Jomier observed that all four of these works retained a sympathy for the person of Jesus, but whereas in the premodern Arabic literature such sympathy manifested itself in the place of Jesus as a miracle worker and mystic, for these modern writers, such sympathy took the more deeply human dimension of Christ as its object, borrowing much of its detail from the Gospels. In the medieval period, Jesus was seen in the presence of God, whereas in these modern works he is seen in the presence of humanity (Jomier 1958, 386; Avon 2005, 758–59).

For Amin, the significance of Jesus lay, at least in part, in his asceticism. If, he argued, metaphysical thought required a vision of the relationship between the soul and existence, then *maʿrifa* (knowledge or gnosis) could only be approached with the prodigious effort of spirituality. He noted that the first of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad to partake of retreat and solitude was Abu Dhar al-Ghifari, walking on the earth in asceticism like Jesus and Mary—a lord of solitude within the Sufi tradition (Amin 1964, 131).[20] Amin drew further upon the examples

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[19]   I depart here from Dominique Avon's declensionist narrative, in which the mid-century intellectual renaissance that occurred in Egypt and focused on Arab cultural patrimony while diminishing the place of foreigners within the university system led to cultural shifts (such as the disappearance of non-secular cultural literary journals and their replacement with ideologically leftist ones) that were not entirely conducive to the project of the Dominicans. Although the Dominicans continued to partake in Egyptian intellectual life, including engagements with the likes of novelists such as Naguib Mahfouz and Yahia Haqqi, Avon claims that such bonds were unlike those of earlier decades (Avon 2005, 630–42).

[20]   Abu Dhar al-Ghifari (d. 652) is a fascinating nodal point across traditions, including Sunni and Shiʿa.

of Imam al-Ghazali, who was renowned for his spiritual retreat and seclusion of eleven years between 1095 and 1106, and the poet Rainer Maria Rilke (b. 1875), whose own letters conveyed the importance of solitude and retreat from all outward things in order to cultivate the creativity of inner silence and interiority (Amin 1964, 131).[21] Although he does not explicitly mention it, it is surely also significant that Amin's own mentor, the Catholic philosopher Yusuf Karam—who would embody a personal ideal to be emulated— retreated in seclusion in the provincial Delta town of Tanta for eight years to study Western and Arab philosophy.[22]

INWARDNESS AS EMBODIED PRACTICE

Having established seclusion and separation as indispensable to spiritual contemplation, Amin maintained that deliberation was necessary for the distinction between vision and spiritual vision, between the sight of the eye and that of the mind; the former was subject to error whereas the latter was subject to continuous self-correction (Amin 1964, 121). Once again quoting from the *Genius of Christ*, he noted that such a process of self-correction was an inner process of self-reform, a strengthening of the spiritual realm of the hidden and nonmanifest (*batiniyya*) (Amin 1964, 122). Inwardness, then, relied upon the self-reform and purification of human consciousness (*tazkiyat al-waʿy al-insani*), a practice of self-freedom that deepened humanity's understanding of meanings, significations, and principles (Amin 1964, 123).

How, then, might self-reform, to attain spiritual vision, be accomplished? I extrapolate two central strategies from Amin's text: reading as an illuminative embodied practice and the *jihad* of the self.

Reading as an Embodied Practice

For Amin, reading was an embodied practice that required the exercise of moral and intellectual virtues. Reading, within this framework, might best be conceptualized as a daily practice through which the reader moves not only towards a more adequate understanding, but also towards a more perfect mind, will, and habitus. In an important sense, reading itself, much like poetry, could be conceptualized as a form of prayer, an everyday activity that contemplates and thus partakes of the divine (MacIntyre 2012). Indeed, Alasdair MacIntyre has remarked that within the Augustinian tradition, "it is only the self as transformed through and by the reading of the texts which will be capable of reading the texts aright" (MacIntyre 1990, 82). Reading, in other words, required a virtuous orientation prior to the encounter with the text—one that was by and large inculcated through a teacher–student relationship and induction into a tradition. Subsequently, reading was an ethical practice that transformed the reader.

Crucially, conceptualizing reading as an embodied practice enables us to imagine inwardness not as the property of an individual emotivist self but as a practice that genealogically links one to a tradition (MacIntyre 1984; Asad 2020). It is surely significant that Amin includes a fair amount of autobiographical detail, whether personal reflections or excerpts from his diary, in his philosophical treatise. Such reflections highlight the significance of reading and mentoring as an orientation into the Islamic tradition. This was abundantly clear in Amin's *yawmiyyat*, a diary curiously nestled inside his philosophical treatise and comprised by and large of discussions of his readings. Although negatively commented upon by his student, the philosopher Hasan Hanafi, who saw in them a mere expression of individual consciousness that did not

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[21]   Amin also quotes from Karl Jaspers's *Reason and Anti-Reason in Our Time*: "What we get from metaphysical scrutiny and spiritual solitude is that which raises us above ourselves in our daily lives... among our basic needs is to ask—have we ignited our freedom or extinguished it, and have we attained the wealth of inwardness in our life?"; Amin had translated Jaspers's *The Future of Mankind* into Arabic in 1963 (Amin 1964, 132).

[22]   In fact, Amin had dedicated his book *Muhawalat Falsafiyya* (Philosophical experiments) to his professor as an exemplum of a contented character imbued with a philosophical nature (Amin 1953, 126–34).

attain to the philosophical (Hanafi 1979), I suggest that they can be productively read as the expression of the ethically transformative role of reading.

Both Amin's father and grandfather were shaykhs, and he recalls vividly his father's library and the first books he encountered: the Qurʾan, Muhammad al-Bukhari's hadith collection, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Muhammad ʿAbduh's *Tafsir Juzʾ ʿAmma*, and al-Ghazali's *Ihya ʿUlum al-Din*. As Amin puts it, his father's library, something external, led him to his psychological sense of inwardness (*al-juwwaniyya al-nafsiyya*), something internal (Amin 1964, 30–31). It was ʿAbduh's *Tafsir* that struck a deep chord, requiring that the "reader know how to read or the listener how to listen, with a sincerity of intention and the soundness of affect"; these were powerful ideas that Amin would later explore in his doctoral thesis on Muhammad ʿAbduh (Amin 1964, 30).

Amin's engagements with his first teachers and mentors were similarly ethically transformative.[23] He recounts two specific encounters in college. The first was with Catholic philosopher Yusuf Karam, with whom Amin engaged in a spirited discussion on the significance of Aristotelian ethics as a guide for virtuous conduct in everyday life (Amin 1964, 46–48). The second was a more public discussion with the Islamic philosopher Shaykh Mustafa ʿAbd al-Raziq, in which he also queried the relevance of grandiose ethical theories to everyday life, particularly in a colonized country still struggling for its independence (Amin 1964, 50–51). Both engagements would have a lasting impact on Amin—the former leading him to contemplate the relevance of ancient Greek philosophy to Islamic philosophy and the latter encouraging him to study Muhammad ʿAbduh, a turn-of-the-century reformer whose own works were written in the shadow of the British colonial occupation.

The inwardness of the individual, then, was intimately connected to a dense network of relations with mentors and with friendships both real and imagined with the living and the dead. In particular, friendship with the dead took place through reading and imagined conversations. David Burrell has posited reading as an act of translation and intercultural understanding, while Brenna Moore reminds us, "how the subject comes to feel and think *religiously* [takes place] not only through anonymous background discourses, but through the more personal domain of mutual bonds" (Burrell 2000, 40; Moore 2015, 444). A discursive tradition, in other words, is not simply an anonymous background discourse, but is peopled by individuals who function as exemplum, companions, and fellow travelers. It is further akin to the Arabo-Islamic tradition of ʿuwaysi relationships "in which one seeks instructions or inspiration from one who is physically absent" (Moosa 2005, 43). An allegedly solitary activity such as reading, then, demonstrates that inwardness was not an atomistic or solipsistic activity, but connects us instead to both the weight of discursive traditions as well as the illumination of the divine.

Thus, for example, on Wednesday, May 15, 1929, Amin asked, "Do university students realize that reading a book well is a means to understanding ourselves (*anfusina*, our souls) and an opening onto the world? One that preserves for us the blessing of *basira* and *basar* (spiritual vision and vision), such that we can read with our minds and our hearts" (Amin 1964, 87). Reading thus entailed feelings and oftentimes an emotive intensity and intimacy with the dead that, in turn, allowed for the possibility of friendship and hospitality across distinct religious traditions. Likewise, reading opened up new vistas of exploration such as that of the similarities between Descartes and al-Ghazali, whether in their critique of stagnant traditionalism, their impetus towards renovation and renewal, or their crises of doubt and certainty. "And

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[23]   It is also noteworthy that Amin attended a Coptic elementary school in which he experienced himself in the demographic minority of students, but in which, he remarks, he encountered no prejudice whatsoever despite students' awareness of his lineage from a family of shaykhs (Amin 1964, 31–32).

yet," Amin remarks in his diary entry of Sunday, January 6, 1929, "what a difference between the certainty of one and the other!" (Amin 1964, 75). Intensely emotional states could be recorded, such as a desire to immerse himself in the philosophy of religions (Amin 1964, 80). Whether being gifted Mustafa ʿAbd al-Raziq's French translation of Muhammad ʿAbduh's *Theology of Unity*, reading Arabic writer Ahmad Amin, immersing himself in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, or contemplating Henri Bergson's notions of time and duration, one thing is clear: Amin perfectly understood "the possibility of that atemporal 'now' at which writer and reader encounter each other."[24]

But how might we conceptualize reading as an *embodied* practice? The embodied nature of reading scripture within the Islamic tradition has been commented upon extensively (H. El Shakry 2020). Individual practitioners, whether reading the Qurʾan out loud, praying, or performing *dhikr* (the remembrance of God through rhythmic repetition), place an emphasis on tonality, harmonious recitation, and, most importantly, on reading as an embodiment of the virtues. As Talal Asad observes, "Hanbalis took the view that reading (*qaraʾa*, to read, to recite) the Qurʾan is essentially an act of trust (*imān*, faith) toward a power infinitely greater than human beings and uniquely perfect. Reciting is therefore the recognition of ideals (mercy, compassion, wisdom, forgiveness, friendship, etc.) that humans so often fail to achieve. In being recited, the Qurʾan was not simply a divine communication but an affirmation of those ideals as originating in God in the presence of God" (Asad 2018, 65).

For Amin, reading was inflected by the particularities of the Arabic language, which, he argued, was especially prone to an inward orientation; the dominance of the verb (*al-faʿl*), the absence of verbs without subjects (infinitives), the omission of pronouns, and the absence of vowels and diacritics in printed texts, all of which meant the mind of the reader must be in a heightened mental state to be able to read (Amin 1965; Hanafi 1979, 424–29). In a text dedicated to French Catholic Islamicist Louis Massignon on *Falsafat al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya* (The philosophy of the Arabic language), Amin asserted the Platonic nature of the Arabic language—marked by an innate idealism, a Cartesianism as he put it, that allowed for a Cogito (*al-dhaat al-ʿarifa*) to decide upon meaning (Amin 1965, 23–29). Such an idealism presupposed the prevalence of ideas over sensate data and was embodied in the philosophical orientation of medieval Islamic philosophy and in particular the premise that "essence [quiddity] precedes existence" (Amin 1965, 29–30). It was the power of imagination (*tasawwur*), of Cogito, to imagine meaning that preceded the contingency of existence, and this he linked to the grammatical peculiarities of Arabic that enabled the reader to move from outer to inner and from appearance to hidden meaning (Amin 1965, 33–40).

Reading and Illumination

If inward life was, as Amin asserted, akin to a musical symphony, then it could not be known simply discursively but must be engaged phenomenologically. Such was the case with reading, an embodied practice that led to the formation of deep intellectual sympathies and spiritual connections between author and reader (Amin 1964, 125). An internal process, "such understanding produces the feeling that between us and the author there is an unshakeable spiritual bond" (Amin 1964, 125). Placing Plato and Imam al-Ghazali side by side, Amin underscores the distinction between expository discursivity and the light that emerges from within. For Plato, philosophical understanding "does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge; but after much converse about the matter itself and a life lived together, suddenly a light, as it

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[24]   MacIntyre refers to "the possibility of that atemporal 'now' at which writer and reader encounter each other, that 'now' at which both can appeal away from themselves and the particularity of their own claims to *what is* timelessly, logically, ontologically, and evaluatively, and is only thereby and therefore the property of neither writer nor reader" (MacIntyre 1990, 45).

were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself" (Plato 1932, 341b–c, 135; Amin 1964, 125).[25]

For Plato, as Drew Hyland persuasively argues, philosophy cannot be put into words but must be based on a long and sustained dwelling or living together dialogically, whether as is commonly understood between teacher and student or between thinker and object of thought (Hyland 2008, 103–14). For Amin, too, a longstanding spiritual friendship between reader, writer, and object of thought was "not a doctrine but a sustained *experience*: one of dwelling-with the matter for thought over a long period" and "an instantaneous, noetic *happening*" (Hyland 2008, 106).

For al-Ghazali, too, knowledge was a noetic happening, conducted to the heart "by solitude and seclusion and averting the eyes from seeing, and then to resolve in the depths of the heart to purify it and remove from it the layers of veils until the fountain of knowledge bursts forth from within it" (al-Ghazālī 2010, 57; Amin 1964, 125–26). As with Maine de Biran, an eighteenth-century French Catholic philosopher known for his validation of inward experience, there was a distinction between knowledge obtained with the mind and that eternally present in the self (Amin 1964, 126).

Inwardness, then, was not about the atomistic individual, but rather about the individual in relation to the other and to the metaphysical realm. Such an illuminationist relationship (the light of inward illumination discussed by Plato and al-Ghazali above; inner inspiration or revelation; *kashf*) could cultivate human consciousness (*al-waʿy al-insani*)—a term that Amin used to encompass the spiritual (*ruhiyya*), the religious (*wujud Allah*), and the ethical (the law of morals) (Amin 1964, 127). Now we can see more clearly the significance of Amin's autobiographical ruminations not as the elevation of subjective experience, but as the embodiment of a philosophical way of life. The contemplation of metaphysics was a Heraclitan and Platonic reflection on the inner nature of things that was first and foremost a way of living and an experience (Amin 1964, 133; Hyland 2008, 105–7).

INWARDNESS AND JIHAD AL-NAFS: AUGUSTINE AND AL-GHAZALI

Never solely a metaphysical orientation or an introspective practice, inwardness was therefore concretely rooted in the here and now of collective quotidian practice. How so? To answer this, we must turn to the process by which the self moves towards the good by way of that which lies outside the mind. Augustine was the most significant early church father to address inwardness, and he provides a crucial link between inwardness, a Platonic conception of knowledge, and the process of moral self-correction.[26] As Alasdair MacIntyre notes with respect to the Augustinian conception of moral inquiry, "the mind thus has to find within itself that which points it towards a source of intelligibility beyond itself…; guided towards that source it discovers within itself an apprehension of timeless standards, of forms, an apprehension, which is itself possible only in the light afforded by a source of intelligibility beyond the mind" (MacIntyre 1990, 84). Yet, "the intellect and the desires do not naturally move towards that good…. The will which directs

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[25]   For another translation, see Drew A. Hyland (2008, 103): "For it cannot at all be put into words like other objects of learning, but only after a long period of dwelling together concerning the subject itself and living together with it, when, suddenly, like a light kindled by a leaping spark, it comes to be in the soul and at once becomes self-nourishing." Both Karam and Amin elaborate on neo-Platonism in their writings.

[26]   A translation of Augustine's *Confessions* into Arabic most likely appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century and again later in the middle of the twentieth century. According to Daniel König, the first appearance in modern Arabic of a discussion of Augustine was in Butrus al-Bustani's modern encyclopedia, *Kitab Daʾirat al-Maʿarif* (1876–1877), in which he addressed the saint's life and overviewed his writings, with special reference to the *Confessions*, *City of God*, and *The Retractions*, and provided a few comments about his importance for Western Christianity. Subsequent scholarly accounts addressed Augustine from the perspective of medieval European history and the history of philosophy, with key texts appearing in 1919, 1933, and 1946 and then again beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s (König 2013, 146).

them is initially perverse and needs a kind of redirection which will enable it to trust obediently in a teacher who will guide the mind towards the discovery both of its own resources and of what lies outside the mind, both in nature and in God" (MacIntyre 1990, 84).

Amin was himself familiar with Augustine, especially through the writings and teachings of his aforementioned mentor, Yusuf Karam, who had written a pinnacle text on the history of European philosophy in the Middle Ages, a synthesis of the intellectual history of scholasticism and dialectical theology covering Augustine, Anslem, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas, among many others (Karam 1946).[27] For Amin, the scholastics provided skills still in use in modern philosophy, whether in rhetoric or logic and argumentation; they deepened the great philosophical questions, especially regarding the connection between the body and the soul, and they gave inner life (*al-hayat al-batina*) an esteemed place in comparison to the ancients (Amin 1953, 133). Significantly, Amin commented on the interconnection between the church fathers and the study of ancient philosophy, noting that Augustine more than any other Latin church father brought the philosophical spirit into his teachings of the Neo-Platonists, which had a deep impact on the Middle Ages (Amin 1953, 126–27).

Referencing the Islamic discursive tradition, Talal Asad has recalled Augustine's warning: "Hands off yourself. Try to build up yourself, and you build a ruin" (Asad 2015, 174). Such an admonition insisted on the fact that the individual was not sovereign—certainly not in the sense of the aesthetic self-fashioning of the European Renaissance nor in the self-transformation of the modern subject—rather individuals submitted themselves to, while adjudicating, the authority of the discipline of tradition (Asad 2015, 174). Nowhere is this absence of sovereignty clearer than in the limitations of inwardness and introspection.

If, then, within premodern Christianity the subject submits themself to the discipline and authority of tradition, Asad remarks,

> *Islam* ("submission") shares this orientation, and the ethical language that goes with it, with premodern Christianity, and has developed it even more vigorously in the *sharīʿa* tradition.… This should not be surprising, incidentally, because Islam developed in late antiquity in a world where Byzantine and Sassanian empires ruled and Christian, Judaic, and Mazdaean traditions flourished, and so, as Muslims interacted with non-Muslims, they inherited institutions and ideas from that complex history and went on to develop them in diverse but distinctive ways. (Asad 2015, 175)

As Asad notes, al-Ghazali "would certainly have endorsed Augustine's position if he had known of it because, for him, there is no essential self that can guide itself; there are only potentialities of the soul that can be realized through or against a living tradition" (Asad 2018, 75). Likewise, David Burrell suggests that al-Ghazali "is better compared... with Augustine primarily, and not simply because his *Munqidh* invites comparison with the *Confessions*, but because the need on the part of both to compose such a work shows the primacy each gives to the inner task of responding to a divine invitation to become what one is called to become" (Burrell 1987, 176).

In what follows, I elaborate upon ʿUthman Amin's notion of *jihad al-nafs* (the struggle of the soul or self-struggle) as one such way in which the Islamic discursive tradition developed in relation to, and in distinction from, an Augustinian conception of moral inquiry—in which subjects submit themselves to the discipline and authority of tradition. I argue that the specificity of Amin's notion of inwardness lay in the reliance upon the normative ethics of al-Ghazali, which calls upon the subject to grapple with self-becoming as a *jihad* that requires purity of

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[27] Amin reviewed the book with the highest praise for its eloquence and rigor, declaring Karam's book not only a great contribution to philosophy in Egypt and the Arab world, but a perfect text (Amin 1953, 133–34).

intention (*niyya*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and truthfulness (*sidq*) as cardinal praxis-oriented virtues to be embodied.[28] Amin's thought is thus in opposition to contemporary secular notions of the self in which intention and sincerity are viewed merely as inner subjective phenomena.

Inwardness and Intention

For Amin, *jihad al-nafs* entails the purification of the heart through divine guidance and a rigorous process of self-examination and vigilance in which the self/soul could be trained and the virtues of sincere intention and truthfulness inculcated. The exertion of effort (*jihad*) was thus as fundamental to religion as was the sincerity of deeds (Amin 1964, 196). The struggle of the soul was both inward and outward in orientation; it encompassed, but was not confined to, introspection, and it required a highly elaborated mode of self-transformation. He quotes the Prophet: "The *mujahid* is he who fights himself" and "the *muhajir* is he who flees from what God has forbidden"; the inner *jihad* required a continuous and determined battle against the passions of the self (Amin 1964, 196).

The ethical injunction of the goodness of intention was a referendum of the heart, which was to be found in Qur'anic verses, *ahadith*, as well as Sufi books, both modern and ancient (Amin 1964, 198–99; see also Q 22:37). The higher path of ethics laid out for humans (endowed as they were with heart, will, and reason) enabled them to actualize the sincerity of intention (Amin 1964, 191). In keeping with al-Ghazali's Qur'anic ethics, Amin focused on the intention upon which deeds are based; the Prophet also reserved the highest value for the inner element of deeds—truthfulness (*sidq*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*) of intention (*niyya*) were thus the cornerstone of faith (*imān*).

Crucially, such virtues were not the product of a freely willed personal choice, absent of authority (ecclesiastical or otherwise) as in early modern European theories of the emotions, which privileged notions of sincerity disconnected from religious traditions and the authority of the Church (Trilling 1958; Stern-Gillet 2007; Asad 2015, 170). Rather, the goodness of intention and attendant virtues such as sincerity and truthfulness required a trained or rehearsed sensibility. As Asad notes, "intention is not, in fact, a purely subjective phenomenon but a publicly accessible construct—requiring the interpretations of words, behavior, and context—that together define its proper use" (Asad 2018, 82). Further, if good intention is aimed at forging the right relationship between the worshipper and God, then bad intention is only guarded against by vigilance and self-examination (Asad 2018, 83; al-Ghazālī 2015).

For al-Ghazali, intention rested on the compatibility of a human choice with God's purpose and as such its orientation was eschatological (al-Ghazālī 2013). Intention and sincerity were inextricably linked because true intention could not *but* be sincere. How, then, might one acquire sincere intention in accordance with God's purpose? Al-Ghazali's answer is deceptively simple: through the habitual practice of pious ritual worship (Shaker 2013, xvi–xix). "The habitual activities of someone dominated by the love of God and the Hereafter acquire the attribute of his preoccupation, becoming sincerity" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 61). Pious acts nourished the heart and aided "healing, survival, welfare and felicity in the Hereafter, and luxuriating in the meeting with God (Exalted is He). The only goal is the pleasure of the meeting with God" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 18).

Stated more directly, ritual practice (*ʿibadat*) and the material injunctions of religion—prayer, fasting, *hajj*, and so forth—were *fundamental* to sincere intention (Amin 1964, 186–221; Powers 2004). Significantly, intention was neither a matter of choice nor a

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[28]   For a discussion of Ghazalian ethics and the importance of "technologies of the self" that include both the exoteric and the esoteric, see Moosa (2005, 237–60).

matter of the inner discourse "of the tongue and of mere thought" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 37). Instead, it referred to the soul's orientation and could be acquired through the "strengthening of one's faith through the injunctions of religion" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 38; Amin 1964, 188–190, 193, 215–16). It "does not consist in merely uttering 'I intend.' Rather, it is an incentive of the heart which occurs in the manner of inspiration from God (Exalted is He)" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 40).

Al-Ghazali's illuminationist language points us to the unique significance of Sufism to discussions of interiority. As Amin observed, one must attend to Sufi insights into the inward dimension that entailed accounting, patience, and certitude as well as the cultivation of *adab* or socio-ethical comportment (Amin 1964, 209–10). If intention and sincerity were the foundation of true ethics, then inwardness in Sufism was itself premised upon an enlightened consciousness based upon the goodness of intentions, truth, and sincerity (Amin 1964, 210–11). Sufism provided special insight into the nature of the lower self as a specified evil—the seat of the passions and the base instincts (Amin 1964, 211). The dominance of the lower self over the soul could be combatted by exertion and *jihad*. Amin thus emphasized the exertion necessary for the exercise of the virtues insofar as the sincerity and truthfulness of the subject could not be taken for granted. True meaning and inward intention were the true value and measure of words and deeds (Amin 1964, 199). Ideally, the interior and exterior dimensions of the human (the heart and inner senses, on the one hand, and external conduct, on the other) would be aligned such that external conduct represented the purification of intention and the exteriorization of the soul (Shaker 2013, xv, xviii, xxvi).

The listening and prescencing of the heart and the witnessing of the soul, Amin noted, were what one might refer to in modern terminology as the righteousness of conscience (*istiqmat al-damir*) (Amin 1964, 189, 191, 198–99). Freedom lay in a willing submission to tradition, understood not as an inflexible corpus of dictates, but rather as a rational and emotive alignment of the inward and outward orientation of ethical life. In common parlance, we might say that being sincere or truthful takes work, it requires the vigilant self-examination of motives and it was not the spontaneous expression of the free will of a cavernous subject presumed to be autonomous. How, then, could the virtues of sincerity and truthfulness be attained?

Sincerity and Truthfulness

Amin placed Ghazalian ethics at the center of his notion of inwardness, which was comprised of a twofold path, outward and inward. First was the path of the science of works and deeds and that which corrupts it. Such a path was arduous and required vigilance and a battle against the self and the whispering (*wiswas*) of evil. Second, it required the knowledge of the *batin* or the hidden realm of inner secrets, premised on the purity and perception of the heart (Amin 1964, 214–15).

In his own ethics, al-Ghazali emphasized inwardness and the presencing of the heart. The heart could be made present through prayer, invocation, and the remembrance of God, thus purifying the heart of worldly thoughts and cultivating sincerity and intention (Amin 1964, 215–16). True *juwwaniyya*, then, derived from a consciousness of the self that could exceed the spatiotemporal bounds of corruption and aspire to the eternal remainder and residue of life in the memory of God (Amin 1964, 216). For al-Ghazali, every sound mind has the ability to reflect on "what is beyond material things," thereby pointing oneself to the Hereafter (Shaker 2013, xvi).

"Sincerity is truthfulness of intention with God" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 64). Sincerity emanated from the exclusion of the love of this world alongside "the love of God and the Hereafter" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 57–63). As Amin noted, what reaches God is only sincerity and righteousness

(Amin 1964, 189; *Q* 34:37). The ethics of Sufism especially sought to exercise control over the lower self and its desires. When asked about sincerity, the Prophet replied "That you do not worship your desires and your self, that you worship none but your Lord" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 66–67). To ward off such impulses required a *jihad* of the self, and it was a covenant between the self and God.

Sincerity (*ikhlas*) was an act, the act of purification, and not just a state. It is best conceptualized as an embodied practice, namely that of purifying all actions and motivations to be closer to God in his oneness (*tawhid*), with no other motivation (al-Ghazālī 2013, 57, 60, 76). "This is possible," states al-Ghazali, "only for someone enamored and fond of God, so engrossed in his concentration on the hereafter that love of this world no longer sways his heart" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 60). Al-Ghazali states: "The Apostles asked Jesus, 'Who is pure (*khāliṣ*) in action?' He said, 'He who acts for the sake of God without longing for anyone's praise'" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 66).

As such, truthfulness, both with oneself and with others, was allied to sincerity. A person's interior and exterior were bound by obedience to God; having no goal other than God (al-Ghazālī 2013, 87), the utmost truthfulness lay in servantship to God and freedom from what is other than God (88). Once again, it is the ethical orientation towards the Last Day, which must guide humankind in this world. "But it is the righteous one who has faith in God and the Last Day... such are the truthful" (*Q* 2: 177; al-Ghazālī 2013, 94). The Prophet noted that "Truthfulness (*ṣidq*) guides towards piety (*birr*) and piety towards Paradise" (al-Ghazālī 2013, 81). "Among the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God" (*Q* 33:23; al-Ghazālī 2013, 90).

A moderate familiarity with Augustinian thought should make it clear that the writings of al-Ghazali, and Amin after him, shared elements with a premodern Christian tradition that viewed sincerity, attended by truthfulness, as a preeminent virtue. It is to Augustine that we may trace the emergence of sincerity as a moral virtue, as the philosopher Suzanne Stern-Gillet forcefully argues (Stern-Gillet 2007, 226–27). As she remarks, contra Lionel Trilling, sincerity is *not* a late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century invention, nor is autobiography for that matter. Rather, the emergence of sincerity as a moral virtue may be traced to the late Antique age and to Augustine's *Confessions* in particular.[29] Indeed, both the Augustinian and Ghazalian traditions shared a belief in the purity of intention as a necessity for righteousness as well as an illuminationist theology embodied in the light of inner truth. If, for Augustine, "in knowing God, the soul may know itself," (Stern-Gillet 2007, 243), then for Ibn ʿArabi "in knowing oneself, the soul may know God" (*man ʿarafa nafsahu, ʿarafa rabbu*). However, as noted, within Ghazalian ethics, embodied ritual practices (*ʿibadat*) were essential to faith, and the alignment of the individual's inner and outer orientation toward the divine was a critical component of piety.

CONCLUSION

ʿUthman Amin's philosophical elaboration of inwardness (*juwwaniyya*) draws our attention to an ethical coordinate of the self that could be discussed and debated across religious and philosophical traditions, from Augustine to al-Ghazali. Amin combines the Christological emphasis on inwardness as a revolution in the direction (*qibla*) and axis (*mihwar*) of religious sensibilities with the normative ethics of al-Ghazali, which calls upon the subject to grapple with self-becoming as a *jihad* that requires embodied practices. Seeking to restore metaphysics

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29   Stern-Gillet is careful to demonstrate that sincerity postdates classical virtue theories as found in Plato and Aristotle and is almost entirely absent from their catalog of virtues (Stern-Gillet 2007, 230–32).

to its proper place within philosophy, one might argue that Amin's goal was not to elevate interiority at the expense of the exoteric, nor was his target Muslim legalists; his deep appreciation for ʿAbduh alone should dispel this notion. His critique was directed, rather, at contemporary philosophical skeptics, materialists, positivists, and empiricists (belonging to what he termed the destructive *madhhabs*), alongside those who arrogated unto themselves the control of humanity and nature in the name of a science without spirit (Amin 1964, 26, 132–33, 136, 139–140, 206–07; *Q* 22:46).

For Amin, the initial elaboration of inwardness could be traced back to the historical figure of Christ, and even farther back to Greek conceptions of philosophical inquiry. As Amin's student, Hasan Hanafi phrases it "God is in the self, the *Gnothi seauton* of Socrates" and the *in te ipsum redi, in interiore* "*homine habitat veritas* of Augustine" (Hanafi 2002, 319). Inwardness combined this emphasis upon theories of knowledge as a noetic happening with the figure of Christ as the first to have turned away from the world of appearances and looked toward the inner essence of things. Scholasticism provided a further bridge between the Islamic tradition and early Greek philosophy. It was Augustine, in particular, who embodied a crucial link between inwardness, a noetic conception of knowledge, and the process of ethical self-correction, foundational to both the Christian and Muslim traditions. The conceptualization of ethical self-correction reached its pinnacle, however, in the thought of al-Ghazali, for whom ʿ*ibadat* or embodied practices were foundational to the *jihad al-nafs*.

This confluence of religious traditions should not surprise us. As Asad remarks, thinking about religious traditions "as autonomous needs to be reconceived as traditions simultaneously occupying a single, complex, intellectual, and social field in the lands surrounding the Eastern Mediterranean, in which each responded to the others, disagreeing or agreeing and reformulating what became distinctive, yet partly linked (if often mutually antagonistic) traditions" (Asad 2018, 67). In particular, the significance of living according to reason through contemplative practices of wisdom as elaborated by Greek philosophy traversed early Christianity and medieval Islam alike (Asad 2018, 68–69).

Amin, I argued, was engaged in an *experimentum mentis*—one in which inwardness provided an angle of lucidity from which *longue durée* epistemic resonances might be found between Patristic and Islamic philosophy; between Augustine and al-Ghazali; and between strands of Christian and Muslim Neo-Platonism, scholasticism, and mysticism. At the same time, Amin's philosophy of inwardness was distinctive in its reliance upon Imam al-Ghazali's normative ethics, which calls upon the subject to grapple with self-becoming as a *jihad* that requires purity of intention (*niyya*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and truthfulness (*sidq*) as cardinal virtues to be embodied. Such a view of inwardness stands in stark opposition to modern secular notions of the self in which intention and sincerity are viewed merely as inner subjective phenomena.

The philosophical episode recounted here presents us with an ethical thematization of religious difference, that is, the ways in which the similarity and the distinctiveness of Islamic concepts, practices, and sensibilities emerge in the encounter with the religious other. Such thematizations often took place through the materiality of intellectual exchange, through relations of mentoring and in institutions of religious hospitality in twentieth-century Egypt. It was inwardness—a sensibility, embodied practice, and virtue—that powerfully connected distinct discursive traditions. Inwardness, as I hope to have demonstrated, was far from the solipsistic enterprise that some contemporary philosophers assume it to have been in the modern period. Rather, inwardness signaled the individual's movement on a path toward the divine, often through illuminative embodied practices, and this is where religious traditions met and at times converged.

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