

## **In Memoriam**

### **Charles J. Adams**

**1924-2011**

PROFESSOR CHARLES J. ADAMS PASSED AWAY ON March 23, 2011 in Mesa, Arizona, where he had been living for several years in a retirement home with his wife Joanna, who died in 2005. In his final years, he suffered from Parkinson's disease which affected his body but not his sharp mind and clear thinking. He will be sorely missed by his many friends, his colleagues in Islamic and Middle East studies, and his numerous former students all over the world.

Charles Adams was born in Houston, Texas on April 24, 1924. After graduating from high school in 1941, he entered Baylor University in Waco, Texas but his undergraduate studies were interrupted by World War II when he served from 1942 to 1945 in the U.S. Air Force as an airborne radio operator and mechanic. After resuming his university studies at Baylor, he obtained his B.A. in 1947. He then enrolled as a graduate student in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, where he studied History of Religions with Joachim Wach, wrote a doctoral dissertation on "Nathan Söderblom as an Historian of Religions," and was awarded his Ph.D. degree in 1955. During his years of graduate studies, he taught at Princeton, served briefly with a photo reconnaissance squadron in the Korean War, and won a Ford Foundation scholarship with a research residency in Pakistan. Meanwhile he had begun since 1952 his long association with McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies, just founded then by Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000) who was its director. Charles Adams was first a non-degree

graduate student at the Institute of Islamic Studies then an instructor, and in 1960 he was appointed assistant professor—to be later promoted to associate and full professor.

In 1964, when Professor Cantwell Smith moved on to be director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard's Divinity School, Charles Adams was appointed director of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill and remained in this position until 1980. As such, he continued Professor Cantwell Smith's vision of fostering conditions at the Institute to preserve an environment where Islam would be rigorously studied as a living religion in the world along with its history and civilization, and would be respectfully appreciated through existential interaction of faculty and students of various faiths, Muslims and others, constantly seeking deeper understanding. Under his directorship, the Institute continued to attract well-known scholars as teachers, researchers, and visiting professors, and graduate students from North America, the Muslim world, and elsewhere for M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. And with his efforts, it continued to attract financial support from foundations and governments for scholarships, professorships, and library acquisitions, and it achieved international repute.

During his career at McGill until his retirement in 1988, Professor Charles Adams taught only one course, an introductory course on Islam, year after year. Although not a required course, students of Islamic Studies took it because it was a comprehensive introduction to Islam, its scriptures, theology, philosophy, mysticism, law, institutions, and modern developments; it was continuously updated with the latest bibliographies, and students were always made aware of areas needing further research open to their own endeavors in theses and dissertations, and so he never delegated the course to teaching assistants. His contribution on Islam in *A Reader's Guide to the Great Religions* (New York, 1965; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1977) which he edited demonstrates his command of bibliographic materials and his immense knowledge of the subject, as well as his Chicago background training in *Religionswissenschaft*.

In 1966 he was one of the fifty-one founders of the Middle East Studies Association of North America and was elected to its 1967 Board of Directors; he later wrote "The State of the Art: Islam" for its *Bulletin of Middle East Studies* (1970, 4:9-23; 1971, 5:1-15), and "Islamic Religious Tradition" for *The Study of the Middle East and Scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, edited by Leonard Binder (New York, 1976).

He edited *Iranian Civilization and Culture: Essays in Honor of the 2,500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of the Persian Empire* (Montréal, 1972) in the

context of the visit to the Institute in Montréal of the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and the establishment of the Teheran Branch of the Institute of Islamic Studies. The Teheran Branch provided the Institute in Montreal periodically with Iranian visiting professors and with contact for its students doing research in Iran; furthermore, Charles Adams supported its scholarly series named *Danesh-i Irani*, of which several volumes appeared to date. This branch in Teheran is the only Western institution that the 1979 Iranian Revolution did not close.

He also started a scholarly series in Montréal, the McGill Islamic Studies and, as its editor, published in it Toshihiko Izutsu's *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montréal, 1966) and, as editor with Donald P. Little, Yohanan Friedmann's *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi* (Montréal, 1971).

Charles Adams enriched Islamic studies with other contributions that are too many to enumerate. Most were articles in encyclopedias, such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (for which he was a consulting editor for many years), *World Book Encyclopedia*, *Encyclopedia Americana*, *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, and *Encyclopedia of Religion* (of which he was an editor). Many other contributions were chapters in important books, such as his "The Ideology of Mawlana Mawdudi," in Donald E. Smith, ed., *South Asian Politics and Religion* (Princeton, 1966); "The History of Religions and the Study of Islam," in Joseph Kitagawa, ed., *History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding* (Chicago, 1967); "Tradition and Legitimization of Social Change," in Jessie G. Lutz and Salah el-Shakhs, eds., *Tradition and Modernity* (Washington, 1982); "The Hermeneutics of Henry Corbin," in Richard C. Martin, ed., *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson, 1985); and "Abu al-A'la Mawdudi's *Tafhim al-Qur'an*," in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Oxford, 1988). Furthermore, he was for many years an editor of the *Religious Studies Review* in which he always made sure Islamic studies and book reviews had a prominent place.

Charles Adams will be remembered as a dedicated scholar and a successful academic administrator, but also as a real gentleman with deep passion for the people of the Muslim world and genuine appreciation for their culture and arts, not least their carpets of which he had a unique collection. ✧

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