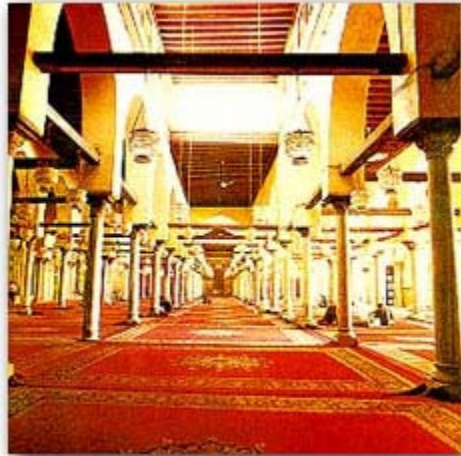# The Grand Imams of Al-Azhar *Shuyukhul Azhar*

Al-Azhar Mosque

Al-Azhar is the world's oldest university, older than Cambridge or Oxford. Situated at the heart of Cairo, Egypt's capital, Al-Azhar has been the greatest learning centre for Muslims since it was first built by the Fatimid dynasty in the 10th century AD.

The Fatimids were of Shiah belief. They erected Al-Azhar as an institution to propagate the teachings of the Isma'iliya madhhab. When the Ayyubids took over Egypt, they turned Al-Azhar into a school that taught the Sunni understanding of Islam.

Rich in tradition and knowledge, Al-Azhar had produced brilliant ulama throughout history. Examples of Imam Suyuti, Imam Ibn Hajar 'Asqalani and Imam Ibn Hajar Al-Haitami bejeweled its glorious past. Contemporary ulama produced by this university include Shaykh Ghazali and Shaykh Sha`rawi. With thousands of others, these giants of Islamic knowledge became the symbol of Al-Azhar supreme position among Muslims, something unrivalled thus far.

Today, Al-Azhar is not just a university, but an institution that vanguard the teachings of Sunni Islam, and an umbrella body to which thousands of ulama affiliate themselves with. The Head of Al-Azhar, called the Grand Imam (Imamul Akbar Shaykhul Azhar), was previously appointed by a committee of Azharian top scholars (shuyukh). But now it is under the appointment from the Egyptian President from the advice of the committee. Recently however, the Egyptian government is getting inclined to leave the matter of appointment purely in the hands of the Azharian ulama.

## The Shuyukh of Al-Azhar (The Grand Imams)

1. [???? - 1690] Shaykh Muhammad al-Kharashi

2. [1690 - 1694] Shaykh Ibrahim al-Baramawi

3. [1694 - 1708] Shaykh Muhammad al-Nasharti

4. [1708 - 1711] Shaykh Abd al-Baqi al-Qillini

5. [1711 - 1720] Shaykh Muhammad Shannan

6. [1720 - 1724] Shaykh Ibrahim al-Fayyumi

7. [1724 - 1757] Shaykh Abd-Allah al-Shabrawi

8. [1757 - 1767] Shaykh Muhammad al-Hifni

9. [1767 - 1768] Shaykh Abd al-Ra'uf al-Sijjini

10. [1768 - 1776] Shaykh Ahmad al-Damanhuri

11. [1778 - 1793] Shaykh Ahmad al-Arousi

30. [1909 - 1909] Shaykh Hassouna al-Nawawi
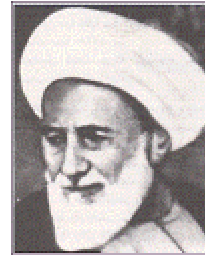
31. [1909 - 1916] Shaykh Selim al-Bishri
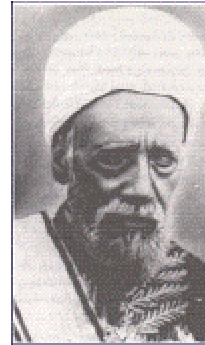
32. [1916 - 1927] Shaykh Muhammad Abu al-Fadl al-Gizawi

12. [1793 - 1812] Shaykh Abd-Allah al-Sharqawi

13. [1812 - 1818] Shaykh Muhammad al-Shanawani

14. [1818 - 1829] Shaykh Muhammad al-Arousi

15. [1829 - 1830] Shaykh Ahmad al-Damhugi

16. [1830 - 1834] Shaykh Hassan al-Attar

17. [1834 - 1838] Shaykh Hassan al-Quwaisni

18. [1838 - 1847] Shaykh Ahmad Abd al-Jawwad

19. [1847 - 1860] Shaykh Ibrahim al-Bayguri

20. [1864 - 1870] Shaykh Mustafa al-Arousi

21. [1870 - 1882] Shaykh Muhammad al-Abbasi

22. [1882 - 1882] Shaykh Muhammad al-Inbabi

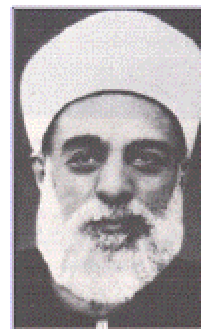23. [1882 - 1886] Shaykh Muhammad al-Abbasi

24. [1886 - 1895] Shaykh Muhammad al-Inbabi

25. [1896 - 1900] Shaykh Hassouna al-Nawawi

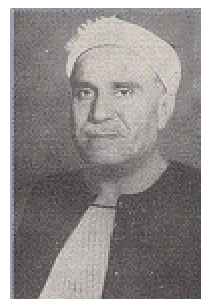26. [1900 - 1900] Shaykh Abd al-Rahman al-Nawawi

27. [1900 - 1904] Shaykh Selim al-Bishri

33. [1928 - 1929] Shaykh Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi

34. [1929 - 1935] Shaykh Muhammad al-Ahmadi al-Zawahri

35. [1935 - 1945] Shaykh Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi

36. [1945 - 1947] Shaykh Mustafa Abd al-Raziq

37. [1948 - 1950] Shaykh Muhammad Ma'moon al-Shinnawi

28. [1904 - 1905] Shaykh Ali al-Biblawi

29. [1905 - 1909] Shaykh Abd al-Rahman
al-Shirbini
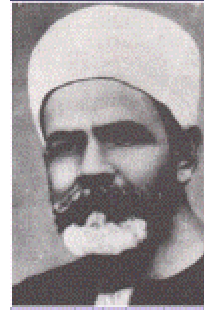
38. [1950 - 1951] Shaykh Abd al-Majid
Selim
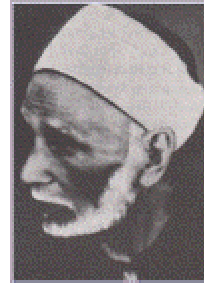
39. [1951 - 1952] Shaykh Ibrahim
Hamrush

40. [1952 - 1952] Shaykh Abd al-Majid
Selim

41. [1952 - 1954] Shaykh Muhammad al-
Khidr Husayn

42. [1954 - 1958] Shaykh Abd al-Rahman Taj

43. [1958 - 1963] Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut

44. [1963 - 1969] Shaykh Hassan Ma'moon

45. [1969 - 1973] Shaykh Muhammad Muhammad al-Fahham

46. [1973 - 1978] Shaykh Abd al-Halim Mahmud

47. [1979 - 1982] Shaykh Muhammad Abd al-Rahman Bisar

48. [1982 - 1996] Shaykh Jadul-Haqq Ali Jadul-Haqq

49. [1996 - Currently] Shaykh Muhammad Sayid Tantawi

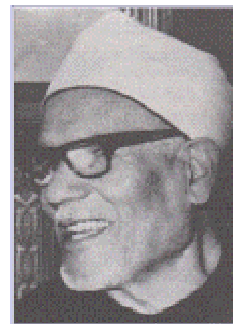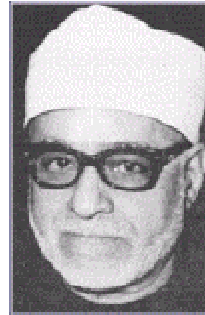**Shaykh Muhammad al-Kharashi**

The first shaykh to become the grand-imam of al-Azhar. Before his appointment, Al-Azhar never had an organizational supreme at its top. The organization of the institution was left to the Sultans and the princes. With the increase in the number of students attending the institution, it was inevitable to have a superior at the top level of the institution to organize its activities.

Shaykh al-Kharashi was born in the village of Abu-Khirash (Buhayra Province) in 1601 [1010 H]. He studied in al-Azhar the knowledges of Arabic language, Qur'anic interpretation (tafsir), prophetic traditions (hadith) , Islamic jursprudence (fiqh) following the Malikite school and logic (mantiq).

One of his well-known students was Shaykh Ibrahim al-Fayumi who later became al-Azhar's grand-imam. Shaykh al-Kharashi passed away in 1690 [1101 H] leaving a multitude of publications which include:

- *al-Sharh al-Kabir li-Mukhtasar Khalil* (jurisprudence)

- *al-Fara`id al-Saniya fi Hall Alfazh al-Sunusiya (theology)*

- *Muntaha al-Raghba fi Sharh al-Nukhba*

Shaykh Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn(1876 - 1958)

Shaykh Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn is the sole Grand Imam of a non-Egyptian origin to assume the Grand Imamate of al-Azhar. He was born in Nfta, Tunisia to a family that fled from Algeria in the face of the French invasion. Shaykh al-Khidr's family was known for its devotion to religious knowledge. His uncle to his mother was Shaykh Muhammad al-Makki bin `Azzouz, who was a reverred scholar both in Tunisia and in Turkey. In southern Tunisian town of Nafta, Shaykh al-Khidr memorized the holy al-Qur'an and started his basic education.

In 1888 Shaykh al-Khidr moved with his family to Tunis (Tunisia's capital). Two years later he joined Jami' al-Zaytuna (The equivalent for al-Azhar in Tunisia). In al-Zaytuna, Shaykh al-Khidr excelled in his studies, especially in Arabic literature. He was offered a job in Tunisia's French controlled government when he was still an undergraduate, but Shaykh al-Khidr declined the offer. In al-Zaytuna, Shaykh al-Khidr had a strong anti-colonial sentiment.

In 1903, Shaykh al-Khidr graduated from al-Zaytuna. In the same year he founded a bi-monthly magazine known as "al-Sa'ada al-`Uzma" (The Greater Happiness). Although, the magazine attracted many of the famous Tunisian writers of the time, it showed the great literative talent of Shaykh al-Khidr.

In 1905, Shaykh al-Khidr became the grand judge of the Tunisian town of Binzert. In 1906, he gave a lecture about liberty in Islam. Its main theme challenged the colonial authorities in Tunisia. Soon his growing anti-colonial sentiment led to his resignation from his judiciary position. In 1909, Shaykh al-Khidr became a faculty member of al-Zaytuna.

In 1911, when Italy declared war on Libya, Shaykh al-Khidr flared his magazine "al-Sa'ada al-`Uzma" with anti-colonialism articles and called upon Tunisians to volunteer in the war aside their Libyan brethern. Shaykh al-Khidr's articles put him at odds with the French colonials in Tunisia. He was accused by the French ruling authority by instigating the Tunisian masses against the west. He eluded the trial by leaving Tunisia briefly to Istanbul. Upon his return, he found that Tunisia was totally controlled by its French rulers and he could not address the masses through his magazine. Finally he decided to leave Tunisia and immigrate to Syria.

On his way to Syria, Shaykh al-Khidr stopped in Egypt and met with a number of Islamic scholars who were the pioneers of the leading Muslim scholars of the time like Shaykhs, *Muhammad Rasheed Rida* , *Ahmad Taymur Pasha* and *Muhib al-Din al-Khatib* . After his settlement in Damascus he taught Arabic language in the Sultaniya school.

In 1914, he left Damascus for Istanbul to work in the Ottoman ministry of war, and in 1915 the Ottoman wat minister, Anwar Pasha, sent him to Berlin where he instigated the Tunisian-French POWs to against the French rule in Tunisia. He then returned to Istanbul and then to his home in Damascus.

In 1916, the Turkish ruler of Syria detained him in prison for a few months, but was freed upon the orders of Anwar Pasha. In 1917 he travelled to Berlin for the second time, where he met with many of the exiled Muslim Shaykhs like *Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Jawish* and Dr. Abd al-Hamid al-Sa'id.

In 1918, the Ottoman empire was declining to its final phase. The Turks lost Syria in the First World War, and an Arab ruler was to be appointed, but the French forces which landed in Syria during the war controlled the country. Shaykh al-Khidr's previous anti-French activities put his life in danger, so he immigrated to Egypt in 1921.

In 1922, he enrolled in al-Azhar's final year, and obtained its `*Alamiya* certificate. He then became one of the scholars of al-Azhar.

In Egypt, he established an organization for helping freedom movements against French colonials in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Members of the organization included well known freedom fighter who were in exile in Egypt like al-Habib Bourquiba from Tunisia, al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi from Algeria and al-Fudayl al-Warthilani from Morocco.

In 1925, Shaykh al-Khidr became involved in one of the greatest ideological battles of the time. An Azharite Shaykh (Shaykh Ali Abd al-Raziq) issued a book giving an Islamic umbrella to secularism. Although Shaykh al-Khidr was a friend of Shaykh Abd al-Raziq's family, he wrote a reply book where he elegantly rebutted the secular implications. In the consequent year, the famous Egyptian writer Taha Husayn issued another book about pre-Islamic Arabic poetry which contained implicit attacks on Islam. Again, Shaykh al-Khidr issued another book rebutting Taha Husayn's claims.

In 1927, Shaykh al-Khidr collaborated with his Egyptian friend Ahmad Taymur Pasha in the establishment of a Muslim youth organization known as "Jam'iyat al-Shubban al-Muslimeen" (Association of Muslim Youth). Later he established another organization for spreading the righteous understanding of Islam. The later organization was known as "Jam'iyat al-Hidaya al-Islamiya" (Association of Islamic Guidance).

In 1932, Shaykh Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn obtained the Egyptian nationality.

In 1930, al-Azhar issued its monthly magazine which was known in those times by the name "Nur al-Islam" (The light of Islam), and Shaykh al-Khidr was appointed as its chairman. In 1932, the

general assembly of Arabic Language was established in Cairo. Its members included scholars from Egypt, the Arab world and some orientalists in England and France. Its first membership included Shaykh Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn. In 1950, Shaykh al-Khidr was promoted to the membership of the council of great Azharite scholars after a study that he presented in Arabic Language.

In 1952, he was appointed by the newly formed revolutionary government as the Grand Imam of al-Azhar. Although he was reluctant in the beginning to accept the appointment, the plea of three ministers persuaded him to accept. Nevertheless, when he sensed several pressures trying to direct the Azharite policy, he preferred to resign from the position in 1954 saying his famous statement: "A glass of milk and a piece of bread is enough for me and let the worldly matters go away". When he was asked about his resignation he replied: "If I cannot contribute more to the well-being of al-Azhar, then the bottom line is that it does not deteriorate in my time".

After his resignation he became dedicated to writing books , until he left this world in 1958. When Tunisia gained its independence in 1956, the Tunisian president Bourquiba persuaded him to return to his home country. The idea appealed to Shaykh al-Khidr, but his increasingly deteriorating health hampered his travel. In his funeral, Azharites accompanied by many Muslims in Egypt followed his funeral in the thousands. He was burried in the Egypt leaving no sons or wealth behind him except for a large number of publications and Islamic articles.

Shaykh Muhammad Muhammad al-Fahham (1884 - ????)

Shaykh al-Fahham, born in Alexandria, Egypt, attended his primary Azharite education in Alexandria's institute of religious studies. He obtained the high degree of al-Azhar (al-`Alimiya) in 1922. He was so fond of studying mathematics that he worked as a math teacher in addition to his Azharite career. In 1935 he was appointed as a teacher of logic in the Faculty of Shari'a. Shaykh al-Fahham travelled to France to prepare for his PhD degree. He enrolled in the graduate program of Universite de Sorbonne. During his stay he and his family had to endure the hardship of living in occupied France during World War II. Shaykh al-Fahham's thesis was in linguistics.

Shaykh al-Fahham was a famous Islamic traveller. Being fluent in English and French, he visited many Islamic countries and established a relationship with their scholars. These countries included Nigeria, Pakistan, Mauritania, Indonesia and Iran.

He was appointed in the position of the dean of the Faculty of Arabic Language in 1959. In 1969, he became the grand Imam of al-Azhar. Due to his deteriorating health condition he retired from the position of al-Azhar's grand Imam in 1973.

Shaykh al-Fahham's publications include:

- *al-Muslimoon wa istirdad Bayt al-Maqdis.*

Shaykh Abdul Halim Mahmud (1910 - 1978)

Shaykh Abdul Halim Mahmud was born in Abu Hammad in the Sharqiyya Province, Egypt, to a devout middle classed family. His parents had their ancestry going back to the prophet's [PBUH] grandson al-Husayn [RAA]. His father was an Azharite and worked as the village's judge.

Shaykh Abd al-Halim memorized the holy Qur'an in the village's Kuttab . He finished its memorization at a very young age. He could not join the Azharite education right after memorizing al-Qur'an due to his young age.

In 1923 Shaykh Abd al-Halim travelled to Cairo with his father to enrol in the primary Azharite education. Two years later he was sent to al-Zaqaziq to continue his education in its newly opened Azharite primary institute.

There were several directions that Shaykh Abd al-Halim could have taken at this young age. He was eligible for studying in several newly opened schools for graduating teachers. Those schools were promising in his time, since its graduates were highly paid. Shaykh Abd al-Halim's father interfered and insisted that the young Shaykh continued his Azharite education. Shaykh Abd al-Halim compromised by studying in three curriculums simultaneously.

Shaykh Abd al-Halim's perseverance paid off later. He was too educated for his normal years at al-Zaqaziq's institute, so he studied independently for the secondary exam, which he passed and became eligible for the higher Azharite education. In this jump Shaykh Abd al-Halim covered the curriculum of three years in one.

Shaykh Abd al-Halim started his higher Azharite education in 1928. At that time Azharite education was not divided on Faculties. Shaykh Abd al-Halim Mahmud named some Shaykhs as his revered teachers during his Azharite education. These include Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut , Shaykh Hamid Meheisen , Shaykh al-Zankaloni , Shaykh Muhammad Abd-Allah Daraz , Shaykh Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi and Shaykh Mustafa Abd al-Raziq.

There were some public associations for Islamic preaching and youth activities that were present when Shaykh Abd al-Halim was a student. Shaykh Abd al-Halim participated in the activities of two of these associations. These were: the association of Muslim youth (Jam'iyat al-Shubban al-Muslimeen) and the association of Islamic guidance (Jam'iyat al-Hidaya al-Islamiya) whose president was Shaykh Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn. .

In 1932, Shaykh Abd al-Halim graduated from al-Azhar. After his graduation he travelled to France to continue his education accompanied by his wife. He enrolled in the Universite de Sorbonne. In Paris, Shaykh Abd al-Halim stood by his Islamic values and behavior. He graduated in 1937 and in 1938 al-Azhar put him in its delegation to France to prepare for the PhD degree. Shaykh Abd al-Halim's biggest problem in France was the bias against Islam that was shown by many orientalists.

Shaykh Abd al-Halim's finished his thesis in the area of Sufism and the life of al-Harith ibn-Asad al-Muhasibi in 1940. His supervisor Masignon the orientalist left him alone in the final phase of his PhD to fight the Germans. With the outbreak of the second world war Shaykh Abd al-Halim had to go back to Egypt by the way of Cape of Good Hope.

Shaykh Abd al-Halim started his professional career as a professor in the Faculty of Arabic language in al-Azhar. He was then transferred to the Faculty of Religion's Fundamentals in 1951. He became the faculty's dean in 1964.

In 1969, he was appointed as the secertary general of the Assembly of Islamic Research (Majma' al-Buhuth al-Islamiya) . In 1970, he was appointed as al-Azhar's vice-Imam. In 1971 he became the minister of Waqf and was then appointed as al-Azhar's grand Imam in 1973.

In the early 1960s an anti Azharite wave swept the Egyptian media. This wave was topped by a comment of a high Egyptian official who slandered Azharites. In response, Shaykh Abd al-Halim stopped wearing the European costume and replaced it by the Azharite one. He even instructed

his fellow Azharites to respond in the same manner. In those days socialist journalists attacked a multitude of Azharites in the newspapers. Shaykh Abd al-Halim was no exception.

In addition to being one of the great Islamic scholars of the modern age, Shaykh Abd al-Halim was an activist whose objective was to retain al-Azhar's revered position and independence. In 1974, a law was passed that degraded the position of Azharites. In response Shaykh Abd al-Halim resigned from the grand Imam position. Due to the Shaykh's overwhelming popularity within the Azharite and Islamic circles, the law was not passed and Shaykh Abd al-Halim was persuaded to stay in his position.

Shaykh Abd al-Halim played a big hand in reshaping the 1961 Azhar-law that previously ripped the grand Imam position of much of his authority and undermined al-Azhar's independence. He succeeded in reshaping the law and his act was met by overjoy by his fellow Azharites.

In 1975, the Egyptian security forces cracked on an extermist group known by the name of al-Takfir wa al-Hijra after the assassination of the minister of al-Waqf, Shaykh al-Dhahabi. During their trial Shaykh Abd al-Halim was instructed by the judges to give al-Azhar's opinion on the group and he was hinted to give a fatwa that the group members apostasized and left Islam with their extreme beliefs. Although in difference with the group's beliefs, he refused to have orders dictated to him unless he reviewed their thoughts. This stand caused him and al-Azhar as a whole to bear the wrath of media attacks.

A group of devout Egypt-Air workers demanded not to do any work which involved the use of wine. The officials refused and the workers had no one to complain to except Shaykh Abd al-Halim who sent to their officials narrating the prophet's [PBUH] tradition "There is no obedience for a created person when it involves the disobedience of the creator (*La t`ata li makhluqin fi ma'siyatil khaliq*)".

In the mid seventies, some Egyptian officials wanted to pass a divorce law that contradicted Islamic Shari'a. Shaykh Abd al-Halim stood firm against it and the law was never debated until after his death.

In the early seventies, the communist way of thought was popular in some elite and students circles. Shaykh Abd al-Halim issued a long list of pamphlets and books that warned the Muslim community against communism.

Shaykh Abd al-Halim pioneered in trying to unite the Muslim preachers into one code of conduct. In an unprecedented incident he made a committee for Islamic Da'wa which constituted Azharites, Islamic groups and Sufi orders. He even linked al-Azhar with Da'wa organizations outside Egypt.

During the Shaykhdom of Shaykh Abd al-Halim a great number of Azharite institutes were established upon his personal orders.

Shaykh Abd al-Halim was the first Azharite Shaykh to publicly call for the application of Islamic Shari'a. When he was confronted with officials saying that time is needed to detail its laws, he established several committees of Azharite scholars for the detailing process, which was supervised by him even when he was taken to hospitals for his deteriorating health.

In 1978, when Shaykh Abd al-Halim Mahmud passed away, his death was so saddening to his fellow Azharites that the attendance for his funeral service was unprecedented.

Shaykh Abd al-Halim was a talented author. His published over 60 books during his active career. He was known to have a calm, tender and sober personality. In his books one can trace the Sufi tendencies of Shaykh Abd al-Halim. His form of Sufism was based on Qur'an and the prophet's traditions in a manner like the person whom he biographed in his PhD, al-Harith al-Muhasibi.

Shaykh Abd Abd al-Halim's publications included:

- *Muhammad Rasul Allah.*

- *al-Islam wa al-Shuyu'iya.*

- *Jihaduna al-Muqaddas.*

Shaykh Jadul-Haqq (1917 - 1996)

Shaykh Jadul-Haqq was born in the village of Batra (Daqahliyya Province) in 1917. He studied Qur'an and memorized it at a young age and had his early Azharite learning in the Ahmadi institute in Tanta.

He worked as a judge in the Shari'a courts, the ministry of justice and was appointed as the Grand Mufti of Egypt in 1978. In 1982 he became the 42nd Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar.

Shaykh Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi (1928 -)

Shaykh Muhammad Tantawi, who was born in the village of Saleem Sharqiyyah in Egypt on Oct 28, 1928, showed his brillance when he was able to recite the whole al-Quran while still in elementary school in his village. He then went to the Al-Iskandariah religious institute for his secondary education in 1944 before enrolling in the Usuluddin Faculty of Al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1958.

He obtained his first degree with honours, his Masters in Education in 1959 and his Ph.D in 1966. His doctoral thesis was on the Jews in the al-Quran and al-Sunnah. Dr. Muhammad had served in the Waqaf Ministry of Egypt till 1964 before being appointed a lecturer of his alma mater.

He was seconded to University Islam of Libya from 1972 to 1976, before being made Dean of his Usuluddin Faculty of Al-Azhar University (Asyut campus), Head of the Intepretation and Quranic Knowledge Department at the University of Islam in Madinah, Saudi Arabia (1980-1984) and a visiting lecturer of the Basrah University of Iraq. In 1985, Dr. Muhammad was appointed Dean of the Islamic Studies and Arab Language Faculty of al-Azhar University. On Oct 28, 1986 he was made the Mufti of the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt and on March 17, 1996, he became the Grand Shaykh of his alma mater, the oldest university in the world.

Shaykh Tantawi, who was a Mufti of the Egyptian government for about 10 years from 1986, has long been well-known for his courage in airing his frank views on various issues and problems confronting the Muslim world.

Issue of apostasy

Shaykh Tantawi's ruling on the subject of a Muslim apostasizing has certainly shed new light on this subject, while making the non-Muslims realise that Islam is a religion of moderation.

To Shaykh Tantawi, a Muslim who renounced his faith or turned apostate should be left alone as long as he does not pose a threat or belittle Islam. If the Muslims were forced to take action against the apostate, he said it should NOT be because he or she had given up the faith but because he or she had turned out to be an enemy or a threat to Islam.

Shaykh Tantawi, in his views, shows clearly how simple and moderate Islam is, a religion that is tolerant and not coercive on anybody. Shaykh Tantawi repeatedly stresses the need for Muslims to acquire traditional Islamic knowledge as well as the modern ones so that they could add to the strength of the Muslim community to defend the religion.

Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims

Shaykh Tantawi defendes Islam as a religion of tolerance and states that Muslims are not enemies of non-Muslims so long as they do not threaten Islam or become its enemy.

The Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar said in the eyes of Islam, non-Muslims could be classified into three groups. The first are those who do not live in the same country as the Muslims and who are not enemies of Islam. Muslims are allowed to undertake exchanges of interests with these non-Muslims so long as these ties do not tarnish the image of the faith.

The second group also do not live in the same country as the Muslims but are opposed to Islam, actively condemning or belittling Muslims or the religion. In this case, the Muslims are allowed to fight against them but only to the extent of making them aware that they should not become enemies of Islam and Muslims.

The third group, which best describes nations like Malaysia, Egypt, Pakistand and many others where Muslims and non-Muslims live together in cooperation and on friendly terms: i.e. non-Muslims who live in the same country as the Muslims and are not enemies of the faith. In this case, their rights and responsibilities are the same as the Muslims so long as they do not become enemies of Islam. In the case of the third group, Shaykh al-Azhar reminds the Muslim community to continue with their missionary work among the non-Muslims to make them realise that Islam is the best faith to follow, but they must never be pressured or compelled to embrace Islam.

Islam - Religion of this world and the next

Islam, Shaykh Tantawi says, not only asks its followers to concentrate on the hereafter but also to make acquire and use of all the rewards and riches of this world, in order to achieve happiness in the hereafter.

On their quest for knowledge, he said Islam demands its followers to master all knowledge of the world and the hereafter, not least the technology of modern weapons to strengthen and defend the community and faith. Mastery over modern weaponry, he said, was important to prepare for any eventuality or prejudices of the others, although Islam is a religion of peace that upholds love and good understanding.

[see ASFA chairman's visit with Shaykh al-Azhar Tantawi and Shaykh Farid Wasel, Mufti of Egypt in 1998]

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