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## *George F. Hourani*

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### *A. A Biographical Sketch*

George Fadlo Hourani was born in Didsbury, a suburb of Manchester, England, on June 3, 1913. Both his parents were Lebanese, from the Marjeyoun area in Southern Lebanon, who emigrated to England and became British subjects. George's father, Fadlo, came from a family that had converted from Greek Orthodoxy to Presbyterianism. He studied at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut (later to become the American University of Beirut), earning his B.A. degree in 1891. He then emigrated to Manchester, where he worked for the rest of his life as an exporting merchant of cotton piece goods. George's mother, Sumaya, was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Joachim Racy.

There were six children in the family, three girls, followed by three boys. George was the oldest of the boys. The second was Albert, who was to have a distinguished career at Oxford University as a scholar of the modern Middle East. Cecil, the youngest, was for several years economic adviser to President Bourguiba of Tunisia and later a business consultant for British and American contractors in Saudi Arabia.

After attending elementary school in Didsbury where he began learning Latin, French, and later, Greek, George Hourani won a scholarship to Mill Hill School in a suburb of London. He spent five years there, concentrating on Greek and Latin languages and literature, but also developing, through the influence of some of his teachers, a keen interest in international affairs, which he never lost.

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From Mill Hill School, he won a scholarship in classics at Balliol College, Oxford.

At Balliol he prepared for the examinations of the honours B.A. in Literae Humaniores. The content of the first part consisted of extensive texts of Classical Greek and Latin literature, with some Aristotelian logic. The second and larger part, "Greats," embraced Greek and Roman history and Greek and modern philosophy. He had tutorials with such scholars as Cyril Baily, Horace Mynors, D.J. Allen, and A.D. Lindsay, and lectures from Lindsay, R.C. Collingwood, H.H. Price, the Roman historian Hugh Last, Gilbert Murray and others. He developed a special interest in modern ethics and the ethics of Plato and Aristotle.

During his four undergraduate years at Oxford (1932–36), George Hourani was active in a small Liberal Club, and during the vacations did some travelling. In the summer of 1933 he visited Germany, where he witnessed an enthusiasm for the new Nazi regime that jarred his liberal sensibilities and innate rationality. A more pleasant trip was taken in the summer of 1934 to the Near East where he visited Lebanon, staying with relatives, and making short trips to Palestine and Egypt. On his return to Oxford he wrote the article, "Syria under the French Mandate," published in November, 1935 in the *Contemporary Review*. The article was critical of French rule.

His trip to the Near East was a factor in his decision after graduation (and after considering alternative possible careers) to become a graduate student in the Department of Oriental Studies at Princeton University. He was also encouraged to do this by Professor Philip Hitti. Before going to Princeton, he spent the summer of 1936 reading Near Eastern history and teaching himself Arabic. This was followed by seven months in Beirut, where he audited courses at the American University of Beirut and learned Arabic from relatives with whom he lived and from private tutors. After another summer in England (1937) he proceeded to Princeton. There, by extremely hard work, he was able to take and pass the doctoral preliminary exams in October, 1937, covering Arabic, elementary Hebrew, ancient and medieval Near Eastern history, and linguistic science. He chose for a dissertation topic, "Arab navigation in the Indian ocean in the 9th and 10th centuries A.D." It was completed in time and accepted for the doctoral degree at the end of May, 1939. During the second year he held a graduate fellowship from Princeton University.

George Hourani was then offered a position as Lecturer in Classics and Philosophy at the Government Arab College in Jerusalem, Pal-

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estine. Before taking on his duties in Jerusalem, he spent much of the summer of 1939 on holiday in Lebanon. There in the resort of Brummana, he met his future wife, the vivacious and talented Celeste Habib, who was there on holiday with her family from Cairo. She is the daughter of a prominent Egyptian lawyer, Tewfik Bey Habib. The family belonged to the small community of Catholic Copts, who through French Catholic schools were assimilated to French culture and, at home, spoke more French than Arabic. George and Celeste were married in June, 1940, in Heliopolis, Egypt.

His teaching career at the Arab College started in September, 1939. Mr. Jerome Farrell, the Director of Education during the British mandate in Palestine and an enthusiastic classical scholar, set up for George Hourani a program of classical education for Arab young men at the Government Arab College. This was the highest educational institution for the Arabs of Palestine, at the level of a two-year American liberal arts college. Its principal was Mr. Ahmad S. Khalidi, a member of one of the oldest Arab families of Jerusalem. The students were all on scholarships, highly motivated and competitive. George Hourani taught Latin, Greek and Roman history, logic and the history of philosophy. Many of his students became distinguished scholars and writers. Among them were Ihsan Abbas, Ahmad Abu Hakima, Walid Arafat, Mahmud al-Ghul, Michel Mazzawi, Muhammad Najm, Irfan Shahid, and Muhammad Zayid. Despite the turmoil in Palestine which ended in the partition of the country in 1948, this was a period of literary and artistic creativity among the Palestinian Arabs.

As the British mandate came to an end in April, 1948, the Government Arab College closed and the Houranis, who were British subjects, left Palestine for England. George decided to undertake a year of philosophical writing with the purpose of completing a book. The first draft, later to be published under the title *Ethical Value*, was written under the B. Litt. graduate program at Oxford in 1948-49 with the tutorial guidance of Mr. J.P. Mabbott. The year 1949-50 was largely devoted to a search for permanent employment. George Hourani assisted in the survey of the national British elections of 1950 in Oxford and did some tutoring in political philosophy. In April, 1950, he obtained an invitation from Professor George G. Cameron at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, to teach intensive Arabic in the special Near Eastern program organized in the summer school of that year. He accepted and as a result of his summer's work, he was offered an assistant professorship in the newly formed

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Department of Near Eastern Studies at that University. With this appointment, a new phase in his academic career began.

George Hourani taught at the University of Michigan from 1950 until 1967, advancing from assistant to full professor. Throughout these seventeen years, he and his colleagues laboured to build up the Department of Near Eastern Studies. In the first decade his main teaching was in Near Eastern history, medieval and modern, on both the undergraduate and graduate levels. For the first two years he also taught Arabic at all levels, but with the appointment of new faculty, he confined himself to advanced reading courses in historical and philosophical Arabic. In 1952 he developed a course in Islamic philosophy which for several years was unique in the country. After 1959 he concentrated entirely on medieval Islam. Finally in his last three years at Michigan when he held a joint appointment in the Departments of History and Philosophy, he taught a lecture course on medieval Christian philosophy.

George Hourani's book *Ethical Value* was published in 1956, and ethical concerns continued to underlie his researches whether historical or philosophical. It was, however, during his academic career in the United States that he came to focus more and more on Islamic theology and philosophy. Professor Hitti suggested Islamic philosophy as a possible area for his doctoral research when George Hourani was a graduate student at Princeton, but he declined to follow the suggestion largely because there would have been no one to guide and direct a thesis in this field. His interest in Arabic philosophy was awakened when he taught the history of philosophy in Jerusalem, but with the disruption of his teaching career, he could not pursue it. In the United States his philosophical interests and work in Islamics combined to direct his attention again to this field. He produced a critical and definitive edition of Ibn Rushd's *Fasl al-Maqal* (*The Decisive Treatise*, published by Brill) and the exemplary English translation with its excellent introduction and notes (published in the E.J.W. Gibbs Memorial series and UNESCO by Luzac and Co.). During the years at Michigan he also wrote a number of articles on Islamic philosophy (on Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Rushd) and directed doctoral theses on Islamic thought. At the same time he began his pioneer researches on the ethical thought of 'Abd al-Jabbar, which were published mainly in the seventies.

During this Michigan period the Houranis travelled extensively in the Middle East, visiting most of the Arab countries from Morocco to Kuwait, as well as Spain, Italy, Greece and Turkey. These travels included attendance at the International Congresses of Orientalists

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in Moscow (1960) and New Delhi (1964). Perhaps the most important and memorable of all these travels were seven months spent in Cairo, from October, 1956, at the height of the Suez crisis, to April, 1957. As newly naturalized U.S. citizens, the Houranis could have been evacuated from Egypt during the Anglo-French-Israeli attack, but they stayed on, largely because of their sympathies with the Egyptians. This period reawakened George Hourani's interest in the modern Near East and he thought seriously of transferring his research to modern history. However, as civilian life and the opportunity to do research gradually replaced the crisis in Egypt, Hourani returned to the initial purpose of his visit, to work on Islamic philosophy. During this period, he gave four lectures on Ibn Rushd at the American University of Cairo.

From 1964, he was Associate Editor on the Islamic Near East for the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, a post which he held at Ann Arbor and Buffalo until his resignation in 1970. This work put him in contact with many Islamists in the United States and Canada. In the summer of 1967 he edited the printed program of the International Congress of Orientalists, which was held in Ann Arbor that year.

In January, 1967, George Hourani was invited to give a lecture at the Department of Philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo, and this led to an offer of a position in that department. Negotiations were carried on with the Chairman, Professor Rollo Handy, as well as with the President of the University, Dr. Martin Meyerson, who was hoping to build a small but strong Near Eastern program. Professor Hourani accepted their offer and moved to Buffalo in time for the fall semester, 1967.

The hopes of President Meyerson of initiating a program in Near Eastern Studies were not realized. This was a disappointment for Professor Hourani. On the other hand, he was now deeply involved in the affairs of the Department of Philosophy and took a constructive, moderating stand in the turmoil of 1969-70, which involved exhaustive and exhausting debates on the organization of the department. The next few years were a period of calm and reconciliation. In 1976, his colleagues in the Department of Philosophy first elected him as Acting Chairman and then as Chairman for three years (1976-79). With the help of able and sympathetic faculty and graduate students, he was able to carry out his administrative duties effectively.

In his teaching at Buffalo, George Hourani reverted in a substantial way to Greek philosophy, revising his courses of an earlier period

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and developing a graduate seminar on Greek ethics. This work became a relevant background to his research on Islamic philosophy. He wrote more articles on Islamic ethics. In 1971 his study, *Islamic Rationalism: the Ethics of Abd al-Jabbar*, was published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford.

In 1970, the Society for the Study of Islamic Philosophy and Science (SSIPS) was founded of which the President was Muhsin Mahdi, the Vice-President George Hourani, and the Secretary-Treasurer Parviz Morewedge. This Society organized several conferences and was responsible for a series of books, "Studies in Islamic Philosophy and Science," most of which were published by the State University of New York Press. Hourani was on the editorial board of the SUNY Press from 1972 to 1977, and was thus able to evaluate the manuscripts for this series of the Press. His interests on the Press Board extended to works on philosophy, the modern Middle East and other subjects.

During his career in Buffalo, George Hourani was elected President of the Middle East Association (1968). His presidential address at Austin, Texas, in November, 1968, startled the members by its bold subject, "Palestine as a question of ethics," which, nonetheless, was received with great acclaim and is long remembered. In 1978-79 he was President of the American Oriental Society. In the winter and spring quarters of 1979, he and his wife enjoyed the sunshine of Los Angeles while he taught Islamic philosophy as a visiting professor. In 1980 he was promoted to the rank of Distinguished Professor of Islamic Thought and Civilization.

The one serious shadow over all this activity is a cardiac condition which led to a heart attack in the summer of 1971 and another in the summer of 1977. The latter required surgery. Professor Hourani has carried on with his activities in spite of this, and his academic achievements have earned him the respect of scholars in North America and abroad.

For those who know him, it is his personal qualities that leave the deepest mark. Gentle and courageous, he has striven to live the life of reason. The Houranis are noted for their generosity and caring, particularly appreciated by students a long way from home. Those of us who have had the privilege of being his students have experienced many times the real kindness and hospitality that he and his wife so graciously bestow.

George Hourani has given a significant impetus to Islamic research through his writings, his teaching, and his example. As a teacher he has always insisted on the highest standards of scholarly objectivity,

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intellectual honesty, and clarity of thought. Compassion, justice and reason temper both his work and his day-to-day associations with his fellow men and women.

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