



Imam Hummudah Abd Al-Ati

By Richard Awid

In 1938, Canada's first mosque, the Al-Rashid, was built. The first Imam (religious leader) was Najeeb Ailley. Mr. Ailley died in 1959 and the mosque was without a leader until Imam Hummadah Abd Al-Ati arrived in Edmonton from Montreal in July, 1960. While in Montreal, Imam Hummudah attended McGill University from which he received a master's degree in Sociology. Abd Al-Ati originally came from Egypt where he had received a Bachelor's degree at the world famous Al Azhar University. He came to Edmonton through the courtesy of that university and had the duty of serving Islam in Canada as well as conducting the activities of the Al-Rashid Mosque.

It wasn't long after settling in Edmonton that he began to reach out to both his own congregation as well the non-Muslim population. He was so pleased when he saw large Muslim groups appearing at the mosque and was just as pleased when he was able to receive visiting church groups and cultural clubs at the religious centre of which he was in charge. He was overjoyed when he had the opportunity to open mail that came from remote areas in Canada and overseas. He took pleasure in writing letters to the press and giving radio and television interviews. The Imam always found it interesting to address a non-Muslim audience and answer their questions about his religion. Abd Al-Ati would often stress to his audience that the mosque for him was a bridge between the civilizations of the ancient and the modern worlds and that it was the most effective medium of direct communication between the cultures of the West and the East. He also said that the mosque in Canada is without a doubt the best platform for Canadian Muslims to present the truth of their religion, to show their goodwill toward their fellow citizens, and to practice their faith in the existence of God and the brotherhood, equality and freedom of all mankind. During his stay in Edmonton, he authored an outstanding book on Islam written for western readers, entitled, "Islam in Focus". The book is well-regarded as an introduction to Islam and has been reprinted many times.

Imam Hummudah Abd Al-Ati believed that a religion advanced when explained properly to people from other religions. He left Edmonton after being offered a fellowship at Princeton, where he earned his PhD. The Imam died at only forty-five years of age while teaching at Ithaca College in New York State. Needless to say, he was sadly missed after his death, but will always be remembered as a prominent figure in Canada's Islamic history.