

Introduction

On this sacred night, it was not planned that such an unsacred person as myself speak. I have gained much from my contact with the work of Professor Louis Massignon. He was a great man and well known Islamic scholar who had written about Fatima.

I was greatly influenced by her blessed life, as well as her effect upon the history of Islam. Even after her death, she kept alive the spirit of those who seek justice and opposed oppression and discrimination in Islamic society. She is a manifestation and a symbol of the Way and essential direction of 'Islamic thought'.

As a student, I played a small role in the preparation of this great work, especially at the beginning of the research and gathering stage. The documents and information which existed had been recorded over a period of fourteen hundred years. They were written in all languages and local Islamic dialects. The historic implications in the various documents and even the local odes and folk songs were studied. I was asked to summarize this work here.

I said to myself, 'I will offer this work here today because it has yet to be published and the great man who began it, has left this world having left this work uncompleted.' People unfortunately do not know about this work. Even Europeans, who are familiar with Islam, do not know about this study. This has also affected our own scholars, who are familiar with Islam through the writings of Europeans, and , therefore, remain uninformed of this work.

I accepted this invitation and I said to myself, 'I will describe the manuscripts to my students, in particular, those who participate in my classes at the Husayniyyeh Ershad. I will give them the scientific and historic results of the deep research of this great man.'

But now I see and sense that the face of the gathering differs. It is not a group gathered for a sermon or a discourse. The women and men who are now here are all intellectuals and educated representatives of the needy of today's generation of this society. They have not come to hear me speak of Fatima in order to gain spiritual reward from this gathering tonight. They have not come to hear a dry, scientific, historic lecture as they have a newer, more urgent, more alive need which is to answer this most sen-

sitive question for those who are affected by our contemporary fate: Who am I?

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