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News and Notes

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What is our Special Message to Muslims?

IT is possible to approach this question with preconceived ideas, to view it solely from the Christian stand-point and to say, as indeed is true, that Christ crucified is our supreme message.

But there is surely, when the Muslim is in view, a previous question, for the significance of Christ's death (as, of His authority) depends on the meaning we attach to Christ Himself.

As we consider Him we find ourselves approaching our question more from the Muslim point of view.

Who was He? What significance shall we attach to Him? Clearly, other questions, however important, are but secondary to this.

The question is an old one—"Who say ye that I am?" The Jews of His time contended with Him, and among themselves, about this very matter. And yet the question is always new—Muslims continually compel us to face it. Nothing, in fact, is so familiar as their repudiation of the suggestion that Christ was, in any unique sense, Divine.

Now, the motive of some Muslim detractors of Christ is self-evident. We quote a recent utterance that is characteristic of a certain section: "Islam and Christianity are engaged in a deadly struggle for world-mastery. It is therefore in the best interest of Islam that Jesus should be brought down from his divine pedestal. In crediting him with a miraculous birth as well as a miraculous flight to heaven, the Mussalmans are only confirming the Christian contention that Jesus was divine, not human. It is, therefore, the crying call of the day to prove that Jesus was born in exactly the same way as any man is born, and that, like all the rest of mortals, he too had to drink the cup of death." (quoted from *The Light*, in *The Moslem World*, October, 1929, p. 353.)

And, conceivably, it might be debated that it is just this motive that underlies and explains the persistent attitude of Muslims through the years to the superior claims of Christ and to Christian teaching about Him; as if they were to say, 'what Muhammad cannot be, Christ shall not be.'

However that may be, unquestionably the chief reason for this attitude on the part of Muslims in general is to be found in their tenacious belief, at any price, in the *Unity* of God. It is there in the brief *Kalima*, so constantly repeated: 'There is no god but God.....' It is there in the Sura *Ikkhlas* (112), a short chapter of two verses said to be equal in value to one-third of the whole Quran and embodying the same protest in striking language: 'Say God, He is one; He is eternal; He doth not beget, and He is not begotten, and there is no one in His likeness at all.'

As Maulvi Muhammad Ali says (Preface to 'Holy Quran' p. viii f.): 'The unity of God is the one great theme of the Quranthere is absolute unity in the Divine nature.....it admits of no participation or manifoldness.....Unity is the keynote to the conception of the Divine Being in Islam... ..It denies all plurality of persons in the Godhead.....Islam refuses to acknowledge the Incarnation of the Divine Being.'

And as though the great stress laid by the Quran on this doctrine were not enough, the offence of "associating a partner" with God (*shirk*) is declared by the Quran to be the one unpardonable sin. "Verily, God will not forgive the union of other gods with Himself! But other than this will He forgive to whom He pleaseth. And he who hath united gods with God hath devised a great wickedness." (Sura *Nisa* (4), vv. 51 and 116).

It matters not that we, on our side, might strongly object to such crude language as being inapplicable to the case of Christ, the fact remains—in the mind of the Muslim we come within the category of those so upbraided.

It appears certain, therefore, that in the main these two factors—the constant assertion of the doctrine of the absolute unity of the Divine Being coupled with the dread of this sin of *shirk*—are preventing Muslims from entertaining any conception of the Divinity of Christ and any explanation of the Incarnation.

So incessant and vehement a repudiation of the very idea of an incarnation might well lead us to consider,

1. whether this belief of ours is, essentially irrational and unwarranted;
2. how, while holding it to be entirely reasonable, we may restate it in terms more intelligible, and therefore more acceptable to Muslims.

We are enabled to understand the deeply-rooted prejudice of the Muslim by studying the psychology of the Jew, for the Jews of old also strongly resented Christ's own claim to be Divine.

Subjectivism dominated Jewish thought. While the Greek sought perfection outside himself, the Jew sought it within himself and so any outward image of the Deity was forbidden. The Greek gloried in his sculptural art; the Jew found in the Psalms a finer means of self-expression. Now, just because the Jew is essentially a subjectivist he could not accept a realisation of his ideal in the objective and the external. Jesus was the fulfilment of Jewish hope and ideal, and yet precisely because He was this, the Jews could not accept Him. (see art. by Sir Leon Levison, *The Moslem World* January, 1928).

Muhammad appears to have been controlled by ideas very similar to those of the Jews; at any rate, his followers are no more ready now to accept the idea of an incarnation than the Jews were then.

Can we not get at the root of this Muslim abhorrence? Is it not that the Muslim, like the Jew, feels that to bring God into the human category, in any manner or degree, is to profane and debase Him? For our part, we believe and we maintain that, far from detracting from God's glory, such a course, when seen to be taken for the sake of man's highest welfare, immeasurably adds to His glory.

How can we get the Muslim also to see that? The question enables us to focus our problem.

We are agreed, Muslim and Christian alike, that the chief end of man is to know God and have fellowship with Him. But before we can have real fellowship we need to have a knowledge of Him more intimate than the kind that contents itself with ascribing to Him such attributes of majesty as, in effect, keep Him far beyond the realm of human affairs. We cannot "hold communion" with a God unknown nor can we with One whose only known characteristics awe or appal us.

Is God, then, more intimately knowable than this, and if so, how can we know Him? We believe that He is, that He Himself has shown us how, and that the finding of the way is the greatest discovery man can make.

At the outset of our investigation we are faced with a fact which we shall do well to ponder, and that is that we can only understand God and everybody and everything else as we see them expressed in terms of human experience. There is a further principle involved in this fact which may be expressed by saying that it requires a person to understand a person, and also to explain a person. A Muslim might here object that while this may be generally true, yet to think of *God* in this way is wrong. It may be wrong, but, constituted as we are, it is our only way of thinking at all, even of God. And since God Almighty made us, He cannot have erred in limiting us to this method in that realm of activity which definitely raises us above the brute creation—the realm of mind.

In a remarkable passage in the New Testament the attainment of just this knowledge of God is declared to be the supreme concern of

man: "This is *life eternal*, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." (S. John xvii, 3).

That is to say, it is a vital matter for man to know not only God but Jesus Christ also. The bringing of the name of Jesus into close proximity with that of God in this place is no accident, neither is it arbitrary. On the contrary, as we have already indicated, it is profoundly significant. *The knowledge of the One leads to the knowledge of the Other.* To know Jesus enables us to know God.

This is a new and a strange proposition to the mind of the Muslim. He is not prepared to admit it. We may remark also that, simple though it seems, and even obvious, there are many Christians who have not paused to consider its profound significance.

Let us look at it in the light of our claim that Christ is Divine. Whence do we derive our criterion as to what is Divine? Is it that we already know God, not so much in respect of His attributes as of His character, and that we proceed from this to declare that Christ is like Him, and *therefore* Divine? But is that strictly accurate? Who really directly knows the character of God? 'No man hath seen God at any time'; can we humans, then, by speculation find Him out? If that were so then obviously, "for beings who could sit inside the heavenly council and differentiate the Divine essence and map out the Divine scheme, an Incarnation were a superfluity." (Oman, in *Vision and Authority*. New ed. p. 234).

We come back to this, therefore, that in actual fact it is Jesus whom we know, and our claim is that from our knowledge of Him we can reach to a knowledge of God Himself.

Jesus, then, we know, or may know, *but what do we make of Him?* This is a vital question for the Muslim no less than for the Christian.

Stated briefly, the Christian conviction—for it amounts to that—is that God is *revealed* in Jesus Christ; that He is revealed absolutely and revealed completely, so far as the Divine can be expressed in human terms. But, in the interest of truth as well as for the sake of the Muslim who finds this whole idea a stumbling block, we need to be careful so to state this as not to appear to claim that God is, in Christ, *exhaustively* revealed.

What we do maintain is that God is, in Christ, distinctively and sufficiently revealed in respect of what He essentially is. And lest even this statement be open to misunderstanding, we would add that we do not mean that Divinity, in a general way (as in saints and seers), is to be found in Christ, but rather that the *character* of God is the character of Christ. We cherish this as a wonderful discovery so much so that when men ask us, "What is God like?" we unhesitatingly reply, "Like Jesus Christ."

It is *this* that makes Jesus unique. His character when placed side by side with the characters of men, the best of them, is a *distinctive* character. Not only so, He in Himself sets up an

absolute ethical standard, and for an increasing host of people throughout the world the highest achievement in the realm of moral endeavour is to be just this—Christlike.

We can now carry the theme a step further. If it be true that God is revealed in Jesus Christ (and this we do most sincerely believe), then it can be no accident. On the contrary, we Christians see it to be of set purpose: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." He has deliberately revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. And here we come upon another fact that is distinctive of Christianity.

Man's search for God and struggle to attain to communion with Him—the way by which, according to many Muslims, the goal is to be reached—is indeed a vital feature in the religious experience of man, but there is nothing distinctive about it. It is a common feature in most religious systems. Whereas Christianity proclaims the great fact that in the matter of seeking and searching God Himself has taken the initiative: "We love because He first loved us."

Nor do we shrink, as would the Muslim, from extending this voluntary self-revelation of God into the realm of the Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Muslim is prepared to give the highest praise to Jesus for what He said and did and suffered, so long as it is claimed for Him that He was no more than man, but once he is asked to accept all this of one said to be Divine, he thinks the character a deplorable one—a sorry God.

But we maintain that, far from it being derogatory to the Majesty and Glory of God to seek by this means to make Himself known in a saving way, this is Love's prerogative. God is essentially LOVE.

The Glory of Power might be sullied by an act of condescension. Supreme Intelligence might hesitate to appear in lowly guise, but Love, true Love, does stoop to save and stooping is not stained.

When we realize the significance of Christ's life as a whole, not the life without the death nor yet the death without the life, but both His living and His dying, we become certain that we thereby have obtained a nearer and a loftier conception of the character of God, the like of which can be gained by man in no other way.

But, when all is said, it remains true that there are many (and these are not all Muslims) who, having beheld Christ and seen Him crucified, find nothing in Him that they should desire Him. Others find that they cannot live without Him: 'He loved me and gave Himself for me.' And is it not true that the measure of our concern for those who still live without Him is the measure of our response to His redeeming love?

L. B. J.

The Henry Martyn School, Mahore.

FOR the information of those who are interested in this project it is now possible to announce that the Christian School for the Study of Islamics in India is actually established, the necessary financial support having been assured from both British and American sources.

An institution of this kind is only possible through co-operative effort. Apart from those contributing members of the staff and the loan of buildings, the following societies are assisting with funds: the Wesleyans, Meth. Ep. Church, A. P. Mission, C. E. Z. M. S. and the Oxford Mission.

We have been encouraged during the first term by the attendances at occasional lectures, and by a small group of regular students for the whole course of study. Three of these, ladies, representing different societies, have come all the way from S. India.

Through the kindness of the C. M. S., the School has its first home within the Mahan Singh Bagh, the site until recently of their St. John's Divinity College.

The name by which the school will in time become known throughout India serves to remind us of the noble example in saintliness and scholarship of the first missionary to Muslims in modern times.

The Staff consists of the following:—

Rev. L. Bevan Jones, Principal	...	lent by the B.M.S.
Rev. Laurence E. Browne	...	" " " S.P.G.
Mr. John A. Subhan	...	" " " M.E.M.

It is confidently hoped that this institution will be able to serve the Christian cause in India in a variety of ways. Some of these may be briefly indicated.

1. Special study will be made by members of the Staff of different aspects of Indian Islam and the results published.

2. Time will be given to the preparation of Christian literature and this will be made available for workers among Muslims in the field.

3. For part of the year the School will be a teaching centre to which, it is hoped, Missions and organized churches throughout the country will send promising candidates for short or, in exceptional cases, longer courses of study. It is expected that some more experienced workers will come for short 'Refresher' courses.

Some idea of the ground we seek to cover by the lectures will be gained from the following list of subjects selected for the opening term:—

- Muhammad: the Quran.
- Islam and Christianity through the ages.
- The Beliefs and Practices of Muslims.
- Muslim Objections to Christianity.

The Christian approach to Islam.
 Development of Islamic Doctrine.
 Influence of the Islamic Faith.
 Sufism and Muslim Sects.
 Readings in the Quran.
 Traditions in Islam.
 History of Islam, with special reference to India.

4. During the remaining period members of the Staff, so far as practicable, will be available for conducting Courses of Study in Islamics in other provinces and in hill stations. They will also welcome opportunities for bringing the claims of Muslims to bear on the heart and conscience of Indian Christian congregations.

Because of the prolonged cold season in Lahore it has been decided to hold two terms each year for lecture work at the centre. For 1930-31 these will be:—

(1) 1st October—20th December; (2) 5th January—15th April.

We undertake to arrange accommodation for those who require it, both foreign and Indian, and to find satisfactory teachers for those desiring to learn Urdu. Much use can be made of cycles in Lahore; these can be hired.

No charge will be made for the regular courses of study.

Enquiries concerning Extension Courses in the provinces for this year and applications for enrolment for the term beginning on 1st October should be addressed, at an early date, to the undersigned who will be pleased to supply any further particulars required.

*The Henry Martyn School,
 Mahan Singh Bagh,
 Lahore, Punjab.*

L. BEVAN JONES,
Principal.

Important Notice.

ON resuming, after an interval of two years, the Secretaryship of the League we learn, to our dismay, that the membership roll is, in several respects, far from satisfactory. In saying this we in no way intend, and we trust none will infer it to be, a reflection on the late Secretary who despite his arduous tasks in a Theological College served us faithfully. Nor can the reason for it be traced to the Press Superintendent, Cuttack, who though a very busy man, cheerfully undertook to see to the business side of the League's affairs, without any extra charge.

Nevertheless here are some of the hard facts with which we are faced.

1. Two years ago, there were approximately 622 members; to-day there are only 458. Of these 251 are on the Indian Postal list, and 207 on the Foreign.

2. Many of the members on the Foreign list, though still regularly receiving *News & Notes*, have not paid their subscriptions for 2, 3, 4 and in some cases 5 years. The Press Superintendent has, in the interval, sent out two notices requesting that dues be paid up and has met with some

small response, but the fact remains that so large a sum as Rs. 622 (or about £ 47) is the amount of the unrealised debt to the League funds.

3. Members have left their stations, and in some cases left their fields of work, without intimating where they are to be found or what their wishes are, so that it is not to be expected now that we can trace them all.

With regret, therefore, we have instructed the Press Superintendent to give three months' indulgence to those who have been defaulting for three or more years and that if, in response to his final appeal, they have not sent in their remittance by 1st August their names shall be struck off the roll.

Will all those who read these lines and whose conscience pricks them kindly send in their dues, or if they desire to discontinue, intimate their wish to the Press Superintendent?

We fear a further diminution in our membership as the result of this decision, and yet, are those really members of our fellowship who **take all and give nothing!**

There is one redeeming feature. Though the Indian list is considerably reduced, the 251 members are all in good standing.

"China! *India calling*: What about it?"

Our best thanks are due to the Rev. Malcolm Pitt who has for nearly two years kept our little paper going, notwithstanding the heavy demands which his duties at the Jubbulpore College have made upon his time and strength. There have been times when he has carried on though far from well. He is now away for a well-earned rest and we all cordially wish him a time of refreshment and reinvigoration.

* * * * *

Pray for a Muslim who has got into touch with missionaries in South India and is expressing a desire to become a Christian and devote himself to preaching to Muslims. He knows several languages, has studied and travelled a good deal and seems very sincere in his intention,

New Members.

Rev. L. E. Hartman	C. M. A. Mission	Anjangaon, Surzi, Berar.
Rev. K. L. Parker	A. P. Mission	Fategarh, U. P.
Mr. W. M. Hume	Y.M.C.A.	Lahore.

Any notification of change of address, names of new members or remittance of subscription, etc., should be sent to the Superintendent, Orissa Mission Press, Cuttack, India, and *not* to the Secretary of the League. The annual subscription to the League is Rs. 2-0-0 (English 3s. od.).

Matters of interest to members of the League, items of news and requests for prayer should be sent (if possible, early in the month) to the Hony. Secretary:—

Rev. L. Bevan Jones,
*The Henry Martyn School,
Mahan Singh Bagh,
Lahore, Punjab, India.*