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## News and Notes

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### **The Unity of God as seen in Christ.**

**I**N the time of Christ all the Jews without exception believed in the unity of God. Their religion had in a sense already outgrown the nationalist stage. For their forefathers the one and only God in the world was their national God revealed under the proper name of Yahweh, the same God who had in times still earlier been regarded as a tribal deity. The other tribal deities had been proved to be no Gods. But as the centuries had passed since the days of Isaiah it seemed less appropriate to name the God of all the earth by a proper name. It is generally supposed that it was out of a sense of reverence that the Jews by our Lord's time had ceased to utter the name Yahweh, and even when reading the Hebrew Scriptures always substituted the more general terms Adhonai (Lord) or Elohim (God); while that larger portion of the Jews whose language was Greek habitually thought and spoke of Him as Kurios (Lord).\* Whether it was a sense of reverence or not which had first prompted the Jews to drop the proper name of their God, it certainly was in accordance with their view of Him as the God of the whole earth and not as a mere tribal deity. The use by the Jews of the Dispersion of the name Kurios must have made it far easier for Greek-speaking people to accept Him as their God than it would have been if they had been taught to call Him by a proper name in a barbaric tongue. It is one of the marks of Muhammad's genius that he did the same thing. Is it likely that people of other races would have accepted his religion so easily if he had called them to the worship of Hubal, instead of to the worship of Allah whose name was recognised as meaning "The God"? The admission of large numbers of

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\*The English form Jehovah arose in Reformation times as a first erroneous attempt to recover the sacred name which had been so long unspoken,

Gentiles as worshippers of the true God, without even the rite of circumcision, was a further stage of universalising the Jewish religion. Christianity, under the guidance of St. Paul, in admitting Gentile and Jew on exactly the same terms into the fellowship of the Church, was carrying to its logical conclusion the universalistic principle already at work in Judaism. The use of the generic names Lord and God, instead of Yahweh, was not so much an assertion as an assumption of the unity of God; as one can readily see by considering how much harder it would have been for Gentile converts to Christianity to believe in the unity of God if He had been presented to them under the name of Zeus instead of Kurios.

To understand not merely the Christianity of the Gospels but the Christianity of the Apostolic Age, we must know also the background of Greek thought. The Greek philosophers had reduced the ancient polytheism into a kind of monotheism, either looking to a supreme unknowable Absolute, or to a pantheism in which the various deities appeared as manifestations of the one God. This philosophy was not a thing to make any appeal to the ignorant, for its background was purely intellectual. Those who were guided by feeling rather than by cold logic still preferred to offer their worship to a deity of whom something was known than to a cold bare Absolute. At a slightly later time practical politics combined with the desire for a knowable object of worship in promoting the worship of the emperor. In Athens in St. Paul's day the self-styled philosophers, ever ready to learn some new thing, would have been willing enough to accept as a pair of new Deities Jesus and Anastasis (Resurrection). In Rome not long afterwards an emperor actually suggested putting an image of Christ in the Pantheon. The significance of these facts is this, that though the learned philosophers of those days believed in the unity of God, their belief had no appreciable influence on the people at large because its grounds were purely intellectual, such as a consideration of the harmony of the universe. Yet in the early centuries of Christianity, when the Greek-speaking world was trying to express its Christianity as a doctrinal system, Greek philosophy played a great part, perhaps too great a part.

It is time now to return to the Judaism of our Lord's day and to the Christianity of the Gospels. Our little survey of the nature of the tendency towards monotheism in the Greek world sets off in clear contrast the ethical monotheism of the Jews. The moral grounds for the Jewish belief in the unity of God were such as could make their appeal to all classes of people, and not least to those who had been known, almost as a technical term, as the Poor or the Pious.

Our Lord in His teaching never had need to emphasize the fact of the unity of God, because it was accepted by all. But He did emphasize, and that continually, the underlying ground for believing in the unity. He accepted, of course, the moral ground for this belief as seen in the Old Testament, but raised it to a still higher level; for while we may say that the highest Jewish conception was that "God is

holy," our Lord's teaching is more aptly summarised as "God is love." For holiness at its best gives the idea of freedom from sin, and separation from all that defiles; while love implies a self-giving activity. The contrast between the conceptions of holiness and love might not unfitly be compared to that between the royal robes carefully wrapped in tissue paper and stored where moth cannot corrupt them, and the work-a-day clothes of one who spends his time in the slums and hovels seeking to heal and save the dregs of humanity. Where there is active love there is no fear of defilement, and the type of holiness attained when love is the motive is higher than when the motive is simply to escape defilement. The name of God which came most frequently on the lips of Jesus was Father, and, whether He spoke of God as His Father or our Father, He was thinking of Him not as Progenitor but as one whose characteristic was a fatherly concern, affection and love for His children. The teaching of Jesus about the heavenly Father tells us what treatment we may expect from Him. It is this that everyone really wants to know about God. At various times in the world's history men have feared being cast by God into endless torments for failure to perform correctly some ritual act. It is really vital for our peace of mind to know that God is not like that, and that the great ruler of the universe can be depended upon to act justly and reasonably, nay more, that He has our best interests at heart. The real objection to polytheism is at this point, for polytheism means divided counsels in the heavenly places; and if counsel is divided, how are we to depend upon the treatment that we shall receive? The sort of unity that we are concerned to maintain is that the Power who controls the universe has no variability nor shadow of turning from perfect and continual beneficence.

Compared with a unity that has this deep and all-important meaning for us, the sort of unity that is postulated by Islam is simply dull and uninteresting. When Professor Jeans says that the ruler of the universe must be a great mathematician, he is asserting a fact which may be of great interest to mathematicians, but is not calculated to stir up the enthusiasm of ordinary people. If there is any idea in the minds of Muslims about the unity which goes beyond the mere assertion that the deity is one, it probably is that He is uncontrolled and independent in His ordering and predestinating of events, a conception which arouses in men rather the feeling of impotent dread than that of childlike trust. In an examination recently set for theological students one of the questions was, "What is the difference, if any, between the Muslim and the Christian conceptions of the unity of God?" There was only one candidate taking that part of the examination, and it was clear from his answer that he knew of no difference except the doctrine of the Trinity. It cannot too strongly be insisted on that, quite apart from the doctrine of the Trinity, the Christian and Muslim conceptions of the unity of God are entirely different. We are all aware that many modern Hindus believe in a

kind of pantheistic monotheism, and we see at once that such a monotheism is far removed from that of Christianity. It is not so obvious, but equally true, that Islamic monotheism is far removed from our Christian monotheism.

It is this great underlying difference between the doctrine of the unity of God in the two religions which makes it so hard to explain to a Muslim the doctrine of the Trinity. For generally, when trying to expound this doctrine, we are apt to assume that the Muslim is starting from the same belief in the unity as ourselves.

Compare these two facts of history: (1) The Apostles were all Jews. They had been brought up to believe in the unity of God. During the time that they were with Jesus they learnt many things from Him about God, but they certainly were not taught the doctrine of the Trinity, and it is very doubtful whether they were taught to speak of Him as God, or even as the Son of God. And yet within a very short time they were using language that plainly implied their belief in the divinity of Christ, and there is no hint that this all-important belief was a matter of dispute or debate amongst them. They had fierce discussions about the admission of Gentiles into the Church, although that was only the last stage of the universalistic movement which was already at work in Judaism; but the divinity of Christ was accepted as a matter of course, and the only people apparently who denied it were heretics such as Cerinthus who were unworthy of the name of Christian. (2) On the other hand, consider the Arabs who burst forth from Arabia on their career of conquest after the death of Muhammad. They had all been brought up as polytheists, and had accepted monotheism from Muhammad. It is true that they had been taught by Muhammad that Jesus was not God, but that He was a prophet to be respected. But very soon they were in close contact with Christians who could give them more accurate information about Christ. And yet, with a few negligible exceptions, they all denied, and continued even more vehemently to deny, the deity of Christ. These two stories are closely parallel, and at first sight it is difficult to see the reason why the reaction was so different. Yet, if we pay attention to their respective grounds for believing in the unity of God, it becomes clear why it was easy for Jews, and impossible for Muslims, to attribute divinity to Christ. For the Jew it was holiness which determined the uniqueness of the only God; but, having seen in Christ a holiness even surpassing previous conceptions of the holiness of God, the Christian Jews were bound to place Christ in the category of divine, thus actually raising the conception of God. This fact that the attribution of divinity to Christ raised the conception of God in men's minds is explicitly stated by St. Paul, "that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii-11). Had Christ pointed to a Father different from Himself in character men might have been compelled to make Christ the greater of two unequal heavenly beings

(as Marcion at a later time did), just as they recognised that His claims placed Him on a higher level than Abraham. But in all His words and works Christ professed to do as the Father did, and to share with Him the intimacy of an undivided will. It was thus that the Christian Jews were carried along to ascribe divinity to Christ, and to give greater glory to God at the same time. If they had been charged with splitting the unity of God, and so of dishonouring His holy Name, it would have sounded absurd in their ears, since what they had done had not merely established the holiness of God on which His uniqueness depended, but had disclosed within that holiness a depth of beauty, hitherto unplumbed, for which they had to coin a new word, the Greek word "agape," which we translate as "charity" or "love."

Such a train of thought was impossible for the Arabs. God, as they had been taught to believe in Him, was separated from all else, not by a quality of holiness which had conceptual meaning, but by a barrier which eye could not pierce nor the mind contemplate, more impermeable than the rampart of Dhu 'l Qarnain: "Say, He is God alone; God the eternal! He begetteth not, and He is not begotten; and there is none like unto Him." Just as the Quran is sheltered behind a blind belief in its incomparableness, so that no other book may be compared with it, so Allah is sheltered behind a blind belief in His unknowableness: a God who may be adored and feared, but never loved, for we shall never know Him as He is. Let it be stated that Muslim Sufis, who have spoken of knowing and loving God, have to that extent outstepped the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy; and although they themselves are allowed to remain in the ranks of Muslims, their thoughts have not been allowed appreciably to influence Islam's crude theology. As far as the Sufis themselves are concerned, their religion is not monotheism but pantheism; and pantheism, as is well-known, is inconsistent with a moral conception of God.

### **Age-Long Complacency Shaken.**

**I**N a note under the above heading in our February number we stated that the Egyptian Government had passed an order that new missionaries were not to enter the country. This appears to have been a misunderstanding on our part, as the order in question allows new missionaries to replace those who are retiring.

Another example of the Muslim fear of missionary activity may be seen in the following quotation from a recent number of a Palestinian newspaper, "We have only taken this line after having seen how far missionaries have gone in this country, these servants of foreigners, this hell-guard of colonisation. They are sowing strife and hypocrisy here. They are enemies of Islam, but also of the national uplift in the Orient and especially in the Arabic world. Therefore

Christians and Muslims ought to stand together against them with all means. Through long years they have been living as brethren. Nobody but the missionaries and their helpers have dared to awaken the slumbering strife. The only way to bring back dominion to the Arabs as of old is the Islamic law and its high principles. So if the newspaper beseeches Muslims to stick to their religion, that does not mean forsaking the national thought or breaking the bonds that unite us. In Europe and America Mussolini, Hitler and other leaders have started under the banner of the Church. There is a cross in the Nazi banner, which does not prevent their progress. National movements are not against religious laws and divine traditions. Even Japan has been making use of a pagan religion in its wonderful progress. Why then should not Muslims, with their rational religion, make use of it?"

There have been several examples recently in India of attacks on the character of Christ, of a kind which is contrary to the usual spirit of religious toleration in India. Christ is so highly esteemed by all classes in India that until quite recently attacks on His character were practically unknown. This new phenomenon is probably to be attributed to fear for the inviolability of Islam, and the feeling that Christian propaganda must be checked by all means.

### **The Prophecy of Muhammad.**

THE following account of the prophecy concerning Muhammad which is supposed to be found in the Injil is taken from Ibn Hisham's *Life of Muhammad* (translated by Weil, Vol. 1, p. 112). It is one of those parts of the book in which Ibn Hisham is reproducing the work of Ibn Ishaq, the earliest *Life of Muhammad*. At the moment of writing I am away from Lahore and have not access to the Arabic original in order to verify the correctness of Weil's translation in detail.

"Ibn Ishaq says, It is reported to me that Isa b. Mariam, in the Gospel revealed by God, according to the copy of the Gospel made by the Apostle John in the lifetime of Isa, expressed himself as follows with regard to the description of Muhammad, 'He who hates me, hates the Lord. If I had not done works before their eyes such as no one before me had done they would not have been guilty. But now they have become ungrateful, and have believed that they must honour me like the Lord. But the word that is written in the book of the Law must be fulfilled, They have hated me without a cause. If Manhamanna (*i.e.*, in the Syriac Muhammad, and in the Greek Paraclete), whom Allah will send unto you from the Lord and from the Spirit of righteousness, had already come, he would have borne witness for me, and ye would do likewise, for ye were with me before. This I say unto you that ye may not doubt.'"

For convenience of seeing easily the divergences from the true text of the Bible I quote here from the Revised Version of St. John xv. 23—xvi. 1. The quotation is so extensive that it is not likely to have been made from memory. Ibn Ishaq must have referred to the text itself, and we cannot therefore acquit him of deliberately perverting the text before him. "He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me; and ye also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be made to stumble."

The following alterations of the text should be noted :—

- (1) "Father" is changed to "Lord."
- (2) The words "but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father," which link together the love that we ought to have for God and Christ, are changed into, "They have believed that they must honour me like the Lord."
- (3) The explanation of the Syriac word for Comforter, that it means Muhammad, is absurd, and could have deceived no one. Any one with the most elementary knowledge of Arabic or Syriac would have known that there is no connexion between a word with the root letters NHM and one with the root letters HMD.
- (4) Because it is obviously inappropriate to speak of Muhammad as "the Spirit of truth" Ibn Ishaq says that the Paraclete will be sent "from the Spirit of righteousness."

## Symposium on Fasting.

No. 6. By Miss Kirby, S.P.G. Mission, Dornakal Diocese.

**OUR** Lord continually enjoined fasting upon His disciples as a self-discipline, as an example to others, and above all as a means of putting spiritual things first. He said that His followers must deny themselves, they must not worry about their needs of to-morrow, they must not spend much thought on what they were to eat or to put on, they must not be taken up with the pleasures and riches of this world. They must seek first the kingdom of God, give to the poor and needy, serve others with humility, be prepared to take the lowest place, in fact willing to lose their lives for His sake, and take up their cross and follow Him. Such was our Lord's teaching on fasting.

Since the earliest times the Church has made rules of fasting in order to help us to understand our Lord's meaning, not simply to

limit fasting to abstinence from food on certain days, but through those rules to teach us the way of obedience and self-discipline in everything for His sake, who for our sakes became poor.

The Muslims have their strict rules of fasting with their own religious motives for doing so. Surely we Christians should rejoice that here is something that we can build upon, and from which we can lead them on to understand something of what our Lord meant when He said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself."

Our Lord never presented Christianity to His followers as a wishy-washy religion of comfort, ease and consolation, but rather as a hard narrow way leading to the cross, and after that to the resurrection and ascension. And I believe that the teaching of the Church on the keeping of Lent, Fridays, etc., as special days of fasting, prayer and penitence, will help Muslim Christians enormously to get the right idea of sin, and a high standard of self-control, obedience, a sense of spiritual values, and a more complete surrender to God of their bodies, minds and spirits.

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### Notice.

The Rev. L. E. Browne is temporarily editing *News and Notes*. Matters of interest to members of the Missionaries to Muslims League, items of news, and requests for prayer and praise, should be addressed to Rev. L. E. Browne, 30, Mozang Road, Lahore, India.

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