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News and Notes

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Members of the Missionaries to Muslims League.

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What are our Plans ?

IT is with a deep sense of constraint that we place before the Members of the Missionaries to Muslims League what we have already placed before the readers of the *National Christian Council Review*, under the title of "A Plea for a Minority." As we write the position of the Henry Martyn School of Islamics at Lahore is very precarious as a result of the withdrawal of support by one of the original co-operating Societies. We still have hopes that the co-operation of this Society may be resumed. We have only started to range ourselves as a "united front" against Islam. If we break down at the start then the hope expressed in the remainder of this article recedes still further from our grasp. God forbid that such should be the case. The attention of the *M.M.L.* is respectfully requested to what is a plea rather than a plan but which may, by God's grace become a plan.

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In view of the proposed five year programme of evangelistic advance, is it not time that the Church as a whole took stock and asked itself what it is doing for the evangelisation of Islam in India? Amid all its claims can it find a little leisure to think of yet one more claim? With all its commitments can it find the courage to face yet one more task? It has dedicated its gifts and talents to many types of service and when it has caught a vision it has not lacked those who would count no drudgery too hard and no sacrifice too great till that vision became an actuality. Will it now take thought awhile so that fire may kindle in its musing and the illumination of a new vision break on its eyes?

At the outset perhaps some will be asking the question, "Why particularise in this way? All men need the Gospel. Our message is for all. 'O that the world might taste and see the riches of His grace.' There is no need to particularise. We invite Hindu and

Muslim, caste-man and untouchable to the Gospel feast." Just so, and it is precisely because the Gospel is for *all* and because the Muslim is apt to be overlooked that we feel the need of particularising.

It is a matter of frequent debate as to whether one should "specialise" in Muslim work. This question hardly arises in a country exclusively Muslim or having a Muslim majority. Why? Because every missionary *is* a specialist. If he is to do his work effectively in any sphere he must specialise. What are the elements in this specialisation? He learns the language of the people among whom he works, they are his constant study as he tries to find out their special characteristics, and he learns as much as he can about their beliefs and customs. Even when he makes no very profound study of these they are the background of his thinking. The more he becomes steeped in the new atmosphere the more valuable will he be as a witness to Christ. He gradually adapts himself and becomes wise to win souls. Here we are not thinking particularly of those who are usually called missionaries but of any missionary-hearted Christian whether Indian or from overseas. For though the former may start with a great initial advantage we know that it is possible for him not to look far beyond the bounds of his own community or the language group which is his own and it is our purpose to point out that in the matter of Muslim evangelisation specialisation is needed for the indigenous worker and for the missionary.

It is not a normal thing for a missionary to be sent from China to Cairo in the course of his missionary service. (A few may pass from one sphere to another when the language is their own). The reason is because he has become specially equipped for a particular task. When, therefore, any man is working in the majority community in any land, everything is tending to make him year by year more fitted for his task. But the case is altogether different when a man has to work in a minority community. In this latter case those things which would be constantly fitting him for his missionary task if he were called to serve the majority community, such as the constant hearing of a certain vernacular, daily intercourse with people professing one and the same religion or having certain ideas of etiquette and manners, instead of making his task easier will make it more difficult. Take for instance, a man who has had a good grounding in Hindi and has had the opportunity to learn it in a place like Benares and then send him to do work in a village area where he hardly ever hears anything but *ganwari*. It will not be long before that man, by reason of the claims which are made on him in the village work, will leave the high Hindi and concentrate on the colloquial dialect. If in addition his uprooting from Benares is early in his missionary service then the process will be all the quicker. Suppose, however, this man is expected while living in the village area, to concentrate on work among high cast people, who are few and far between. At what a cost will his specialisation be maintained?

Now this is the position of any missionary to a minority community, and it is important for us to realise that throughout India our work among Muslims assumes the character of work in a minority community. At first sight great Muslim cities like Lucknow, Lahore etc., may seem to be exceptions to this sweeping statement. But we have only to think for a moment to realise that it is true there also. These cities are frequently the head-quarters of missions and churches which have a sphere of influence extending far beyond the city itself. In the surrounding small towns and villages work among the depressed classes may be the chief concern and the churches throughout that area will have been built up from converts from those classes. In the cities there are also gathered together the educational institutions of the church, its high schools and colleges and perhaps its theological institution. So it happens that a majority community in the particular city is changed into a minority community in the area in which the church is interested. The responsible missionaries placed at these centres have the burden of administration on them and the educational workers are naturally absorbed in their task. Thus, speaking generally, in proportion to the tendency of the individual missionary, the particular missionary society, or the church with an evangelistic spirit to go with the message of the Gospel to the adherents of the religion most common in the area, and to the class most likely to respond to the message couched in terms which it understands, in precisely the same proportion will the Muhammadan community be neglected in the field of missionary enterprise, because it is most often found in the minority, is always exclusive, and has been found to be least likely to respond to the Christian message.

The Muslim community's exclusiveness is proverbial. It applies to language, culture, social customs, etiquette, etc. Many observers have drawn attention to the reluctance of an indigenous church drawn mainly from Hindus to undertake the evangelisation of Muslims. The reasons are not far to seek. One is the language barrier. Even when the Muslim community is largely bilingual it is found that what is sufficient for daily intercourse and the transacting of business, is not sufficient for religious instruction. We can well remember the eagerness of a convert from the depressed classes who had become a preacher of the Gospel and whose vernacular was Hindi, to learn Urdu in order that his message might be acceptable and understandable by the Muslims he met. Such enlightened zeal is not common. But unless the effort to break down the Muslim's exclusiveness comes from the Christian side, by Christians seeking to understand the Muslim mentality there is little hope of that exclusiveness being broken down by the growth of a new liberalism and a new spirit of enquiry within the Muslim community itself.

It may however be objected that specialisation in Islamic studies on the part of missionaries and evangelists will only perpetuate this exclusiveness within the Christian church itself. Congregations of Muslim origin will spring up with a Muslim tongue, and thus two Christian churches will exist side by side with nothing in common. This seems to us to be an altogether unfounded assumption. It neglects to take into consideration the reconciling genius of Christianity, the unifying spirit of the Gospel and the Christian faith. Taking a short view the objection may have some cogency but taking the long view, it can have no cogency at all any more than it should be thought necessary that for the unity of Christianity in its doctrine and discipline it is necessary that Christians should speak one language from China to Timbuctoo or that there should not exist churches in India conducting their worship in Telugu, Tamil, Bengali and the rest, or Welsh and English congregations in Manchester.

It is at most only now or in the immediate future that the language difference is fraught with risk. With the growth of Christian literature in the different vernaculars there will be more careful statement of the theology of the church and less likelihood of its being plunged into heresy by the use of words which are liable to misinterpretation. The longer the work of interpretation goes on the nearer will the meaning which the speakers in the different languages import into their words be uniform and harmonious with the teaching of the universal church and the less the possibility of misinterpretation in the translation of the Word of God.

Meanwhile we would remind our readers that the New-Muslim propaganda often attacks Christianity as carrying with it elements of paganism and what it conceives as a sort of polytheism or tritheism. Now consider how greatly that conclusion will tend to be strengthened if in the proclamation of the Christian message a vernacular is used which still retains the flavour of paganism. Suppose, for instance, a Christian should happen to use the word *avatar* for incarnation when speaking to a Muslim. The latter may easily go away strengthened in his belief that Christianity is a departure from true monotheism. The church in North India is recognising the greater suitability of a vocabulary based on the Muhammadan religious vocabulary and this in spite of the fact that the church in North India is not composed for the most part of converts from Islam. This strikes us as very significant. In preaching in Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, etc., the vocabulary available to the evangelist is one associated with the Hindu cults. Thus if he is to speak about the incarnation then he will use words which he seeks to invest with a Christian significance but which for the majority of the people round about him will be used in their old pagan significance. Now he passes on to the minority community which is already prejudiced and very strongly monotheistic. He uses the same vernacular which they also use for ordinary daily intercourse

but which they would be most loth to use when speaking about religion, for though the Muslim community in certain places may not be completely bilingual, it will yet express its religious ideas in words borrowed from Arabic. Even for a village Muhammadan who speaks no Urdu, *pūja* will mean Hindu worship and *namaz* his own faith's.

Thus, the evangelist who is using the vernacular of the majority community will find himself severely handicapped. He may find that his Muslim hearer thinks that Christians believe in an incarnation which is like a pagan incarnation because the evangelist uses the same terms as his Hindu neighbour. It is difficult enough to guard against misunderstanding when speaking to people in a language which is allied to the cult language of one's hearers but what must be the position of a man who is using a language which is alien or unsuitable to the cult of the people whom he addresses—and a language not as yet fully redeemed from its old bad meanings by a new Christian significance?

It is a point to be borne in mind also that now-a-days the National Congress is putting great emphasis on the need for a *lingua franca* in India and would like to see a form of Hindustani established in this position. We are aware that this does not find acceptance among many of the people in the South and that some people who are not carried away by ultra-nationalism would even gladly welcome English as the *lingua franca*. But when we have a language so wide-spread as Urdu why not make use of this to the glory of God and the spread of the Kingdom and as a means of encouraging unity among the different parts of the Indian Church? Let us remember that if we would follow the master missionary Paul then we should mark how he used the *lingua franca* of the world of his day in order that the Gospel might be spread and that there might be unity throughout the churches.

But to return to the question of "specialisation." Sometimes it is falsely assumed that specialisation in Islamic studies and evangelisation by the indigenous church are opposed in principle. It is hard to see how this can be. Presumably there is visualised a missionary owing little allegiance to any indigenous church and perhaps unacquainted with its language, gathering a group of believers from another language group and organising it into a separate unit without reference to the local church. Can any one give an instance of such a thing happening? The wise missionary will be very careful that no Muslim who comes to Christ through him will be labelled as his convert. He will hesitate even to baptize when there is a pastor of an indigenous church who can do this. He will be careful to tell the would-be Christian what his relations should be to the Christian brotherhood and—just as important and necessary—he will do all in his power to make the indigenous church realise its responsibility to the new convert. The local church, as a whole, must rejoice in the reception of another brother into its

fellowship. But in addition to this the local church must realise its responsibility to evangelise and not leave this task to overseas missionaries. The witness of the church in its saved life is of paramount importance. But this does not mean that its members should not seek all the equipment possible for the special evangelistic task which it has to perform and that equipment will be the more important for some individuals of the local group than for the rest, in so far as the majority must be engaged in the evangelisation of the community which is making the major claim. Some few individuals in localities in South India, for instance, for the sake of the Muslim—for whom Christ died as much as for the outcaste or for the pagan polytheist—may have to take a lonely course against their ordinary inclinations in order that the witness of the local church may not suffer. They will seek to know what the Muslim thinks. They will find also from their brethren in other localities, how the Muslim can be influenced and what the Christian reply to the Muslim's attack is. Such a man would not be a menace to the unity of the local church but a source of strength to it. He would be a sort of sentinel, also a reconnaissance officer or, perhaps more fittingly, an interpreter of the Muslim to the church and the church to the Muslim.

Whether such a man is a "foreign" missionary or an indigenous evangelist, a paid agent or a voluntary worker are not matters of supreme importance. What is of importance is that the witness of the church should be complete in every way possible whether by the saved life or both the saved life and the preached word. To say the work is for the indigenous church irrespective of its ability to express its faith in terms understood by its Muslim hearers is to impose on it a task which may lay it open to an insidious attack from Muslims no less vigorous in their missionary zeal; and "specialisation" is needed as much for that church as it is needed for any particular individual missionary who may be "set aside" for such work.

(To be continued)

Material for a Life of Muhammad.

“**T**HE historical or biographical tradition in the proper sense of the word has only lately been submitted to a keener examination. It was known for a long time that here too, besides theological and legendary elements, there were traditions originating from party motive, intended to give an appearance of historical foundation to the particular interests of certain persons or families; but it was thought that after some sifting there yet remained enough to enable us to form a much clearer sketch of Muhammad's life than that of any other founders of a universal religion.

It is especially Prince Caetani and Father Lammens who have disturbed this illusion. According to them, even the data which had

been pretty generally regarded as objective, rests chiefly upon tendentious fiction. The generations that worked at the biography of the prophet were too far removed from his time to have true data or notions; and moreover, it was not their aim to know the past as it was, but to construct a picture of it as it ought to have been according to their opinion. Upon the bare canvas of verses of the Quran that need explanation, the traditionists have embroidered with great boldness scenes suitable to the desires or ideals of their particular group; or to use a favourite metaphor of Lammens, they fill the empty spaces by a process of stereotyping which permits the critical observer to recognize the origin of each picture. In the *Sirah* (biography) the distance of the first describers from their object is the same as in the *Hadith* (Legislative tradition); in both we get images of very distant things, perceived by means of fancy rather than by sight and taking different shapes according to the inclinations of each circle of describers."

SNOUCKE HURGRONJE.

"Why Callest Thou Me Good?"

THE EDITOR OF *News and Notes*.

February 1st, 1937.

DEAR SIR,

May I add a remark to the interesting note on the above question of Our Lord's? The matter is complicated for Muslims speaking Urdu by the fact that the form "Why callest thou me good?" really means "I am not good; thou shouldst not call me so." This is very much like the English "Why call me good?", and in my opinion a case of translating words but not meanings in its present Urdu form. (I admit the difficulty of translating so as to avoid the force of an almost direct negative). It is advisable, I think, to point out to hearers that this form of question does not in Greek imply a direct negative, but is actually a question, even if there is some slight deprecation of the affirmative statement to which the question corresponds.

I am

Yours faithfully,

Longton, Stoke-on-Trent.

W. MACHIN.

Prayer and Praise.

LET US PRAY that the whole church may awake to the seriousness of and urgency of the call to evangelise Islam.

LET US PRAY that a new vision may be accompanied by a sound method and plan under the direction of God's Spirit.

LET US PRAY that the immediate problems which confront the Henry Martyn School may be solved and that the future of the school may be assured by the financial help which is so urgently needed.

LET US PRAY for a young man at Lucknow in search of God that he may find the One who seeks him.

New Members.

Rev. H. Merklin,	German Mission	Assuan, Upper Egypt.
Baroness G. V. Massenbach,	"	" "
Miss Kathe Ganer,	"	" "
Miss Lina Gotte,	" Daran,	" "
Miss Gertrud Noack,	" Garf Hussein,	" "
Rev. W. Mueller,	"	Bulak, Cairo, Egypt.
Rev. J. Gottin,	Basel Mission	" "

NOTICE.

Any notification of change of address, names of new members or remittance of subscriptions 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. 0d).

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 Honorary Secretary :—

Rev. J. W. Sweetman,
30, Mozang Road,
Lahore.