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News and Notes

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New Developments in Indian Islam.

THE COMMUNITY.

IT is fitting to begin our enquiry with the Muslim community because the reorganisation, unity and preservation of the community are the chief pre-occupation of Islam to-day. Sometimes it seems as if Allah is reduced to-day to the internal principle of the unification of Islam. When in the latest book written on the Religion of Islam we find in some 700 pages only 33 given to a discussion of the Doctrine of God and 88 pages to marriage alone, this is still further emphasised. Theology is required to take a back seat. Dr. S. N. A. Jafri recently gave a lecture before the All-India Philosophical Congress. He roundly declared that Islam was a rule of life rather than a collection of doctrines. "Nature is God's behaviour. The distinctive feature of Islam is that it takes the empirical view of life and its problems. Its commands and tenets help in keeping an equilibrium between the body and the soul. It teaches us to face facts. The Prophet of Arabia was helped in his mission of creating this empirical attitude by the fact that it is the characteristic of the people of Arabia to hold to the positive, so much so that even in poetry, which is an inspired art, they care more for the concrete than the abstract. . . . The Qur'an emphasises deed more than idea. . . . Muhammad caused an intellectual revolution by stressing the visible more than the invisible. (Note that he first tells us that it was an Arab characteristic and then tells us that Muhammad wrought a revolution in this respect). There is the crowning principle of *Tawhid* in Islam which demands all loyalty to God and this ensures the unity of mankind under one banner. . . . Islam in its attitude towards humanity has even gone so far as to prefer the duty of man towards man to that of man towards God."

In the higher religio-political thinking of Islam there is not lacking the conception of a universal theocracy. In the *Jami 'a-i-milliya*, the Nationalist Muslim University of Delhi there is a *MSS.* book written by Muhammad Ali called the *Kingdom of God*. From comments of his on Wells, *God the Invisible King*, I have gathered that his conception is that a simple religious creed without theological subtleties and an organisation of human society on the lines of Islamic practices and institutions will bring the golden age.

But the emphasis is always on "under one banner." The brotherhood of man is really Islamic brotherhood. There is a sense in which the brotherhood of the world for which we stand is based on humanity and not on creed. Since our Lord gave the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the breaking down of Jewish prejudices in the early church, Christians have realised their duty to the world outside the Christian community. In Islam however there is always present the tendency to achieve unity by exclusion. Such a unity is really the consolidation of a community and is handicapped at the start in any attempt to universalise itself. An illustration of this can be found in the statesman of June 6th. The Muslim League demands for its better relations with the Congress are such as to proclaim the solidarity of Islam.

Bande Mataram should be given up.

Muslim majorities in the provinces where such majorities exist at present must not be affected by any territorial re-distribution or adjustments.

Muslims must have freedom to slaughter cows.

The Muslims' right to call *azan* and perform their religious ceremonies should not be interfered with in any way.

Muslim personal law and culture should be guaranteed by statute.

The share of Muslims in the State services should be definitely fixed in the constitution by statutory enactment.

The Congress should withdraw all opposition to the communal award and should not describe it as the negation of nationalism. Statutory guarantees should be given that the use of Urdu should not be curtailed.

Representation in local bodies should be governed by the principles underlying the communal award, that is, separate electorates and population strength.

The Congress flag should be changed or, alternatively the flag of the Muslim League should be given equal importance.

Recognition of the Muslim League as the only authoritative and representative organization of the Muslims.

The formation of coalition Ministries.

The point of all this is that the chief consideration is the united front in Islam and the unity of that community which must not be impaired in any way and that this unity is not to be confined to a unity

of spirit but an external and communal unity. Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan said he wanted the Hindus and Muslims to remain as sister communities and remain in peace and good-will. Mr. Fazl-ul-Haqq the Bengal Premier said that Muslims should unite to protect and defend Islam.

So really the ideal is Pan-Islamism rather than Divine Theocracy. The God of Islam is useful because he serves the ideal of Islam. In fact one frequently feels that the real object of worship in Islam is Islam itself rather than God.

Islam has always been very strongly community-conscious. In the Arabian Nights in the story of the *Fisherman and the Young King of the Black Isles*, the fish the fisherman caught were of four colours, the white, Muslims, the red, Magians, the blue, Christians and the yellow, Jews. The custom of the Ottoman Turks was to require the wearing of a special garb by all Christians and the latter suffered all sorts of civil disabilities such as the forfeiting of property as a *waqf* to the Muslim community. The contention of some enlightened Muslims of the present day that this is peculiarly Turkish and not characteristic of Islam as such, cannot be sustained.

The Light of Lahore asks sadly "Where is the solidarity of Islam? Shall we look for it in the Jamiat-ul-Ulama, in the Deobandi—Brelvi conflict, in the Sunni-Shi'ah feuds, in the struggle of Ahrar and non-Ahrar?" Sir Muhammad Iqbal attacked the Ahmadiyya especially because he considered it a disruptive force in Islam. He even attributed the rise of the sect to intrigues of British Imperialism designed to break up the solidarity of Islam. The Lahori trend to orthodoxy and the infrequency of its advocacy of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad may be attributable to the same motive—Let us not destroy the unity of Islam. Muhammad Ali of Lahore himself deploras the tendency to achieve unity at the expense of liberty of theological thought, and thinks that a middle way can be found whereby there may be freedom of thought and the unity of the community not destroyed. No matter how erroneous a man's interpretation of Islam may be, let him still be a Muslim. That is his argument. You will notice that this means that no matter how much disunion of spirit there may be, the external unity of Islam must be preserved.

After saying that the direction of prayer is not important the late Sir Muhammad Iqbal says, "Yet we cannot ignore the important consideration that the posture of the body is a real factor in determining the attitude of the mind. The choice of one particular direction in Islamic worship is meant to secure the unity of feeling in the congregation, and its form in general creates and fosters the sense of social equality as much as it tends to destroy the feeling of rank or race-superiority in the worshippers."

Iqbal's Lectures in the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam are concerned mainly with the need for the liberation of the community from the "dead hand" of tradition. Hope for the future of

Islam lies in a new dynamic conception of Islam along the lines of Bergson's philosophy. Persia and Turkey have made the changes and reforms of recent years in accord with the genius of Islam and not because they have been influenced by non-Islamic political and social ideals. History must be regarded as a genuinely creative movement and not a movement whose path is already determined. Iqbal says that this principle of movement in Islam is *Ijtihad*. The fundamental inconsistency of his thought is that on the one hand he claims that Islam has in itself the power of change and development and yet admits in the same breath that the inertia of Islam is giving way before the impact of forces outside Islam. We would characterise Iqbal's work in general, in spite of some force and originality, as an undigested mass of Western philosophy and Islamic terminology.

THE PERSON OF MUHAMMAD.

Islam in India and indeed all over the world is attempting to meet the challenge of the person of Christ by presenting an idealised Muhammad.

The tendency has been on the whole to bring Muhammad to the Christian standard and then expurgate all that is incompatible with that. Muhammad's house of women was really a sort of widows' home. Says Prof. Salim of Lahore "Muslims do feel that it is derogatory to the status of a prophet to tell lies but you cannot purge the pages of Bukhari nor can they bring out a new collection according to modern standards of truth and piety." We might ask how, if Muhammad himself is the standard of truth and piety, it turns out that at this late date the records of his sayings and doings have to be expurgated according to a modern standard. We might further ask what is that modern standard? Is it not that which Christ is compelling men to judge themselves by? These ideas are characteristic of what one might call the School of Sir Syed Ahmad. Along with these we find the attempt to prove Islam monogamist in principle etc.

But now there seem to be two other points of view. The first, strange to say, is the intellectuals' avoidance of discussion of the person of Muhammad. This is specially noticeable in the lecture which I have referred to by Dr. Jafri. Some go so far as to say that the test of a Muslim is that he should believe only the first part of the *kahmu*. "There is no God but Allah." Muhammad Iqbal in his lectures has nothing to say about the person of the Prophet. In a correspondence he had with Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru he actually says that in Muhammad prophecy realises the need for its own abolition. Iqbal's approval of the superman, the man of power and success, is not explicitly applied to the Prophet Muhammad and may be interpreted to mean that there is no pre-eminence among men but that all are equal and by their very nature are able to absorb into themselves the divine attributes. This at any rate seems to be the teaching of *Israr-i-Khudi*, The Secrets of the Self. By this interpretation Muhammad's dignity is that

he came to free man from bondage to any system. Much lip service is given to Iqbal as the poet-philosopher of Islam but it is highly improbable that all the implications of his philosophy will be allowed to influence Islam in any great degree. However, it must be remembered that the Wahhabis in this country are strongly against what some of them regard as Muhammad worship. As one such said to me. "Muhammad is nothing but a servant as any other, and it is the glory of Allah that he needs no particular virtue in the messenger he sends."

On the other hand, the most popular conception of the person of Muhammad is that he is in himself the supreme ideal. If one could single out any particular new development in Islam which is of outstanding importance in the eyes of the masses it would be the cult of the person of Muhammad.

Down its long history Islam has shewn that it has not been without the hunger for a personal ideal linking the human and the divine. From the very earliest days we find the cult of 'Ali. Later we find the cult of the Sufi saint and this has gained very great hold on the popular imagination. Devotion to a person is very largely the strength of Qadian. With these things in the background and, above all, the contact of Islam with Christianity and the realisation that in the Person of Jesus Christ is the strength of Christianity, it is not surprising that now-a-days we see a new and stronger emphasis on the excellencies of the Prophet and the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet on a scale unparalleled in Islamic history.

It must be remembered that the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet is quite a late development. Khaizuran the mother of Harun-ul-Rashid was responsible in 173 A.H. for special reverence of the birthplace of Muhammad but it was not till the time of the Fatimids about A.H. 500 that we find special birthday celebrations held for the Prophet. These were then confined to a very close circle round the Caliph and were associated with the celebration of the birth of 'Ali, Fatima and the Imam of the time. They had a distinct Shi'ah impetus. Later in about 600 A.H. popular celebrations in imitation of the Christian Christmas festivals, with torch-light processions, etc., were held.

This was in the time of Saladin. Some think that the brother-in-law of Saladin, who was strongly in favour of the Sufis had a great deal to do with this. The orthodox frowned on the new innovation and called it *bid'at*. Later, because it gradually grew in popularity, it was regarded as *bid'at hasana* i.e., a good innovation. But to-day in India this celebration is swelling to great proportions. The English newspapers are taking notice of it. Christians and people representing other religions are invited to take part in it. Speeches are made in honour of Muhammad and reported in the press in a way which we cannot find the praise of Christ at the Christmas festival. It is a salutary experience to read a Christmas newspaper alongside one reporting the '*Id-i Milad*.

The next point of interest is the attempt to expurgate the traditions. Tradition has been unkind to Muhammad as it has been unkind to Jesus Christ but a wholesale rejection of tradition would leave the biographer of Muhammad in a most unhappy position. Where is he to get his materials for a life of Muhammad? The Qur'an is inadequate in this respect. So we find this silence of some on the question of Muhammad and on the other hand the creation of a myth which is daily growing.

THE QUR'AN.

Professor Salim has complained of the Muslim's enslavement to the past in the matter of the exegesis of the Qur'an. The commentators of the 2nd and 3rd cents have fixed everything. There are no modern commentaries on the Qur'an. (He ignores Muhammad 'Ali's). Muslims have ceased to use their common sense and private judgment.

When the first few centuries have fixed the form of commentary, what new material is there by which the Qur'an can be reinterpreted? Qur'ans of early date are very few. There is nothing like the wealth of MSS. we have for the New Testament and though some people think that textual criticism is an embarrassment, yet we have the important compensation of early translations which are of immense help in the exegesis of the Scripture. Muslims have not.

The attitude of some of the Qur'an is that all that it contains is a re-emphasis of the fundamentals of religion stripped of the accretions of Judaism and Christianity. That it contains a protest against unessentials, against trinitarian philosophy and against the ascetic ideal. That it shews the way to the unification of the religious and the secular and substitutes a practical code for a nebulous idealism.

Abrogation in the Qur'an is felt to be a distinct handicap and tends to destroy the internal unity of the book of Allah. So there is proposed the doctrine of development. What we have is not abrogation but a careful analysis will shew that what have been regarded as abrogated verses are in reality verses which were given in preparation for more complete revelation.

J. W. S.

Why Preach Christ to Moslems?

“ ‘**I**F you will only organize Christian missions to the heathen in my province, instead of attempting to convert Mohammedans, I will do everything in my power to further and support them, but I cannot approve or allow, at any rate at present, the opening of a mission to the Mohammedans.’ So said the Governor of Nigeria, about thirty years ago. This policy was that of Lord Kitchener in the Sudan, of the British in the Malay States, and is not yet abandoned everywhere.

The validity and the necessity of carrying the Gospel message to Mohammedans have been questioned in times past and are being questioned to-day! The late Professor G. Kampffmeyer of the University of Berlin in "Whither Islam?" deals with the subject in the same attitude; his conclusion is that missions in the Near East among Moslems are as dangerous as they are futile and, for the good of humanity, should be discontinued.

Dr. Hugh Vernon White, a Secretary of the American Board, in the magazine called *Christendom*, plainly states that "Christian efforts to evangelize the Moslem have met with signal and consistent failure. The response to such efforts to-day is negligible and there is little likelihood of any marked change in the near future. . . . The Christian Church ought to quit trying to make proselytes of Mohammedans. It should bring the best works of Christian service to the Moslem world in a spirit of ecclesiastical and theological disinterestedness."

Father T. Bennerth, writing in a Roman Catholic missionary magazine for April 1930 says: "As the conversion of the great bloc of Islamic nations to the Christian faith is not to be expected in our century . . . it is of the highest value that Islam at least maintains the belief in God in purified forms. If this refuge of belief in God should vanish, then Western Christianity will be threatened by a new seat of danger."

When we compare these statements with the verdict of the Roman Catholic Conference, held in Louvain in 1930, we find that there also the entire world of Islam is labeled *le bloc inconvertissable*."

In view of such opinions and statements, what satisfactory reasons can be advanced for the validity and necessity of Christian missions to Moslems?

1. If the Gospel of Christ in its simplest form (which is also its deepest mystery) includes the Incarnation, the Atonement and the Resurrection then the world of Islam certainly needs our message for it is *news* and offers Good News to every Moslem. Islam is not a Christian sect or a Christian heresy. It is an eclipse of the Christ as revealed in the Gospel. It is an Arabian palimpsest superinscribed over the message of Jesus by another hand. Its categorical denial of the deity of Christ, of the crucifixion, of the finality of Jesus Christ as God's messenger and of His way of life through regeneration is evident from the Koran itself.

The analogy of Paul's attitude toward Jew and Gentile holds to-day as regards missions to Moslems and to other non-Christians. It was because the Jew had so much that was true and noble and yet needed the Gospel that Paul preached everywhere to the Jew first. Their theism, their knowledge of the Old Testament, their zeal for God, their passion for the Law did not invalidate their need of the Gospel but emphasized it. This implication would hold also for those Moslems of China, Africa and India who live in the midst of paganism or polytheistic ethnic faiths.

In the Near East and North Africa, we have an additional argument. *There* we are not merely trying to lead Moslems to Christ, but rather to *lead them back to Christ*. Here we have the argument of church history; the inspiration of the cloud of witnesses, the apostles and martyrs of the faith; and the very stones of ruined churches and monasteries would cry out if we were silent".

Dr. Zwemer in Missionary Review of the World, Oct., 1937.

The Fakir.

BY REV. E. E. WATSON.

(From *Our Indian Field, Organ of Australian Baptist Foreign Missions*).

AT the beginning of the present century a young Mahommedan, well-known as Jharu Mia, graduated and passed out of the Calcutta University. He gained some distinction as a student of Sanskrit, which subject is not often taken up by Muslim students. His home was about two miles from Comilla, and his parents were poor though respectable citizens.

Shortly after his graduation he secured Government service, and soon undertook the duties of a Deputy Magistrate. He only had a few years service to his credit when he was seized by a sort of melancholia and was obliged to give up Government service and return to his home in Comilla on a pension of 70 rupees a month.

What happened to bring about this unhappy condition of mind is not quite clear. We are given to understand that the learned young Deputy Magistrate was called upon to decide a case in which the chief accused was a Muslim holy man. The accused was convicted and the sentence pronounced. The prisoner turning on his judge, said that he had been wrongly convicted, and that the Magistrate would suffer as a result of his injustice and that within a short time. Strangely enough, the melancholia seized him within a few months, and Government authorities soon considered him too unbalanced in mind to continue his work.

After that for many years he lived quietly in his ancestral home, doing little or nothing except a little ploughing and reaping in the fields. After some years he was balanced enough to take a keen interest in religious matters, and took up the study of Muslim Scriptures. He discussed these with those who visited the home, and gradually he came to be regarded as a Fakir (Muslim holy man). As years passed he became widely known, and all sorts of superstitions grew up with regard to him. Water in which he dipped his finger was supposed to have healing powers, and it was no unusual sight to see bottles of water being taken to him. The devotee seized his finger

and plunged it into the neck of the bottle and went away, he believed with a bottle of balm for all woes. Gifts of fruit, sweets, milk, eggs and fowls were brought to him almost daily by those who now began to regard him as a man of great spiritual powers, whose blessing was to be sought, and whose curse was to be feared. So readily does India's religious sensitiveness lead her into paths of unwarranted regard and fear.

Other Religious Scriptures now claimed the Fakir's attention, and for some months he studied carefully the sacred books of Hinduism and Buddhism. These gave him little satisfaction, and he was not long announcing to his followers, Hindus and Muslims alike, that he found little of real value in these religions. About 1930 he took up fairly serious study of the Bible itself. He was greatly impressed with the teaching of Christ. Soon also he began to regard Christ as the supreme authority, and gradually the axis of his religious outlook changed from Muslim to Christian. He with great consistency, began to interpret the Koran in the light of the Bible. Some of his followers disliked this, and went with him no more, but his influence increased and scores of people were visiting him every week, taking him presents and seeking his blessing. It takes an Indian setting to make a Westerner realise how easy such a thing is in India. He now began to advise all who came to him to read the Bible and to learn Christian hymns.

Soon after our return from furlough at the beginning of 1933, the advise to read the Bible resulted in men coming to the Mission House, asking for Bibles and hymn-books. Numbers of these were sold. Our interest was at once awakened, and soon we were in touch with the Fakir who from then on gave us much room for reflection.

Having attended a Christian college in his student days, he was somewhat conversant with the Church of England and the prayer-book. His disciples came to buy this and other books, such as "Pilgrim's Progress," and the "Imitation of Christ." We began to take more and more interest in what was happening.

Gradually his religious discussions began to follow the line of more or less organised worship services on Sundays. Hitherto he had met his followers in the Mahommedan prayer house attached to the ancestral home. We shall never forget how amazed we were to discover on the occasion of our first visit to the village, a long bamboo pole standing in the ground just in front of the prayer house with a cross on top of it.

This was an unheard-of sight in a Mahommedan village. Soon these worship services aroused opposition, and his brother obliged him to have the services outside the prayer house, and for a while the cross on the bamboo was dislodged. With the aid of his followers, the Fakir now built a small place for himself.

Guided somewhat by the prayer-book for feast and fast days, and Scripture readings, he now shaped his worship more definitely on

Christian lines. He had two services each Sunday. The service consisted of hymns, prayers, and a sermon, the purpose of which was to set forth the truth and glory of Christ and the Bible as opposed to Mahommed and the Koran. Feast and fast days were carefully observed and regular offerings at all services now became an accepted practice.

The Fakir steadily maintained for some twelve months his services in his little house which was also used as his dwelling place. By the end of 1935 this place was considered to be too small, and also not dignified enough for worship. In 1936 he conceived the idea of building a church. With the aid of his followers a very fine building was erected. The cross now found its place on top of the building, and the church was called "Our Lord's Holy Catholic Church." A bell was purchased, and worshippers were called to prayer by its chimes each Sunday. Worship was more definitely Christian than it had hitherto been, and once again some of his followers fell back and worshipped no more. Nevertheless, it was a strange and thrilling sight to see a church right in the midst of a Muslim village, and worship being conducted in the name of Christ. One saw visions and dreams about the growth of the indigenous church. God's spirit is not limited to worn grooves of action. He works in unthought-of ways. There is no telling when He will lay hold of the work of the years and turn it to good account. Here was a case in point, and before our very eyes. Hope and fear ran side by side in all our thinking.

Unfortunately just at this time the question of the marriage of the Fakir to a young woman arose, and we protested, and for a season we felt bound to withdraw from him, his followers and the services. The protest was finally heeded and the marriage did not take place.

(To be concluded).

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. 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 Honorary Secretary:—

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