

Missionaries to Muslims League

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THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

By REV. E. M. WHERRY, D.D.

The message of the Gospel to Muslims is a message of peace. It approaches man everywhere as a word of reconciliation. It seeks to make peace between God and sinful men. The messengers of Christ are exhorted to seek the lost in the spirit of the Good Shepherd, who brings salvation to those who are subject to bondage. They bring glad tidings. They are living witnesses, showing in their life and ministry the love and compassion of their Lord and Master. Their words should be full of sympathy and earnest desire to bring sinful men into fellowship with God and His people.

These words will seem like mere truisms to my readers, and such they no doubt are. And yet is it not true that most of the literature written for Muslim readers is marked by a spirit of controversy that repels rather than draws? Is it not a serious mistake to assume the attitude of an antagonist rather than that of a friend? Is it not a mistake to begin by speaking of the things that differentiate between the Muslim and the Christian? I urge the method of approach, which regards the unbeliever, whether Muslim or Christian, or Hindu, as a man who through sin has become estranged from God, and whose conscience will attest the truth of our claim that men should truly repent of sin and turn to God.

The time will come, no doubt, when we shall have to present the claims of Christ as the almighty and everlasting Saviour, who took upon Him our humanity, *man's* humanity, in order that He might reconcile man to Himself, but our case will be stronger if we can illustrate in our own spirit and temper how we have been reconciled to God in Him. Many an unbeliever is persuaded of the truth of the Christian claim by the character and witness of a Christian friend. The great thing to be accomplished through the word and Spirit of God, is a conviction of sin and a desire to know what a sinner must do to be saved.

If our approach to the Muslim be that of an attack upon his prophet or his sect, setting forth the sinfulness of the whole Islāmic

system—true though every word may be—we shall close the door and their hearts against the message we would give.

If this contention be true, we need to revise much of what we have published, we need to lose sight of the Muslim and see the man—the man who needs to be saved—who needs to see Jesus. Shall we not accomplish this last by leading him to listen to or to read for himself the inspired record. For those who can read, the W. E. Blackstone illustrated Scripture leaflets are most suitable for wide distribution. Along with our message let us introduce social service—not as a simple philanthropy, but as a practical illustration of the Christian life. Especially should we “weep with them that weep,” and mourn with them that mourn. I have known of several apostacies which have resulted from the indifference and neglect of Christian neighbours.

We are about to enter upon a second special campaign for the evangelization of unbelievers. May I not ask our readers to urge everywhere, by example and precept, that we preach the Gospel of peace.

NOTES

We gladly welcome the Rev. Dr. Wherry's beautiful little article on our front page, dealing with the message of reconciliation. Is it not true that in all our literature for Muslims, and in much of our preaching, we are too ready to meet the *opponent*, instead of a sinful soul with a craving for the knowledge of Divine Love and Forgiveness and Peace? Let us be more constructive and less destructive!

Can We Make the League More Useful? Early last year a certain missionary resigned his membership because he considered the League had ceased to be a live organization. It was pointed out to him that any aggressive plan of campaign could not be organised during the war, and if we could only awaken Christian workers everywhere to understand the Muslim mind, and the necessary message for that mind, we would feel that the League is not dead, but a live and useful agent in the work of winning the Muslim world to Christ. Stir a mission worker on the Muslim problem, and in all probability you stir all the churches at his back. The fact that more workers are linking up with us every month, and that others are writing of help received from *News and Notes*, encourages us to go on. But cannot we do more than we have been doing? Will you help to bring about the proposal made in the next paragraph?

Will India Help China? Our hearts rejoice at the good news from our brethren in China, who have been so stirred of late over the Muslim problem. Mr. Rhodes, of Chefoo, has been praying that such a revival would come. For years the printed heading of his letter paper has had this motto: “*The Gospel of the Grace of God for China's*”

Muslim Millions." May the stream widen into a flood and carry everything before it!

In a recent letter, Mr. Rhodes makes a suggestion which we want every member in India to seriously pray about, consider and help to bring to fruition. It is this. Dr. Zwemer was quite unable to visit certain strong Muslim districts in the N.-W. of China, especially places like Kansuh, Shensi and Chinese Turkestan. The suggestion is that two brethren, one an Indian convert from Islám and the other a missionary, spend six months in this part, "where a friendly feeling, and an open door, offer such great opportunities." It is essential that both be specialists, should know English, and, of course, the Qur'án, and be able to speak Arabic, and by interpretation. "Deputations are nowadays so common that our Muslims would respond to such opportunities to meet with and converse with a follower of Christ who has left Islám. . . . And just as a Christian Jew has a very strong pull on an orthodox Jew, so a convert from Islám would draw many of our educated and leading Muslims to hear his story. The cost of such a journey need not be great. . . . *Indian Muslims visit Chinese Muslims* (as well as the 'Faithful' from other lands). Now here is the opportunity for *Indian Christians to send the light where it is so much needed*. We could name quite a number of centres of vital importance (in connection with Islám in China) where such a visit, unhurried and prayerfully arranged, would be quite practicable, safe, and of telling value. . . . The deputation could come any time between September and March." Will members write the League Secretary their opinion.

Muslim Converts' Testimonies. If members cannot help in the foregoing proposal, they may be able to help in the following, and this appeal is for our members everywhere. Mr. Rhodes writes:

"When Mr. Walter was acting during your absence, he very kindly gave me permission to publish in Chinese any of the Testimonies in that series in *News and Notes*, entitled 'How Christ Won My Heart.' This autumn I am issuing two of the series, 'Khalil-ur-Rahman of Bankipur,' April number, 1915; and that of 'Moziruddin Ahmad of Pabna.' This appeared in the September number, 1915. These two testimonies should be very useful, and we pray they may be signally owned of God. The others in that series do not strike me as so suitable for China as for use in lands where the work among Muslims is more advanced. By the way, any time any of your well-established ex-Muslim Christians feel like writing a simple testimony of the Lord's leading out of Islám into Christ, I shall be so glad to have a copy to read. If it appears suitable for use in China, we will (D.V.) use it in our Testimony series. We have thus far issued seven of these testimonies. The first came per Dr. Zwemer from Arabia; the second from Egypt; the third from a Chinese ex-Muslim convert; the fourth was from a Syrian Christian (ex-Muslim); the fifth came from Tunis; while Nos six and seven are from Mr. Walter's series in *News and Notes*. I have another about ready for publishing, and it has come from Cairo. These testimonies from living Christians are very helpful; they are widely circulated and call forth lively comment from our Muslim friends."

If members will send suitable testimonies to the Secretary of the League, he will see that they are duly forwarded.

Fakir.—Dr. D. B. Macdonald, in the *Encyclopædia of Islām*, gives the following meaning of the word 'Fakir'—"One who is in need, either physical or spiritual. Thus opposed to *ghanī*, one who is independent, rich; and commonly contrasted with *miskin*, one who is in a miserable state. A beggar is *Sā'il*, an asker. Thus in Qur'ān, xxv, 16, 'Ye are the needers (*fukarā'*) of Allah; but Allah is the Self-sufficient (*ghanī*).' Fakir has in consequence come to indicate need in relation to Allah and dependence (*tarakkul*) of every kind upon Allah, and is used in Arabic-speaking countries for a mendicant darwish. The saying ascribed to Muhammad, *Al-fakr fakhri*, Poverty is my 'pride,' has assisted this. In Western languages the term has been extended to cover Indian ascetics and yogis. The coincidence with the English *faker* is curious and sometimes misleading."

Turning from this explanation we looked up Trench's *Study of Words*, in which he bids us "note the many words which men have dragged downwards with themselves, and made more or less partakers of their own fall." Surely 'Fakir' is one of them; in fact, the East is full of such words which once had an honourable meaning but have been dragged in the dust. We echo Rabindranath Tagore when he yearns for a state among men, "*Where words come out from the depth of truth.*"

Our Old Friend the Objector.—Yesterday we were preaching on the village green to a crowd of Muhammadans when we heard an argument for the first time supporting the Qur'ānic form of punishment for theft. A Maulvie contended that by the British method of sending a man to gaol for stealing, great injury was done to the community at large, in that, after serving his time, he was set free again upon that community, whereas the Qur'ān put an end to his misdemeanour for ever by depriving him of his hands. We pointed out to the objector that there was a reformative aspect of punishment. Further, to deprive a man of the means of earning a livelihood for himself and those dependent upon him could never have been the wish of a just God. The Muhammadans standing round wanted to know from the Maulvie where he had been living all his days, that he should bring forward such obsolete ideas.

THE APPROACH TO MUSLIM MYSTICISM

(Continued from our last issue.)

Having determined to surrender himself wholly to the control of the Shaikh or Pir, the one entering upon the mystic way must realise that sin is a hindrance to progress. Hence in every real Muslim mystic there is an experience, often very deep, of a change of attitude

towards God and religion. It invariably means a crisis or crises. It is a conversion like that experienced by Rabindranath Tagore when, in a street in Calcutta, "the whole world became one glorious music, one wonderful rhythm." There are stories of many such spiritual crises in Islām, the most noteworthy being that of Al Ghazālī, the most famous Muslim theologian, who by the study of the philosophers was convinced intellectually concerning God, Inspiration and the Last Judgment, but failed utterly to come into touch with that inner light and spiritual power which intuitively he felt it should be his joy to possess.

He underwent a definite conversion to mystical views of God. He sought the light which illuminates the threshold of all knowledge. For a time he could not surrender himself, but at last the day arrived when he said, "On the one side the world kept me bound to my post (his secular employment) in the chains of covetousness, on the other side the voice of religion cried to me 'up! up!' thy life is nearing its end, and thou hast a long journey to make. All thy pretended knowledge is nought but falsehood and fantasy. If thou dost not think now of thy salvation, when wilt thou think of it? If thou dost not break thy chains to-day, when wilt thou break them?" (*Confessions of Al Ghazālī*, by Field, pp. 43-4). Al Ghazālī's striking spiritual crisis is used by Prof. W. James to illustrate his thesis that conversion is a psychological fact.

The struggle was long and severe. His great hindrance to victory was his passion for his profession. He had an overmastering love for his work of research and teaching. He says, "I probed the motives of my teaching and found that, in place of being sincerely consecrated to God, it was only actuated by a vain desire of honour and reputation. I perceived that I was on the edge of an abyss, and that without an immediate conversion I should be doomed to eternal fire." Like Muhammad and many another Muslim, he had an awful dread of "the Fire," and fear has influenced perhaps most of the spiritual crises among Muslim mystics.

The conversion, according to Sufiism, is made complete by three definite stages: (1) Repentance; (2) Renunciation; (3) Poverty. They correspond to "the Purgative Way" of Christian mysticism.

Repentance (*Twaba*) the best Sufis would describe as "the awakening of the soul from the slumber of heedlessness, so that the sinner becomes aware of his evil ways and feels contrition for past disobedience. He is not truly penitent, however, unless he at once abandons the sin or sins of which he is conscious, and firmly resolves that he will never return to these sins in the future. If he should fail to keep his vow, he must again turn to God, whose mercy is infinite. The convert must also, as far as lies in his power, satisfy all those whom he has injured" (*The Mystics of Islām*, Nicholson, pp. 30-1).

The point of contact is almost complete, but we have the action of the Holy Spirit on the repentant heart and His regenerative energy

in the life, of which Muslims are ignorant. At the same time, Muslim mystics have always felt and taught that there must be a work of God in the soul. They say the Qur'án teaches this in the text, "Whosoever shall strive for Our sake, We shall guide him into Our ways" (xxix, 69). Rabi'a, the noted woman mystic of Islám, used to say, "If He shall turn towards thee, thou wilt turn towards Him." The purifying, then, even with Sufis, is the co-operative action of man's repentance and God's influence in the soul.

Renunciation and poverty, from the earliest days of Islám, have been understood to mean the ascetic life, the forsaking of worldly goods, prosperity and reputation, as a sure means of gaining a spiritual attitude that will gain salvation. The Darwish dons the *muraqqa'* at (the patched frock), and goes through a long and severe discipline in fasts and nights of meditation on the Unity of God for the controlling of self. Christian mystics have tried exactly the same methods, although many found them injurious. Ignatius Loyala found that after fasting beyond a certain point the body could not digest the simplest food, so he forbade all such excesses among his followers, but not until he himself was ruined in health.

The first steps, therefore, in the Purgative Way of the mystic is repentance and the embracing of poverty in order to become detached from worldly frivolities. He delights in such names as Fakir (poor man), or Darwish (mendicant), or Sufi (coarse wool-wearer). And these terms mean to the mystic that he, by adopting them, is stripped of every thought or wish that would divert his mind from God. In line with this we have our Lord's "Blessed are the poor in spirit," etc., a consciousness of moral and spiritual defect, which produces that sense of humility, lowliness and dependence upon the Giver of every good and perfect spiritual gift which will help men in the blessed life.

The reason for the mortification, renunciation and asceticism in the Muslim system is based on the fact that man's worst enemy is his *nafs*, which Sufis and Fakirs interpret to be the evil self, or what St. Paul terms "the flesh." Many a Muslim in Bengal will tell you how troubled he is that he is quite unable to overcome this evil thing. It was interesting to read in the account of the Christian movement among the Fakirs of Jessore, how the Pir was largely influenced and drawn to Christianity by a little book called *The Mirror of the Heart*. It is a book that depicts most graphically the animals, birds and reptiles that usurp the place of the Lord of Love in the heart, figures the Muslim mystic is accustomed to, and goes on to tell how the Holy Spirit came and swept it clean.

Then the Muslim mystics have the way of Illumination and Ecstasy. And much is made of *Dhikr* (sometimes spelt *Zikr*), a kind of litany. It is based on a text in the Qur'án, that enjoins "the remembering of Allah" constantly. Dr. Macdonald says, "By reciting in rapid cadence and with physical movements and breathings such religious phrases as the confession of faith, doxologies, pious

ejaculations, etc., they work themselves up into a steady religious frenzy, or else cast themselves into a hypnotic coma." In his book, *Aspects of Islám*, the doctor tells how he attended a *Dhikr* service of one of the Darwish Orders in Cairo. He was impressed with the religious reality in the service; a devotional spirit characterised the whole proceedings. And it was not something got up for the occasion, but the religious life of the Darwishes week by week. The doctor called it "a Muslim prayer-meeting."

And this form of worship is coming to be an essential part of Muslim life. Canon Gairdner says that the bulk of the Muslim population of Egypt have Sufiism for their religion, and Sufiism is represented in the *Dhikr*. It helps to produce by physical means the ecstasy so necessary to illumination.

But true mystical purity, which partakes of the nature of angels, cannot be fully understood without knowledge (*ma'rifat*) and love (*'ishq*). These are words always on the lips of Fakirs and other Muslim mystics. Too many pretend to know their meaning long before they have made any progress along the Purgative Way. But since it is a sign of advancement, men delight to talk of gnosis and love, which are practically the same thing. The literature of the Sufis is saturated with ideas of love, for the knowledge of God has its roots in love.

We get some idea of the advancement made by the best Sufis in the doctrine of divine love by the study of a Muslim sermon on the Love of God, preached at Baghdad over 800 years ago by Al Ghazáli. Here are a few quotations taken from a translation that appeared in *The East and the West*, for July, 1910:—

"God alone is really worthy of love, and where He is not loved He is not known. Love of God is aroused by contemplation of the attributes of God. Happiness in heaven depends upon love of God, for the very essence of the future life is to arrive at God as at an object of desire long aimed at and attained through countless obstacles. But if in a man's heart there has been growing up a love of that which is opposed to God, the conditions of the next life will be altogether alien to him. The signs of love of God are: (1) No dislike of the thought of death, which will be the meeting of a Friend. (2) Willingness to sacrifice one's own will to the will of God. (3) Constant effortless remembrance of God. (4) Love of the Qur'án, of Muhammad, of men and of all God has created. (5) Desire of privacy for devotion. (6) Ease of worship. (7) Love of the followers of God and hatred of infidels. The greatest obstacle to love of God is selfishness—ambition and pride also form an impassible veil between God and man."

While there are many such beautiful utterances to be found in the mystical literature of Islám, there are other passages given in poetic pictures and allegories which are repellant to a Christian. Not knowing the perfect Christ as the Revelation and concrete example of divine Love, not understanding His character, words and works to be compelled by that Love, to whom shall these mystics go? Muhammad is no standard of perfection. They fall back on examples of human love, sometimes high and lofty in sentiment, but more

often erotic in the extreme. They picture the soul in relation to God as a lover to his Beloved, where love binds them into one. They also use such figures as "tavern," meaning place of worship, "wine," signifying love of God, and "the old man of the tavern" as the spiritual guide. (In the use of these figures, Omar Khayyám and Hafiz are notorious.) "Drink wine that it may set you free from yourself." By that these mystics mean, "Lose your phenomenal self in the rapture of divine contemplation."

The ideas and phraseology of such men have been known to make many a pantheist, hypocrite, drunkard and sensualist, but there are others who have been led along a higher road to some conception of the knowledge and love of God. And all the way much thought is given to such important subjects as the divided will, the enslaved self, the inner spiritual jihad, the inner voice, the need for heart purity and the vision of the unseen.

The Unitive State, or end of the journey, as Nicholson says, "Is the culmination of the simplifying process by which the soul is gradually isolated from all that is foreign to itself, from all that is not God. . . . Deification, in short, is the Muslim mystic's *ultima Thule*."

So while Muslim mysticism begins hopefully, it ends hopelessly. It is nothing but the Hindu's idea of absorption. It is really the annihilation of personality, whereas Christianity teaches union with God, which is a perfect union of persons. Not that man's will is obliterated, but it has come into perfect accord and action with the divine will—a real moral affinity, exemplified fully in our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Bring near Thy great salvation,
Thou Lamb for sinners slain;
Fill up the roll of Thine elect,
Then take Thy power and reign;
Appear, Desire of Nations,
Thine exiles long for Home;
Show in the heavens Thy promised sign,
Thou Prince and Saviour Come."

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Members are requested to send news and requests for prayer to*

JOHN TAKLE,
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