THE RIGHT ANGLE OF APPROACH

IN my earlier years in the Punjab, where we have a fair number of converts from Islam, it struck me that, as compared with converts from Hinduism, those from Islam were colder Christians and lacking both in spirituality and devotion to Christ. Further experience has confirmed these first impressions. At first one sought the solution of this in the characters of the men themselves, but this did not seem to solve the problem, nor was there any solution in the character of the two religions. One would naturally expect the Hindu to be more inclined to the mere ritual and orthodox side of Christianity than the Mohammedan. The real explanation is to be found, I think, not merely in the character of the men or their religions, but in these two things combined with the methods which we employ to win them.

The Hindu religion, while an elaborate system of ritual, leaves its votaries perfectly free to believe in the millions of Hindu deities or in none of them. So long as a man attends to the ceremonies of his religion, his intellectual belief may be anything, and he may incorporate nearly the whole of Christianity (the whole except its ceremonial parts) in his creed without ceasing to be an orthodox Hindu. The result is that such men are not drawn to us by any arguments of reason. They can accept all our arguments and remain Hindus. In earlier days this was, perhaps, less marked. A young Hindu, on his intellect being reached by Christian argument, and who was desirous of having acquaintances of the same stamp of thought as his own, could then find such only in the Christian Church. Hence, in the early days of our mission colleges and schools, conversions were more frequent than they are now when in every city a Hindu lad, intellectually convinced of the superiority of Christianity to his own religion, can find hundreds of men with whom to make friends in his own religious

circle, and so he is content to stay with them. To reach a Hindu and lead him to confess Christ, one needs to reach not his head only but his heart. The heart once reached and some devotion to Christ aroused, it follows naturally on this that the convert walks more readily in the spiritual life, and is not content with mere outward acceptance of his new religion. We recognise this fact, and in dealing with Hindus, while not neglecting any possible controversy, we give more weight in our teaching to the character of Christ, His promises, and the spiritual side of our religion.

The Mohammedan, on the other hand, can be dealt with on the intellectual side. Every point in dispute between him and ourselves can be made a matter of argument and of evidence, and we can give such intellectual reasons for the points in our religion which a Mohammedan at first disputes, that it is not difficult to convince him that we have reason on our side, and that his old creed cannot be supported by reason or history. The honest man who is so convinced will be ready to abandon the position which he finds untenable and to come over to the superior position, but he does so not because of any devotion to Christ, nor for any desire of living a spiritual life, but merely because his intellect tells him that we have more reason on our side than the Mohammedans have on theirs. Becoming a Christian, he brings his old religious ideas with him. He accepts our creeds without more thought, he studies the Bible (if he does so at all) not to find food for his spiritual life, but to find arguments in support of his new creed and against his old one. For the spiritual teaching of the Book he cares nothing. In late years I have come across typical instances of this, of which I will mention two.

One was a Moulvie who was a member of a class of divinity students under my charge, and he told me bluntly that my lectures were no good to him ; for in lecturing I dwelt on points which he did not care for, and hardly touched on those which he wanted to learn about. Asked what he wanted to learn from the Bible, his reply was that he studied it to find all that could be used in controversy with Mohammedans and Hindus. He had no

conception of the Book as the guide to the spiritual life, and so had no interest in teaching which dealt mostly with the Bible in this aspect.

More recently I have come across another instance like the first: an ex-Moulvie who for a time, at the request of a friend, came to me every day for Bible reading. The subject I selected was the Gospel of St. Luke. He showed no interest in it, came more and more irregularly, and finally ceased coming altogether. The lessons from that Gospel, bearing on the life we had to lead, had no interest for him. I have read the end of Romans viii and the commencement of Romans ix with two men. The face of the one lighted up at the thoughts and words of the first part, and he has since proved the truth of it by laying down his life for Christ. The face of the other remained unmoved as we studied and talked over that grand passage, but his keenness awoke when we got to the words, "Christ . . . over all, God blessed for ever." This did appeal to him, and he wanted to talk about it and to argue.

The fact that we can and do win Mohammedans in argument has had its influence on our dealings with them, and we have, it seems to me, made intellectual argument our main line of attack to the neglect, perhaps, of the spiritual and moral line of attack. While on the one hand books written for Hindus neglect the intellectual and deal with the spiritual superiority of Christianity, those intended for Mohammedans dwell on the intellectual and neglect the spiritual. The intellectual line must fail to produce the results we want in one respect. Growth in spiritual life depends very largely on a man's knowledge of his own sinfulness and spiritual weakness. It is in proportion as a man realises this that he will press forward to a high standard. Intellectual arguments do not touch on this point, as a rule. The Mohammedan who considers sin to consist in not being orthodox, or in the neglect of some of the prescribed duties of religion, gains no new light on this essential point. Convinced intellectually, he transfers his ideas from his old creed to his new. To express doubt about the Athanasian creed would be sin, and so would wilful

neglect of worship on Sunday. When such men go out in their turn to preach their new creed, or when they stand up in a Christian congregation to do so, their preaching is either entirely of the controversial stamp or on the duties of a Christian to attend to the forms of his religion. They do not, as a rule, preach either "Christ" or "Him crucified."

I do not say that all our converts from Mohammedanism are wanting in spirituality. One of the most spiritually-minded men I know, of any nationality, is an ex-Mohammedan; one of the few preachers I know, who, to quote a friend, "is equally good in preaching to a bazaar audience or to a Christian congregation" is the same; one of the few men whom I ever heard preach well of sin in the bazaars, was the same; and we all know such men; but when one analyses the way in which such men were drawn to Christ, one finds that it is very rare for such a man to have been won by our usual methods of controversy. In some cases the cause of their conversion has been that they had some sense of their own weakness and sinfulness, some longing for something better than their own religion supplied, some spiritual hunger or thirst, which has been satisfied not by arguments about Christ, but by Christ Himself as met and known in the story of the four Gospels. Others have been drawn at first not by this knowledge of their own spiritual defects but by the person or teaching of Christ (Dr. Imad-ud-din wrote that when he had finished the study of the Sermon on the Mount, he had finished with the Koran), and have come subsequently to learn their own weakness, as St. Peter did.

In view of these facts, for such I consider them, what ought to be our line? Controversy there must be; but I think the line taken should be less controversy for establishing Christianity than controversy to expose the weakness of Mohammedanism. Let us know all that we can of their ways of thought, and, above all, of the Koran, and let us devote our energies to rendering their position untenable; but when that is done, let us not substitute for their old belief a merely intellectual belief in Christ, or an elaborate system of argument in favour

of our creed. But, keeping in mind that he and he alone is a Christian who has been brought into personal touch with Christ and has been taught by Him, let us seek to bring those whose faith is at all shaken into touch with Him.

In other words, do not let us aim at teaching them the creeds of Christianity and what we ourselves have learned of Christ, so much as to put them into a position where they themselves may learn of Him. To do this well we need ourselves to study the methods of Christ, and need to have the patience that He had in teaching men. On the one hand, He freely spoke of His oneness with the Father from the beginning of His ministry, but, on the other, He did not insist on all His followers accepting this from the first. He did not make this matter a test of discipleship or even of apostleship, for we know from St. John xiv that neither Thomas nor Philip had any clear ideas on this subject even much later. We know, too, what His terms for discipleship were: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." Recognition of our own need of a teacher, recognition of Christ as the teacher we need, and a willingness to carry out His teaching as we learn it—those were His terms. We too often begin with what came last in His teaching. The A B C of our teaching is too often the Sonship of Christ, and we elaborately explain it, or try to do so, in the formulas we have ourselves stated it in. This is to attempt to drive in a wedge with the thick end foremost. Let us make our starting-point the Manhood of Christ, the perfect Manhood, and let us rather leave it to those whom we seek to bring into contact with Him to learn by personal contact with Him that "never man spake as this Man." A mullah whom I once led to read the Gospel of St. Matthew, said to me a year later: "This is a strange book; take that command, for instance, 'Thou shalt love thine enemy.' We have nothing like it in our book, and that is a command of no human origin." Our definitions of the Sonship may come in useful to a man who has learned by contact with Christ to believe, as St. Peter learned to believe and to confess, "Thou art

the Christ, the Son of the living God," but they are often harmful when thrust on a man as the first thing he must give an assent to.

In conclusion, let us use every weapon we can lay our hands on in order to drive the enemy out of his entrenchments, but let us remember that he is not a Christian who substitutes the entrenchments of Christian orthodoxy for those of Islamic orthodoxy ; but he who becomes a follower of Christ and a learner from Him. The difficulty in carrying out the line I propose lies in ourselves. We are too fond of orthodoxy, and hold up our hands in horror when anyone expresses ideas differing from our own. Those and those only will we accept as Christian brethren who express their belief in the identical terms that we do, and we forget that our formulas were not formulated by Christ Himself, but only arrived at after long, patient and arduous thought by our Christian forefathers. If the Christian Church that we are seeking to build up in Mohammedan lands is ever to be a power, it will be so not when they intellectually accept the creeds which we have hammered out, but when they hammer out creeds for themselves, and to bring about this end we must leave men and teach men to think for themselves and to learn for themselves what the Christ is.

Peshawar.

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