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EDITORIAL

HOW IS RECONCILIATION POSSIBLE?

Many of us are forced to the conviction that we are facing a new era, a new day, in our relations to Moslems. We believe that the hour has come when with sacrificial love and tactful sympathy we should advance to win them to the allegiance of Jesus Christ. The period of controversy, of apologies for the faith, of answers to bitter Moslem attacks, was that of the ploughman. The hard soil has been broken up; rocks once thought adamant have crumbled. Old objections to the Bible as a book are no longer current. The circulation of the Scriptures has been their vindication. After centuries of seed sowing and centuries of the witnessing of the Oriental Churches through slow martyrdoms, after the missionary effort through colleges, evangelists and hospitals, we believe the hour has come to reap.

But if we are to win our Moslem brethren for Christ, by what method are we to proceed? Our call and commission is clear and unmistakable. Archbishop Leighton said, "If our religion is false we ought to change it; if it is true we ought to propagate it." This is the implication of every page of the Gospel. It is the obligation of Christian love to share the life which we have received.

The Moslem also has his convictions and his great passion. Islam has always been aggressive. We admire the Moslem for the boldness of his faith. But have we been

equally bold? God is for us. Jesus Christ has been crucified and is risen. The Spirit of Pentecost has come. All things are now ready. What wait we for? Is there any lack in God, in Christ, in the Spirit, or is the fault in us?

If we are to seek to win our Moslem friends, what plan are we to follow? Two methods stand out in clear contrast: the polemic and the irenic; the method of argument, debate, contrast and comparison on the one hand and on the other hand the method of loving approach along lines of least resistance.

Some go so far as to tell us that we are to omit from our message everything that offends the Moslem mind, to avoid all criticism of Islam and to leave out those Christian doctrines and teachings that might give offence. Moslems themselves are divided on this issue. Some publicly state that Islam and Christianity can easily be reconciled; others are conscious of the deep chasm that yawns between the two systems. Helali Bey, of Alexandria, a retired Egyptian official, who made some name as a literateur and poet, recently published a chart, setting forth the new spirit of Islam according to his views. Just as in the recent outburst of nationalism we saw everywhere the Egyptian flag with the Crescent embracing the Cross, so Helali Bey advocates complete union of Islam and Christianity. His ingenious chart shows the picture of a sheikh and a clergyman with hands clasped as twin brothers. He asserts that even the numerical value of Islam and Christianity are identical and says: "The object of religion is to bring union and concord between the different parts of a nation, to make them one whole and indivisible society; in fact, religion is behaviour." He fails to see, however, that behaviour depends on belief, that conduct is determined by creed.

Let us hear the other side. In the last number of the *Review of Religions* (Quadian, India), the leading article is on "Christianity versus Islam" and sounds a different note.

"The ideals of Christianity and those of Islam seem outwardly the same. I speak of the ideals of the two creeds as contradistinguished from the ideals of Christendom and Moslemism. The two sets of ideals differ very much among them in spite of kinship of names. The ideal of the Christian creed is no more similar to the ideal of the present day Christendom than is the ideal of Islam to the ideal of the present Moslem world." The author, an educated Indian Moslem, goes on to say that there is no possible agreement, for the Moslem idea of Deity is real and reasonable, "while the Christian Deity is an inscrutable paragon to the human mind, an absurdity, a deadweight, restraining mental activity." The Christian plan of salvation, he says, is "derogatory to the perfect wisdom and power of God; no sensible man can honestly accept it . . . The Christian plan of salvation is through faith in Jesus. Mankind have fallen from their original blessedness through the sin of their first parents. They could only be saved through the vicarious office of a redeemer. To make them fit for such a consummation God has chosen from among the nations of the earth a small tribe and made them the medium for the gradual unfolding of His scheme of salvation. While the rest of the human race remained neglected and uncared for, the chosen people were given the Law as the first instalment of Divine favour and as symbol of the great mercy which was to follow. This appeared in the advent of the sinless Redeemer, 'the only begotten Son of God,' who to satisfy the requirements of Divine justice, offered up his own sinless life in vicarious atonement for the sins of men. A belief in him therefore entitles the believer to the benefit of the atonement." After this frank statement of the core of Christian teaching, he goes on: "The Islamic plan, on the other hand is rational and natural. Man is born in innocence in Islam, which is 'the nature made by Allah in which he has made man' (Koran). He falls through the influence of his surroundings and by outraging his own nature. He can attain salvation only by right knowl-

edge and right actions. There is no special favor. There is no 'chosen people.' God has sent teachers or prophets to all nations, who have taught their respective peoples truths regarding the purpose of human life and the way of attaining same, or in other words, truths concerning the attributes and ways of God and human conduct. *Salvation is to be achieved by individual effort.* 'No one will bear the burden of another.' There is nothing occult about the business. When by repeated good actions man realizes the goodness which is his goal, he has already achieved his salvation." This is the Moslem gospel.

So we see that in the ranks of Islam as well as among missionaries there are two views regarding the relations that are possible. Reconciliation at any price or clear reiteration of our message and investigation of the truth, cost what it may. A clash of ideas, a collision of thought, has been the inevitable result whenever and wherever Islam came into touch with Christianity. The first conversion from Islam to Christ took place even before Mohammed died (632 A. H.). One of Mohammed's own companions left Arabia and went to Abyssinia, and there the impact of a living Christianity, although superstitious, opened the eyes of that Arab, Obeid Allah bin Jahsh, so that he wrote to Mohammed, as the Arabs themselves relate, "I now see clearly and you are still blinking." It was the same bold message that the blind man in the Gospel story gave the doubting Pharisees.

There is no reconciliation except through the Atonement. This is fundamental. When we ourselves understand the mystery of the Cross, the love of God to our Moslem brethren is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Without the doctrine of the Cross love degenerates into mere sentiment. Comparative religion is of less value than positive religion on the mission field.

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