

THE PROBLEM OF THE CONVERT FROM ISLAM

PROBLEMS connected with converts from Islam may be divided into two categories, Spiritual and Social. The spiritual problems are those of training in the knowledge and practice of Christian Truth; that is the presentation of spiritual truths so as to be known not merely as an intellectual science, but as a moral force transforming human life in every department. Side by side with this are problems arising from the constitution of a native Church, and questions of discipline including the attitude to be adopted with regard to Divorce, Re-marriage, and Polygamous marriages,—questions apparently easy to be disposed of, but actually more complicated than they appear.

A study of experiences on various Mission Stations leads one to the conclusion that the discussion of these problems is necessary in order that we might decide upon a more or less common basis of action. Perhaps the best way of studying these matters would be to examine particular cases which have already occurred, a course which at some future time could easily be adopted.

These problems of discipline are intimately connected with the social problems, which in turn may be divided into two orders: the Domestic, and the Economic. The domestic problem consists in the building up of a Christian home-life. This includes questions relating to husband and wife, parents and children, the enfranchisement and education of women, mixed marriages of Moslem and Christian, native and European, fasts, feasts, customs relating to births, circumcision, marriages, deaths, burials, and the numerous other ways in which Islam is interwoven into the fabric of the Moslem social order. In the *fight with Islam* it is to these matters which are external and accidental as much as to the internal and elemental

question of faith that attention must ultimately be directed. The difficulty does not arise so much from the attachment of the convert to the Moslem social order,—much of which he will of necessity discard in relinquishing his old faith—as from the influence and claims on the convert of his Moslem relations; and not only his kinsmen, but relatives by marriage, business associates, and the men with whom he comes in contact in the market, café, and the public meeting place.

It is here that we meet the economic problem since the solution of the domestic problem involves the solving of the economic; for if the convert were financially independent of his Moslem compatriots he would be in a position to work out his own salvation albeit with fear and trembling. What we have to fear is not so much the violent persecution leading to bloodshed and death, as the “continual dropping of water which wears away the stone,” the constant and wearing friction of petty persecution. The convert from Islam, unable to escape the old social order, has sought for economic reasons to compromise and propitiate his Moslem relatives by adhering to the old customs whilst accepting the new faith. His divided interests have too long hindered progress and arrested the natural development of Christian Life in its domestic and social aspects. The deadweight of custom and tradition must be removed. This will only be accomplished when the economic problem is faced and compassed.

Thus it is seen that all these problems are intimately connected. Christian teaching must eventually be reinforced by disciplinary action; and both are related to the social problem in either its domestic or economic aspects. To attempt to solve the spiritual problems while neglecting the social is like,—to use a military figure—the front line of an army capturing positions which the second line does not move up to hold so that a further advance may be made. Hence the necessity of issuing a call for a second line to advance and fortify the positions already captured, by establishing a new social order among the converts from Islam.

The end of the World War will increase the urgency of this economic problem. Among the thousands of young North Africans who have served in the army or auxiliary services of France are quite a number of converts and enquirers who have kept in contact with the Missionaries by correspondence. What is to be done with these men on their return? If they are to contribute to the upbuilding of a Christian Society suitable occupations must be found for them, otherwise the fullest advantage will not be taken of their enlarged experience. At the same time, while the end of the war will, by the return of these men, in a measure intensify the problem, it will also offer, in part at least, its solution by the provision of new workers who might form the second line of advance. For, may no reinforcements for the mission field be drawn from the ranks of the Christian soldiers, who, having undergone new experiences and acquired new tastes will have thus been fitted for Christian Service abroad?

The leaders of the nations at war are already considering the problem of demobilisation, and are accordingly making their plans. Should not we as leaders in the fight against Islam make plans ahead, in order to be prepared to take full advantage of the unique opportunities which will be afforded after the war for fortifying our positions in view of a new offensive.

The development of missionary work may be divided into three stages, each of which is marked by a difference in the focal point of public attention.

The first is when the message of the missionary is the subject of consideration; and curiosity asks: What is the foreigner's message? Is it worthy of a hearing?

The second is when the missionary himself is the object of attention, curiosity then deepens to interest. The message is satisfactory, but does the missionary practice what he preaches? Is his teaching that of an idle dreamer or is it practicable?

The order of these two stages may be and is sometimes reversed, and the conduct of the missionary will awaken interest in his teaching; but whatever the order, if the questions relating to the missionary and his message are

answered favorably, a group of enquirers will gather around him; some of whom will become converts. The work will then enter upon the third stage of its development, when the public eye will be directed to the convert rather than to the missionary. This third stage is the critical one, and the whole future of the work depends upon the answers which the new enquirers will find in the experience and conduct of the convert. It is comprehensible that the foreigner should be able to live up to his religion, the question is, can the native live up to it if he adopts it? Can he become a Christian and live the Christian life among his fellow natives? Can he live in the old environment and yet not be of it? Can the rules of the new faith be applied to native life in the home and in society? Or does the change of faith mean such a social as well as moral upheaval as renders it impracticable? Do the claims of Christ so conflict with the rules of the social order as to make it necessary to leave the old environment in order to establish a new social order?

The enquirer may not formulate these questions himself, but if the missionary puts himself in the place of the enquirer he will see that upon the answers furnished by experience to such questions depends the whole future of the work and if it is proved by experience that the dead-weight of Moslem tradition and custom and character hold down the convert to the low level of the old life, then it becomes the duty of the Christian Church to see that such opportunities are afforded him as to give the new faith a fair trial; for we must remember that it is not only the convert who is on trial but the Christian faith in the convert.

It is of little use to theorise about these matters, the answers to the above questions must be furnished by experience; and experience proves that in most cases, for there are exceptions, such measures must be taken to protect and develop the new life in the convert as to involve a change of environment as well as of heart. In other words we have to face the reconstruction of the social order as well as of the religious life.

The Moslem religion is an essential part of the fabric

of the Moslem social order; and from birth to death in all life's relations, the yoke of Islam rests upon the necks of those who live the social life of its adherents. Only a hypocrite can live this life without being a Moslem. The claims of Christ conflict with those of Mohammed from the cradle to the grave and as no man can serve two masters, the convert must cut himself off more or less from his old environment. (2 Cor. 6.)

Moreover this is not always a question of choice to be decided upon by the convert or the missionary. The man who lives up to his new faith, and who seeks to apply it to all life's relationships, will soon find himself cut off from the old environment by being boycotted, ostracised, driven out and disowned. In a more enlightened community he may find a faction who will champion his cause, and secure him certain rights and privileges; he may be protected by his Government from violent persecution; but as long as he remains in the old environment he will always be exposed to danger; and that is more to be feared than that which threatens physical suffering or material loss because more dangerous to the cause of Christ. In any case, whether it be to receive the outcast, or to give protection from the insidious perils that threaten to dwarf the soul life of the convert, the responsibility to make suitable provision for either or both of these needs is indisputably that of the Christian Church.

In the early stages of the work the missionary's need of domestic and other helpers furnishes openings for the first converts. The needs, however, are not elastic, and sooner or later the number of converts will exceed the demand for labour. Then commences the problem: What are we to do with the surplus?

It may be suggested that there is plenty of room for evangelists and colporteurs, and that all the converts could be thus employed. The number who can be engaged in these capacities in Kabylia, with which this paper is especially concerned, is comparatively small; the majority have not sufficient education to follow a course of training as evangelists, and it is found difficult, and in many cases impossible for native evangelists unaccom-

panied by Europeans, to obtain an entrance into villages where they are unknown. Colportage work also is limited as, owing to readers being few, the demand for books is small.

Again it may be suggested that converts may be encouraged to set up in business. Experience proves that to throw them on their own resources is to expose them anew to the old temptations, for their adversaries will not hesitate to do all in their power to compromise them; and if they are induced to enter into business partnership with Moslems, the shipwreck of their testimony is even more certain.

The convert needs the constant moral support of the missionary's presence and example, as well as his spiritual instruction; and this involves more or less regular employment which could only be provided by the establishment of industrial branches.

Industrial branches of mission work have been in operation in one or two centres for some years, and have met with such a measure of success as not only to justify their existence but also to encourage the extension of the movement. They have, however, proved that if they are not to be a burden on the missionary and on mission funds, they should be managed by people of business habits and training, who are well acquainted with the trade or profession concerned. If the missionary, who can only give his divided attention to the industrial branch, and who has only such knowledge of the trade as he has acquired on the field can make such an adjunct to his spiritual work worth while, what could not be done by the consecrated activities of Christian men and women who would devote their business abilities and technical talents to the solution of this pressing problem?

Have the possibilities of the mission field as a sphere of activity for the Christian artisan been sufficiently made known? Has the investment of consecrated capital in industrial missions, earning little dividends in cash but big dividends in souls been sufficiently canvassed? Has it been suggested to the retired Christian business man to combine his love of travel with the examination of the

mission field as offering him recreation for himself in creating, or helping to create a new social order in the Moslem World?

The missionary may not feel called to "leave the Word of God to serve tables," neither may he afford to give time and strength to providing for the material welfare of the converts; but a clear call can be issued to those who are better qualified to grapple with and solve these problems.

The openings offered in the North African mission field for industrial work may be roughly divided into two categories: utilitarian and profitable. These two classes of work offer opportunities to two different classes of men. The utilitarian includes trades or occupations which meet the requirements of the people themselves, such as the building trade and its allied branches of carpentry and smithing; agricultural employments including the olive oil industry. The profitable would include the manufacture of articles for sale in the great seaports to tourists and others, and for export trade; such as carpets, carved wood-work, metal ware, fancy leather goods, etc.

The utilitarian would offer employment for the lower classes and those of little education, whilst the more intelligent could be employed in the arts and handicrafts section.

The aim would be to give the convert or serious enquirer such a knowledge of his trade or occupation, and to inspire him with such a zeal for doing his work well, that he would by his superiority command employment in the open market; or to equip him with such superior implements for his trade as would give him an advantage over his Moslem competitors.

The greatest possible advantage would be taken of the opportunities and facilities offered by the locality in which the mission station is situated. Where land is cheap and readily obtainable agriculture could be undertaken; and, in this case, effort should be directed towards improved methods of work, both by the provision of better implements and a more scientific cropping of the land.

In a progressive neighbourhood where secular education has been provided, and the younger men have travelled, working in European centres or even abroad, there will be an increasing demand for better houses; and some articles of simple furniture.

Other neighbourhoods may already have metal or wood-work industries, which could be developed if better equipment were provided; for the natives show much taste in designing but lack ability in execution, chiefly in consequence of inferior equipment. And if they without a work-bench, planing up their wood by holding it on the ground by their foot, and without the means of finishing off well the articles they make, can nevertheless earn a good living, with a well equipped work-shop, and some technical training, articles of furniture could be produced which would fetch big prices in the best markets.

The development of the wool industry, carpets, rugs, coverings, etc., offers big opportunities for work amongst women and girls; and would provide one of the quickest and surest methods of educating and elevating them. The fancy leather trade also is a promising sphere of employment which might be exploited in the interests of native converts, and the cause of Christ.

By such a training as this the convert would be helped to a state of independence such as would free him to a great extent from the power and influence of his old associates, without draining the exchequer of funds contributed especially for spiritual work, and without the pauperising influence of indiscriminate charity. It would also create amidst the Moslems an intelligent and progressive Christian element which by superior skill, greater zeal, and honest dealings would recommend the Gospel as an uplifting force.

Due provision, of course, would be made for giving moral and religious, as well as technical instruction; ever keeping in view the objective of building up a Christian community, having, at its heart, a native church; and, as its ideal, the evangelisation of its own people at its own expense.

That is a precious story the parable of the Good

Samaritan, teaching us the wondrous grace and sympathy of our Lord; yet may we not also deduct from it the neglected lesson of the practical duties of the Christian Church? For on the morrow of the man's salvation, the noble benefactor committed him to the charge of the keeper of the inn, with the tender injunction "take care of him." Our Lord's earthly life was strictly in conformity with this parable, and reveals his present heavenly attitude. The responsibilities which were uniquely His, He faithfully fulfilled; but He always recognised and pointed out the responsibilities of others and of His followers. Thus in the miracle of feeding the five thousand it was His to perform the miracle of supply, but to His disciples was left the duty of administration. When at the bedside of the Ruler's daughter, who lay dead, He alone could speak the life giving word, but that done, "Take care of her" expresses the spirit of His injunction that something should be given her to eat. So also in the case of Lazarus, the command He gave with reference to the risen man "loose him and let him go," expresses for all time the responsibility of His Church to new born souls; and if from any sepulchre of false and faulty religion, the binding relics of the dark prison may be seen upon those who have heard their Lord's commanding voice, surely its name is "Islam," and it is ours to discover the means of unloosing the winding sheet of custom and tradition, that so we may assist the Moslem Lazarus to experience in full the declaration of Christ: "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

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*Djemaa Sahredj, Kabylia.
Tazmalt.*