

A MOSLEM POLICY

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The Rev. S. M. ZWEMER.

Dear Sir,

You have done me the honour to ask my opinion on the matter of a policy for Protestant missions in the Moslem world. Let me confess from the outset a double perplexity: how dare I state my opinion on such a matter, in presence of devoted students of Islam like yourself in Arabia and your learned colleagues of all the missions in Egypt, Turkey, India, Persia and the Malay Archipelago? How also, unfamiliar as I am with the preoccupations of the missionary spirit, may I venture without presumption into a region of ideas which is strange to me? To these questions my response can only be a sincere testimony to my admiration for all those who, like yourself, spend themselves for an ideal, in the attempt to benefit Moslem humanity.

Allow me then to bring the matter back within the limits of my professional horizon, and to consider, not the penetration of Islam by Christianity, but merely the penetration of Moslem civilization by Christian civilization. Even from the point of view of eventual christianization, this stage would seem to be a necessary one. This human soil, the Moslem world, is not unlike those immense territories in South America which are covered with most wonderful harvests after their earlier preparation by a time of pasturage. Sown in the ground in its natural state the seed would bear no fruit, or else the growing stems would be choked by many surrounding weeds. But let the flocks precede the plough, and the day of harvest will come in its season.

A profound misunderstanding intervenes between Christian and Moslem civilization, due to the disappointments, the humiliations and the ruin that the "policy" of Western ethics brings to the East—and nothing which will be firm and lasting can be done to

improve these relations so long as the obstacle of legitimate suspicion endures. Detached from the Old Islam by modern conditions of railways, telegraphs, and the press, Mohammedans came spontaneously forward to meet the Western powers which beckoned to them glowing with hope. The rise of liberal thought was such, that it threw down with one blow the Imamate of Persia and the Khalifate of Turkey. But from the very moment of the accomplishment of the revolutions in Persia and in Turkey, social bankruptcies for the *élite* and economic failures for the people have turned the New Islam, as in India, to *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* ideas. Their nationalisms, less and less Moslem in content, have become more and more Islamic in their manifestations by the very necessity of existence. Men speak of Pan-islamism, and they believe in Moslem renaissance, but this is not the real truth of the case. No, the truth lies in the organic reaction against disappointing Christian civilization. How should the Moslem world not react, turning back upon itself again, after so many grievous lessons ?

In Persia, Western ethics propagated philosophical education ; and the Russians hanged at Tauris whosoever drew inspiration from the culture of France. British justice in Egypt invited the *fellahin* to forget the régime of forced labour ; but the peasants of Denshawai paid with their lives or their liberty for the pleasure and after-dinner imprudence of excited sportsmen. In Morocco, republican equality guaranteed to the Berber farmers the integrity of their property ; but France has not yet punished those implicated in the scandals of land speculation. All the world over, as soon as Moslems appropriate the dominant ideas of European civilization, or resign themselves to submit to them, cruel experience teaches mistrust.

But Christian missions, whether Protestant or Catholic, are, through their doctors, their hospitals and their dispensaries, the embodiment to Moslem eyes of philanthropic zeal, and they represent a further positive sanction through their schools. The *élite* know this and the common people do not ignore it, but the bitterness of

having been duped by the sum of Christian civilization stifles their gratitude for the help rendered by altruistic agencies. Before asking from Islam the maximum of concessions, the very idea of the minimum concession, against which every thing revolts it, must be justified to it from its own point of view.

The problem is not one incapable of solution. Let us suppose a resolution of the World Conference of Protestant Missions, or, in the meantime, a decision of the Continuation Committee which proclaims the intervention of the great influence of missions, in order to co-operate with the New Islam. Let us suppose it to be declared that, wherever Protestant missions exist in the world of Islam, all Moslems of European culture will find friends and helpers sympathetic to liberal thought. From all sides then the eyes of civilized Islam would be turned upon missions, as in a former time the eyes of the oppressed in the Balkan countries were turned upon Gladstone, the public adversary of their oppressors.

This very simple step would be sufficient for the Islam of the press, of the universities and of European culture, in short for the Islam which to-morrow will guide the general movement of the Moslem world. As soon as Westernized Malays, Indians, Persians, Turks, Arabs or Berbers saw an imposing authority use its influence to sway the political and social ideas of the European peoples on their behalf, they would be able to welcome the moral ideal of Europe with less scepticism.

As for the common people, the banner of liberalism would count for little with them. The rivalry to their minds between Islam and Christianity is in reality merely an economic one, as it was in the times when the Torde-sillas Convention and the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope quickened Moslem religious fervour through the appearance of the mercantile fleets of Europe in the Indian Ocean. The same phenomenon is taking place to-day in Central Africa, where European competition is increasing ten-fold the missionary activity of Moslem commerce. Here then arises an opportunity for Christian missions to interest themselves in the economic destiny of the peoples they wish to attract. Arabs, Persians,

Indians, Kabyles—nearly all Moslems have a gift for commerce, it seems almost as if it were inherent in their religion. Assured of the sympathy of the missionaries and, at times, of their support, the Dioula of the West Coast of Africa would make friendly overtures to them instead of making war ; and the opening of commercial schools in Algiers, Tunis, Cairo and Constantinople would gain for missions allies which as yet they have not won.

If medical and educational missions did not exist, it would of course be necessary to begin with these means of approach, but missions possess these agencies already, and it is no longer a question of beginnings but of developments. Therefore let missionaries and their supporters look about them. They will soon perceive that there exists a surrounding atmosphere of defiant opposition, which can be summed up under two general criticisms : “ The relations of Christianity and Islam inevitably profit the former rather than the latter ; materially Christianity always gains to the detriment of Islam and socially Christianity never accords what it promises.”

This two-fold cause of mistrust which separates, has in it also the secret of confidence which unites.

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These opinions would stand out clearly from a general inquiry into the social life of the Moslem world, the study of which, moreover, would render valuable service in every way to the work of Protestant missions. One feels this, for instance, in seeing those who turn their attention to Africa attribute to Moslem brotherhoods a preponderating influence in the Islamic propaganda in Negro countries. As a matter of fact, when Duveyrier and his successors launched the “ Moslem brotherhood ” they were by no means ignorant of what really is the mystic “ way ” to which they applied this descriptive term. Struck by the militant character which the religious process develops in many of the groups which issue from the mystic schools, they brought it into prominence ; it was a discovery of great importance from the political point of view, but of less grave import from a social standpoint. It has been thought absolute when in reality it

is only relative, whence has arisen a misconception which has been exaggerated by those who understand in a literal sense what is really a merely figurative term. This error moreover has brought with it a curious reaction in the other direction. It has come to pass in French West Africa that there is a distinction made between "brotherhoods" and "mouridism," the hierarchy of marabout and mourid is suspected, whereas that of sheikh and disciple is considered to be harmless. The Russian government has already set an example in the Caucasus by creating a special mouridism for Schamyl instead of leaving it as it was before, Nakshibendee. Thus a medley of vague opinions distorts the very simple question of "brotherhoods" and "ways" in African Islam.

In order to gain clear knowledge without losing time over comparisons, missions need to have a dictionary of selected reference,—a necessary detail which would lead up to the general idea of a sort of sociological survey of African Islam, with handbooks, so to speak, like those by which the Intelligence Service prepared for the conquest of the Sudan.

Possessed of a topical guide as a basis of information, African missionaries would soon come to report as many varying origins in the modern expansion of Islam among Negroes as in its former history. They would discover ethnic growths in some districts and religious expansions in others; they would perceive with greater clearness the respective rôles played by the slave trade with its raids, and by the more peaceful missionary advance of Islam undertaken by caravans or by colporteurs. The sheikh of the mystic "ways," who is of small importance to the Moslem Negro of merely skin-deep islamization, would appear in his proper relation in a district of long standing islamization. To place him in the midst of a group of mourids capable of understanding and of propagating his doctrine or his ritual, would not be to suppress his importance but only to reveal it as it really is. For instance, it would not be to belittle the influence of Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba over his initiates of Cayor in Senegal, if instead of petitioning the government of

West Africa for restrictive measures against Islamic brotherhoods, one would face resolutely the economic object lesson which is furnished there in the cultivation of pea-nuts, which is monopolized under colour of mysticism by the followers of the marabout.

On the East Coast there would be less thought of the spreading of Turkish influence by mosques built at great expense by Indian merchants, Bohras and Khodjas or Sunnites, and more attention would be given to the social ascendancy of these merchants who are both rich and energetic. Also it would not be forgotten that if, on account of the Indian immigration, Swahili Moslems leave the shores of the ocean for the shores of the great lakes, Somali Mahdism will colonise from north to south, right into Jubaland.

The Western world could no longer hold to its erroneous belief in a struggle against a stationary, unified Islam which does not exist; but it would seek for the truth involved in the question of a balance of useful or harmful contact with an Islam which is variable and varied, ceaselessly in evolutionary movement like all human nature.

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The example of Africa, which has been used here to reply to a given question, evokes the general case of the whole Moslem world without further commentary. It was only interposed at such length so as to lead up to a final conclusion to be expressed in a wish. Protestant missions are occupied just now in preparing for their own use an annotated bibliography of Islam. Is it too much to ask that they should both enlarge and specialize their programme by undertaking a recast—from the sociological point of view—of the “Dictionary of Islam,” which was dedicated by Thomas Patrick Hughes to “the first Bishop of Lahore.” Half of the finished work is complete already since the theoretical part of the dictionary only requires to be amplified and brought up to date. There remains then the sociological half, for which the four volumes of the reports presented at the conferences at Cairo and at Lucknow suggest inspiration on every page.

The form of the work—whether dictionary or series of handbooks—matters little, the essential is that the information given be objective and unconfined by any of the boundaries of erudition, literature or history. Social specialization must be its aim. The nomenclature of marriage ceremonies and of the customs connected with marriage in different countries has an undoubted ethnographical interest ; but from a social point of view, real comprehension of the Moslem family is of much greater importance. And in order to influence the family there is no need of opinions hostile to polygamy, but rather there is need of a thorough and constructive understanding of the formation and the rôle of the family in various Moslem centres. However learned explanation of texts may be, it will always be of less value than a judicious and practical appreciation of the rôle of Ulemas, mullahs, sheikhs and pirs in every class of Moslem society.

Let us then form a hypothesis and suppose that the central authority of Protestant missions to Moslems decides to give to the preparation of a Social Handbook on Islam, the work necessary for an adaptation of Hughes' "Dictionary." Let us admit that it be planned more didactically than theoretically, after the manner of "Things Chinese," by J. Dyer Ball, and let us imagine that this outline has been distributed for revision and adjustment amongst missionaries in every part of the Moslem world. Then all that would be necessary would be that a successor to T. P. Hughes should give himself to this task for eighteen months or two years with the help of two or three secretaries. His total expenditure of time and money would hardly amount to that devoted to one volume of the "Jewish Encyclopædia."

Assisted in their work by the guidance of a technical manual, which would be practical and reliable, missionary pioneers could approach with much greater certainty the immense domain which is open to them. With a fuller understanding of the relation of life to society, they would assimilate more easily those adaptable and rational methods of influence, without which Christian civilization must always approach Moslem civilization in a

wrong way. Missionaries should do everything they can to enable Moslems to think and to say amongst themselves: "Missionaries understand us well, and they know what we expect from the civilization they represent. They are not only useful to us intellectually and helpful to us philanthropically: they defend us socially and protect us economically. Their work does not bring us into a snare of weakness but it confers an alliance of strength."

The dawning and the increase of these beliefs in Islam will make it more accessible than it is of itself to the moral ideal of which the practical returns so far escape the Moslem mind. In the missionary march of progress towards penetration of the Moslem world, they will be, by social psychology, the key to the dominant position between the road of confidence which prepares the way for understandings, and the road of distrust which leads to rupture.

Between Moslem and Christian civilization the odds are not equal: from oscillation to oscillation the latter will overcome in the end. It is already in the ascendant, but so slow is its progress that any great movement which could be satisfied with so little would be self-condemned as sterile. The importance of the world-wide work of Protestant missions forbids any such impossible satisfaction. It imposes upon all workers the thorough and proper method of a Moslem policy.

Yours sincerely,

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Paris, May, 1912.