



# MISSION

to Islam and Beyond

A Practical

Theology

of Mission

JENS CHRISTENSEN

Islamic doctrines stand in stark contrast to Christian theology, and a study of Islam can make us value even more the truth and the grace of the gospel. This book challenges Christians to understand more thoroughly, essential biblical doctrines. It then provides some in-depth understanding of Islamic teaching, enabling the reader to grasp some of the philosophical and doctrinal features of Islam.

**Rev. Canon Dr David Clayton** *Federal Secretary, Church Missionary Society, Australia*

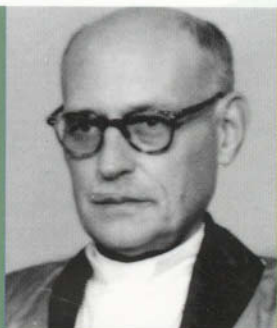
Bishop Christensen's name is legendary in north-west Pakistan. His approach to Muslims and to Islam comes not only from practical experience but from deep suffering. Much of what he writes is full of the deepest wisdom, even if his theological ideas are quite particular. We do not have to agree with every detail of his thought to know that here is someone with an appreciation of the uniqueness of Christian revelation, which is held together with sympathy for those of other faiths.

**Right Rev. Dr Michael Nazir-Ali** *Bishop of Rochester, England*

Jens Christensen was no idealistic armchair theorist. He was a missionary apostle whose faith was hammered out over many years in one of the world's most difficult environments. Combining exceptional experience, knowledge and theology of both Christianity and Islam, Christensen engages his readers and urges action.

He is uncompromisingly rigorous, yet sensitively honest in his pursuit of truth, even if that leads to martyrdom! In an age where absolutes are diluted to more comfortable relativism, and preaching is replaced by dialogue, Christensen stands as an immovable rock. His position and conclusions can be neither dismissed nor ignored. I commend the man and his message.

**Dr Stuart Robinson** *Crossway, Melbourne*



**Jens Christensen,**

*1899–1966, was a theologian of great calibre. A Lutheran Bishop and pastor, he was a man who worked most of his life amongst Muslims. Few men have loved and understood the Muslim as he did.*



**New Creation Publications Inc.**  
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# Mission to Islam and Beyond



# **Mission to Islam and Beyond**

Formerly published as  
*The Practical Approach to Muslims*

**JENS CHRISTENSEN**

NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.  
PO Box 403, Blackwood, South Australia 5051  
2001

First published by  
by Mrs. M. Christensen & The North Africa Mission  
originally titled *The Practical Approach to Muslims*  
© 1977

Republished by  
NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.  
PO Box 403, Blackwood, South Australia, 5051

© 2001  
The Society-in-Aid  
Bjergholt 19  
6200 Aabenraa, Denmark

National Library of Australia cataloguing-in-publication data

Christensen, Jens, Bishop  
Mission to Islam and beyond

New ed.  
ISBN 0 86408 224 X.

1. Islam—Doctrines. 2. Islam—Relations—Christianity.
3. Converts from Islam. 4. Mission to Muslims.
5. Christianity and other religions—Islam. I. Title.

261.27

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Cover design by *Jane McLean Design*

Wholly set and printed at

NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.  
Coromandel East, South Australia

[www.newcreation.org.au](http://www.newcreation.org.au)

# Contents

<i>Editor's Note to the 1977 Edition</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface to the 1977 Edition</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Publisher's Foreword to the Current Edition</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>A Biography of Jens Christensen: Missionary to the Pathans in the North-West Frontier Province</i>	<i>xvii</i>
1. Introduction	1
<b>SECTION ONE: JUST HOW ARE YOU GOING TO APPROACH THE MUSLIM?</b>	
2. Means	13
3. Criticism	26
4. Politics	39
5. Proclamation—I	50
6. Proclamation—II	61
7. Intolerance	73
<b>SECTION TWO: JUST WHAT ARE YOU AIMING AT?</b>	
8. Individual Conversion or Mass Movements?	87
9. Preaching, Teaching and Witnessing	100
10. The Muslim Convert in the Church	115
<b>SECTION THREE: JUST WHERE DOES YOUR CHRISTIAN LIVING FIT IN?</b>	
11. Collective and Individual Responsibility—I	129
12. Collective and Individual Responsibility—II	144

- |     |                                      |     |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-----|
| 13. | Good Deeds in Relation to Evangelism | 159 |
| 14. | Prayer in Relation to Evangelism     | 175 |

**SECTION FOUR: WHAT ABOUT THE QUESTION OF UNIVERSALITY?**

- |     |                            |     |
|-----|----------------------------|-----|
| 15. | Is Christianity Universal? | 191 |
| 16. | Is Islam Universal?        | 202 |

**SECTION FIVE: IS IT ‘A BATTLE OF BOOKS’?**

- |     |                            |     |
|-----|----------------------------|-----|
| 17. | Yes and No                 | 221 |
| 18. | Inspiration and Revelation | 232 |

**SECTION SIX: IS IT LAW OR EVANGEL?**

- |     |  |     |
|-----|--|-----|
| 19. | Wherein Did Christ Differ from Jews in the Matter of Faith?  | 247 |
| 20. | How Does Your Concept of Faith Differ from That of a Muslim? | 259 |
| 21. | Is Islam Law or Evangel?                                     | 271 |

**SECTION SEVEN: WHAT ABOUT THE DOGMA OF THE HOLY TRINITY?**

- |     |                               |     |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----|
| 22. | Is This Dogma Preachable?—I   | 283 |
| 23. | Is This Dogma Preachable?—II  | 294 |
| 24. | If Not Preachable, Then What? | 308 |

**SECTION EIGHT: WHAT ABOUT THE ETERNAL SONSHIP OF CHRIST?**

- |     |                              |     |
|-----|------------------------------|-----|
| 25. | Conceived by the Holy Spirit | 321 |
| 26. | Born of a Virgin             | 333 |

**SECTION NINE: WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD MUHAMMED?**

- |     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| 27. | Muhammed’s Conception of God in Relation to Yours | 345 |
|-----|---|-----|



28.Muhammed’s Conception of Preaching in Relation to Yours	356
29.Muhammed’s Conception of His Book in Relation to Yours	366
30.Muhammed’s Conception of Ethics in Relation to Yours	379

**SECTION TEN: WHY HAS CHRISTIANITY  
NOT DEVELOPED A SUNNAH?**

31.Just What is Sunnah?	393
32.Is a Christian Sunnah Possible? If Not, Then What?	404
33.Why Does the Muslim Object to Our Principle of Ethics?	414

**SECTION ELEVEN: A FEW COMPARISONS**

34.Belief in Allah—Belief in God the Father	429
35.Belief in Books and Prophets	440
36.Predestination and Fatalism	453
37.Resurrection and Judgment	464



## Editor's Note to the 1977 Edition

Because of the constant demand from new as well as from experienced missionaries for copies of Jens Christensen's lectures, Samuel Schlorff of the Church Education and Development Service of the North Africa Mission felt that we should prepare this material for republication. As in places the English was delightfully Pakistani, my job has been to shorten some of the sentences without changing the contents in any way. During the past two years we have been trying to find a publisher who would accept this book but none was forthcoming. We have, therefore, been compelled to use our offset machine normally employed for printing Bible Correspondence Courses in Arabic. Hence the present format.

I would like here to express my gratitude to Mrs Christensen for her help and encouragement as we worked on this project, to Gladys Fox for doing the typing in the midst of her many other duties, and to Kathleen Parson for proofreading the text.

I would be grateful to receive your comments and criticisms.

*June 1977*  
*Iain MacKellar*  
*Ecole Radio Biblique*  
*249 Av. de Montolivet*  
*13012 MARSEILLE*  
*France*



## Preface to the 1977 Edition

For several years there have been requests for Bishop Jens Christensen's lectures on 'The Practical Approach to Muslims' which have been out of print. An edition of them in book form is therefore very welcome.

Bishop Christensen spent a lifetime working among Muslim Pathans in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. He was probably closer to Pathans both in their thinking and in the use of their language, Pushto, than any other westerner. I had the great privilege of working under him for seven years, and later I succeeded him. As few others he was committed to the Church of Christ and to the apostolate to Islam. His own scholarly study of Islam was profound. Nevertheless, he trusted his experience of the living Islam rather than the academic presentation of it by Western scholars. For his whole lifetime he was grappling with Islam as a theological challenge to the Christian Church and its mission. He is one of the very few original thinkers in missiology since the Second World War. As a person and as a theologian he was always scrupulously honest and never willing to accept an easy way out unless it was the answer to the problem. This is why Jens Christensen's books, whether in Danish, English or Pushto, are always interesting and reward the reader. It is due to his efforts that we have a relatively rich Christian literature in Pushto, and his excellent Pushto translation of the New Testament is among the best in any language of the subcontinent.

Jens Christensen's 'The Practical Approach to Muslims' may be felt by many not only to be provoking, but also to be putting the questions too uncompromisingly. Bishop Christensen never believed in qualifying his statements for fear the point might be lost. This is therefore a book for those who are willing to think and struggle with the difficult questions that Islam poses for Christian mission. Perhaps the real reason why some may not find this book acceptable is that Bishop Christensen is absolutely honest, never tries to hide behind pious phrases, never seeks for easy solutions and is never evasive. This attitude may be unpopular in some circles today. But surely it is now more necessary than ever in our striving for dialogue and a sympathetic approach to Islam to take Islam entirely seriously.

There are two points on which I think Jens Christensen's call to an honest approach are especially applicable today. First, there is an approach to Islam which too easily tries to find common ground in religious terms which seem to be similar, but actually have quite a different content. The term 'revelation' is one of these. Jens Christensen stresses that the Christian concept of revelation as revelation of God is something quite different from the Muslim idea about revelation from God. Many Muslims would agree here with Bishop Christensen.

Secondly, Jens Christensen puts a question mark against our attempt to use instruments such as good works, or philanthropic institutions such as schools and hospitals, to convert Muslims. Today there seems to be a growing awareness that very often our use of such instruments has been interpreted by Muslims as an exploitation of their economic, medical and educational difficulties. Jens Christensen stresses, in my opinion rightly, that God Himself is the subject in Evangelisation, and the only instrument He uses is the evangelist who proclaims the Gospel. This book shows us that the problem in mission to Islam is theological, and he challenges us to take this seriously. Perhaps the reason for the neglect of the apostolate to the Muslims is that the Church has been afraid of facing these theological questions connected with Islam.

I hope that this book will be not only a help to those who are trying to grapple with these problems, but also a challenge to the Christian mission to take Islam seriously and to be willing to rethink our often superficial understanding of the Gospel. I heartily recommend Jens Christensen to all who are working among Muslims, or who are otherwise interested to see what an honest approach to Islam implies.

*Right Rev. Arne Rudvin  
Bishop of Karachi, Pakistan*

## Foreword to the Current Edition

As can be seen by both the Editor's Note in the 1977 Edition of this book, and the Preface given by Bishop Arne Rudvin, formerly Bishop of the Diocese of Karachi in Pakistan, this volume is of immense value. Originally titled 'The Practical Approach to Muslims' in the 1977 Edition, we thought it better to give it its present new title. We would like to thank Rev. Erling Albinus, Chairman of The Society-in-Aid, Denmark, for permission to republish this book, under the title 'Mission to Islam and Beyond'.

The present Publisher—New Creation Publications Inc. (NCPI)—is a non-profit organisation which has published over three hundred and fifty books by its own writers, including myself, and which seeks also to find books which, though out of print, are valuable. The whole work is on a voluntary basis and no workers receive stipends or honoraria from NCPI.

My wife, family and I lived and worked as missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Pakistan from the years 1957 to 1966. It was my privilege to know Bishop Jens Christensen, who was a Danish Lutheran Bishop working on the North-West Frontier. I was the Founder-Principal of the Pakistan Bible Training Institute at Hyderabad, Sind. One of the Bishop's clergy was the Rev. Len Patsold who, with his wife and family, worked with the World Mission Prayer League. Len was also Vice-Principal of our Institute. Later he went to the North-West Frontier and opened another Bible College. Len had a tremendous regard for his Bishop, as also did I. Arne Rodvin was a right-hand man to Bishop Christensen until, later, Arne became the Bishop in Karachi of the Church of Pakistan.

My own knowledge of Jens Christensen was of a man who was a theologian of great calibre. I would say unhesitatingly that he towered above all others of us in the land. He was a man who worked most of his life amongst Muslims, suffering deep opposition to the point of great tragedy. Arne Rudvin's preface is of great value in understanding the practical approach to Muslims which Christensen knew and passed on to others.

Some of us regard this particular book as of great theological and practical value for today. Few men have loved and understood the Muslim as did he. Few men have really understood the Christian gospel as did he. Those who really study this volume will find their theological knowledge increased, their insights deepened and their theology questioned.

The reason for changing the title was to tell persons whose prime interest is not Islam, that the body of theology they will gain from this book will stand them in good stead as persons, and as ministers of the gospel of Christ, no matter to whom they proclaim it. Some may react to this theologian but I doubt whether they will ever unseat him. I consider this book as outstanding in the field of doctrine, proclamation and what we are pleased to call 'missiology'. Any Seminary or College library without it will be the poorer for that fact.

In publishing this book we have a hope that it will become not only a text book on the substance of Islam, of true theology and of mission, but that it will be a book which will affect us all deeply, and equip us for the work of the gospel so that there will be a great resurgence of apostolic faith and practice. We send it forth in that hope, and with gratitude to God for a pioneer of the faith.

*Geoffrey C. Bingham*  
*Adelaide, 2001*



# A Biography of Jens Christensen

## MISSIONARY TO THE PATHANS IN THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

Jens Christensen was born on the 24th of August 1899 in Chicago, of Danish parents. His grandparents had immigrated from Denmark to USA in the previous century. The one couple hailed from Thisted in Jutland, and the other from Copenhagen. They probably all settled in Chicago on arrival and there met each other. They had a common background in the pietistic revival movement in Denmark.

Jens' father, Christen Christensen (died 1944), an engineer in the American Telegraph Service, and his mother, Margrethe Poulsen (died 1947), were members of the Presbyterian Church, and their children grew up in a very pious home.

During the First World War, America came to the rescue of France by sending troops to the French–German border. Jens volunteered for service and joined a regiment bringing provisions to the front line. Back home in 1918, he resolved to become a pastor/missionary abroad, and at once started to prepare himself for the task at the New York Missionary Training School in Nyack. It was founded in 1882 as the first Bible School in USA. Affiliated to this school was the 'Christian and Missionary Alliance'—the CMA mission.

Jens was sent to India by this society in 1922, together with another young missionary T. Wiley. They were sent to the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) to learn the language and start mission work there. Here it is worth looking at the luggage JC chose to bring along. The allowance was mainly spent on books bought second-hand: 'The Church Fathers', Calvin's 'Institutes', commentaries on the Scriptures, the Greek language, dictionaries and grammars. Also handbooks on technical subjects, such as drawing and construction work, and on top favorite American poetry.

At Mardan in the NWFP they were met by an old CMA missionary, Mr Robertson, who gave them quarters. Mardan was a well-known township

in the NWFP for two reasons: (i) it was the home of the famous British regiment ‘The Queen’s Own Guides’, who had subdued unruly Pathan tribes, making part of the NWFP habitable for ordinary citizens; and (ii) the Danish Mission, Zenana Hospital, founded in 1906 by a Danish lady doctor, Marie Holst. The hospital was supported by the ‘Danish Tent Mission’ (later called the ‘Danish Pathan Mission’), and run by Dr Anna Bramsen, assisted by Danish nursing sisters and a local staff.

The Danish missionaries at the Zenana (women) hospital had long felt the need for work amongst men, and the Home Board agreed. So when, in 1925, Jens applied for work in the TM/DPM mission, he was happily accepted, so much more because he had become engaged to one of the nursing sisters, Margrethe Rasmussen! They were married in January 1926.

Because the CMA had changed its plans and wanted to strengthen other parts of their mission field, Jens was free to join another mission-society. However, he wanted very much to stay on in the NWFP. From the very start, he had wholeheartedly studied the Pushtu language and the Pathan way of life, and had come to respect and like the proud and self-reliant people.

His first book in Danish was about the Pathans and Islam. He also felt at home with the Danish Lutheran Mission and its teaching. He was given the tasks: to preach the Good News at Mardan and in the surrounding villages, to take care of the pastoral work in the small Christian community, and to produce Christian literature in Pushtu.

In his introductory letter to the chairman of the Home Board he wrote, ‘I am and intend to be first and foremost a preacher of the Word, because the Bible says that “it is through the foolishness of the gospel that men are saved”’.

He divided his work into three categories: Evangelisation, Instruction of the Christians, and Literacy Work, that is, comprising tracts in Pushtu about the Christian faith, translation of the Bible, and opening of reading rooms for distribution of the literature, and as meeting places for personal talks and dialogues.

In M. A. Taib he found a lifelong co-worker. Taib was a Muslim convert from a village in Swat, where his father was a mullah. He had been baptized by Mr Robertson. He was a writer and a poet, a composer of several hymns, and versified Jens’s prose writings, making them more palatable to the Pathan taste.

To begin with, Jens spent much time in the reading room at Mardan, when not travelling in the district with Taib and other Christians to contact the people and preach the Word. The need for literature in Pushtu was obvious. In 1927 the 'Pushtu Literature Committee' was formed; six missionary societies were involved and Jens chaired the committee. The reading room at Mardan, called 'Dar ul Tabligh' (house of learning), became the center for printing and distribution.

Books from English, Danish and Urdu were translated, including: 'The Passion of Jesus Christ' and 'The Life and Teaching of Jesus'; the Altarbook, with prayers and texts for the Church Year; Luther's smaller catechism; several hymns in Danish; and 'Why I became a Christian' by Sultan Paul from Urdu.

Books with titles like 'The Best Friend', 'The True God', 'Conciliation', 'The Difference between the Death of Christ and the Death of Prophets' were translated from English sources. In the Old Testament we find common ground with Muslims, so books about the Patriarchs and about Ishmael were found. 'Stumbling Blocks' only in English and Danish was Jens' answer to a young student who had demanded a logical explanation of the Christian doctrines.

In 1931 Jens began the translation into Pushtu of Matthew's Gospel, followed in 1936 by the translation of John's Gospel, followed soon after by a new edition, versified by Taib, and with a commentary by Jens, presented in the best tradition of Muslim religious writings—a tradition which was respected in the publications from Dar ul Tabligh. 'The British and Foreign Bible Society' met the cost (as it later did with the translation of the whole New Testament).

Taib, working as a librarian, kept a record of the distribution of tracts, booklets, and Bible portions. It made the annual reports Jens' sent home interesting reading. In 1938, after 10 years with the committee, it showed that 37 different books and tracts by 14 different authors had been published. 148,000 copies had been printed, which had been widely distributed through the province and even across the border to Afghanistan, the closed country.

Taib also studied theology with Jens and in 1938 he was ordained pastor by Bishop J. Sandegren, from the Lutheran Swedish Church in South India. In 1939 the church building at Mardan stood ready and was consecrated by the Anglican Bishop, George Lahore, in April.

There were now two congregations: one Pushtu and one Urdu at Mardan, as well as small ones at Malakand and Swabi. Taib became a travelling

pastor, now meeting his fellow men in new situations, giving rise to many questions as a Christian Pathan serving poor Christian communities.

When the Second World War broke out the Danish Mission was cut off from its home base and its support. It required some rethinking and Jens received a commission as recruiting officer at Mardan in the 'Allied Cause', that is, the united forces against Hitler, his regime and confederates.

The office was in one of the old hospital buildings, so Jens just had to cross the road to find himself in his own office, where he also chaired the committee for the translation of the New Testament from Greek into vernacular Pushtu. It was done very thoroughly under the auspices of 'The British and Foreign Bible Society', and was finished in 1945.

Jens' concern about church leadership and the work of evangelists and missionaries found expressions again and again in letters, articles, reports and lectures.

From 1950–60 he worked steadily on a correspondence course comprising 37 lectures. There were students in several countries. We now find the lectures in the book 'The Practical Approach to Muslims', edited by a mission society in North Africa.<sup>1</sup> The book has also been printed in German as 'Christuszeugnis für Muslime'. The Danish title is 'Konfrontation. Islam og Kristendom'.

To help young preachers, Jens published his sermons for each Sunday in a church year. In 1955 he prepared the Constitution for the Lutheran Church in Pakistan (PLC), and in 1959 'The Book of Common Worship of the Pakistani Lutheran Church', with the Creeds and the Augsburg Confession, was published. He was consecrated Bishop of the PLC in 1955.

Jens Christensen was a soldier in the Church Militant, and at the frontline. He was loyal to the last in spite of much illness and many trials. He was an inspiring leader and a good friend of many different people, who enjoyed the cheerful hospitality of his and Margrethes' home. He was only 67 when he died in 1966. At his side was his faithful wife and secretary Margrethe who, until her own death in 1983, very actively supported and promoted his work.

At the front of the Mardan Church there is an inscription, in Jens' beautiful Pushtu handwriting:

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<sup>1</sup> Republished in 2001 as *Mission to Islam and Beyond*, by New Creation Publications Inc.

This is eternal life to know thee  
who alone is truly God and Jesus Christ  
whom thou has sent (John 17:3).

This is now his farewell to the Pathans.

*Miss Karen Friis Nielsen*  
*Fellow-worker of Jens Christensen*



## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

1. Every national Christian and every foreign missionary needs to study the history and facts of Islam. Without a good general knowledge of the religion of the Muslims you will get nowhere with them. Beside the question of general knowledge there is, however, also the very acute problem of your practical approach to Islam and the Muslim. Many serious and unhappy mistakes are made quite unwittingly simply because the Christian has not had any help in thinking out the problem of approach. 'What is the right way of getting on with it?' The answer to that question is the subject matter for discussion in this present series of lectures.

2. The Church Fathers loved to speak of that part of the Church which is still on earth as the *Church Militant*. That is to say that *we*, the present generation of Christians, are the Church Militant. We are in the great struggle between light and darkness. St Paul in his day was in the thick of the battle, not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness. We as the Church Militant have to come to grips with Islam, not as an interesting scientific problem, nor as a historical fact, but as the powers of darkness that struggle against the Revelation of God in Christ.

3. Now coming to grips with Islam is not, definitely not, a study of comparative religion. That study is science, and therefore not our job, as the Church Militant. In the study of comparative religion the tendency is to grade religion as dealers grade eggs before putting them on the market. As a study of the facts of human life, we have no quarrel with this science as such; as the Church Militant we must regard it as being outside of our sphere.

4. It is only when that absolute distinction between light and darkness is clear and firmly rooted in your mind, and you realise that you, in your position, must come to grips with Islam, not as an interesting study of human development, but as a power of darkness striving against Truth as it is incarnated in Christ, that you will be able to benefit by a study of

comparative religion (especially in relation to Islam) and see the many relatively good things and the glimpses of truth found in it, and relate it properly to the whole.

5. It is just here that our course of lectures should help you. You must relate your conception of Islam to your conception of Christianity. There is no way of avoiding that. You will find those who call the Quran the devil's book, and others who say it is an expression of a lofty belief in one God. Both points of view are in reality an effort to jump over the hedge where it appears lowest. The first is simply saying that *everything Islamic is devilish and bad*. How easy! 'I am all right and you are all wrong.' But—what arrogance! St Paul saw through a glass darkly. He had to sweat through the great problem of justification by faith versus justification by keeping the law. He could not say of the law, that it was devilish. And belief in one God in itself is certainly not devilish. No! You cannot be honest with yourself and get around it so easily.

6. On the other hand, when the Quran is spoken of as an expression of noble faith in one God the idea seems to be that we do not need to do anything more about it. A very comforting theory indeed! Those who take this point of view seem to forget that Judaism was also 'lofty monotheism', but our Lord and His Apostles certainly did not let it go at that. In other words the Christian who sees in Islam a noble faith in one God, and therefore lets it go at that, has actually only found an excuse for not coming to grips with Islam. He is being scientific when he should be militant.

7. Now let your New Testament look at the Muslims. What do you find? It has nothing but good to say of the law and the prophets, and yet it introduces an entirely *new* element, namely faith in the grace of God as the basis of salvation. Every individual Jew, Muslim, Christian, and heathen is then Judged according to his reaction to *this new element*. The Jew could not see it that way, nor can the Muslim. For them the new element is a contradiction of the old. In Christ it is a fulfilment, not a contradiction. If you are to be true to New Testament teaching, you have to keep this seeming contradiction in the foreground. Easy? Hardly. But then who said that it was to be easy?

8. This new element is responsible for the fact that Christians approach every kind of people on earth. And the approach in every case is different. Therefore you will find that much of the teaching you got in the west, or from westerners, needs to be re-adapted to fit your work with Muslims. Ask any one who really has come to grips with Islam, and he will invariably say that in his contact with the Muslim he has been forced to approach



the teachings of his home Church from an entirely different angle. Your experience will be, if you are honest with yourself, that in many conversations with Muslims the wind will be taken out of your sails because your approach to the subject (whatever you were discussing) just did not make sense. Expect that.

9. Why is this so? Church history will tell you. Almost from the very start the Church has made a detour around the Muslim world (excepting the Crusades, where they confused spiritual warfare with aggression!). In our age of modern missions, emissaries have been sent thousands of miles to get at the 'heathen', while they kept their eyes shut and their fingers crossed as they sailed past the doors of their nearer Muslim neighbours. One look at a map depicting the Muslim world and present missionary effort will prove how the Church has gone out of its way to avoid Islam. The result has been that we have not been forced to rethink our Christian teaching in relation to Islam. Our interpretation of true Christian doctrine must always develop from the contact that comes from preaching the Gospel in any given place. Luther and Calvin wanted to preach the Gospel to Roman Catholics and Enthusiasts. That was what they were struggling for. They therefore had to develop their teaching in relation to Roman Catholicism on the one hand and Enthusiasm on the other. That is why we today have Reformation theology. It is Christian doctrine developed in the struggle, and is therefore called a struggle theology.

Obviously you need to do the same thing. But chances are you will find that what you already have learned does not really fit in with your present struggle, and you therefore have to make a fresh start. Because the Church has avoided impact with Islam, its theology has developed in such a way that now when we have to preach Christ to the Muslim also, we find he is on an entirely different wavelength from us. Although we may use the same words as he does, he is talking in the east, we in the west.

In other words, as long as you live, your job is going to be to find out: (a) how the New Testament looks at the Muslim; and (b) how the Muslim looks at Christianity. This is not as easy as it may sound.

10. Let us take (a): How the New Testament looks at the Muslim. First, remember this: Each of us has been brought up in—or influenced by—a certain Christian community. There are various or varying theological or non-theological backgrounds. Now do not deceive yourself into believing either that your peculiar kind of orthodoxy or heterodoxy is the truth in all its fullness, or that you by some special patented process have been able to lift yourself by your bootstraps up and above your particular

background Christianity. It just does not work that way. All of which means: if you are deadly earnest about wanting to see how the New Testament looks at the Muslim, the first step is to own up to your own very relative understanding of the New Testament and, as a consequence therefore, to your very relative understanding of how the New Testament looks at the Muslim.

11. One concrete example is enough to illustrate this point. You have a certain conception of inspiration. When the subject comes up later in the chapters you will see that the controversy about inspiration as it has raged in certain Christian countries has *no relation whatsoever to the Muslim*. While we in Europe and America have been burning each other at the stake (figuratively, fortunately) because of a difference of opinion regarding the *Book*, we in our struggle with Islam have to concentrate on the fact that the Word became *Flesh*, and not as the Muslims think, a Book. This difference has far-reaching importance.

This illustration ought to be enough to make you see that the New Testament has an angle when looking at the Muslim that you probably have not even thought of, or at least, not thought out.

12. Now let us take (b): How does the Muslim look at Christianity? In some ways parallel to what you see when you look at Judaism. Judaism was not universal, you say. That is what the Muslim says about your Christianity. Judaism was a preparation for the coming of Christ, you say. He says the same about Christianity in regard to Islam. (Try reading the Gospel of Barnabas and you will see how Christianity is made to pave the way for Islam.) You believe the Jews should be converted to Christianity. He believes you should be converted to Islam.

13. Apart from the above, you will find that, as the Muslim looks at Christianity, he himself suffers from a threefold lack which you may find difficult to understand.

(a) He has a complete lack of the sense of history as far as the 'books' are concerned. Let us not shout too loudly about this, for you will find the same lack cropping up in Church History all along the line, and yet the Muslim has a better excuse for *his* lack than any Christian has.

Just what is meant by a lack of a sense of history? A Muslim believes all Scriptures are sent down from heaven. That idea makes Scripture something outside and above the warp and woof of history, so the books do not come into being inside a natural historical development. Therefore the Muslim's idea of revelation is that God made up certain words into certain sentences and sent them down to man quite apart from history itself.

Therefore a Muslim does not talk about *revelation*, but about *inspiration*, that is, the act of receiving these divine statements. (Even if he uses the word 'revelation' in English, he means 'inspiration', or the 'revelation' and recording of these divine statements and requirements.) The Christian idea of revelation is that God works in, through, and by history, doing certain mighty acts which we through the medium of Prophets and the Apostles understand are to be interpreted as revealing the purpose and will of God. We therefore are, and have to be, intensely interested in history, whereas the Muslim can ignore it. Admittedly the New Testament on its human side (the only side a Muslim can see) is a historical document, written by certain men about our Lord. So the Muslim sees in it only the 'biography' of a prophet.

The result is that if certain definite statements are made in the New Testament, for example, about the historical Jesus, and the Quran contradicts these or says something else instead, the Muslim will never hesitate to deny the historical statement in favour of the Quran's inspirational statement. In explaining his point he may say the Quran has superseded the New Testament or he may accuse the Christians of having changed the New Testament. Be that as it may, the fact still remains that the Quranic inspirational statement bears more weight with him than the historical statement, and he will keep his own point of view even if it is based on such flimsy and untenable arguments as these just mentioned, rather than face up to the obvious facts of history.

But this lack of a sense of history means more: it means that he must inevitably misunderstand Christianity because he is looking for revelation in an entirely different sphere from where it is actually to be found.

This fact about Christianity has often been forgotten in western countries, because the battle has raged around the subject of how we are to understand the position of the Prophets and Apostles, more than about the revelational acts of God in history.

(b) Another thing you will find lacking in the Muslim is the enquiring, critical attitude towards his own Book or the history of Islam.

Our New Testament and our Church History have, for several generations now, gone through the fiercest fires of criticism—not only hostile criticism, but also scholarly criticism based on the idea that if the New Testament *is* a historical book and Church History *is* history, they should be able to bear the same critical scrutiny any other book or history is subject to. Admittedly the result of such criticism may seem far-fetched or even definitely wrong. That is beside the point here. Actually in practice, if

not in theory, even the most narrow sectarians have developed the critical attitude (for example, the clothing of women and their position in society, or the slavery question).

The Muslim simply cannot understand this aspect of our attitude to the New Testament. Genuine, honest, reverent, scholarly criticism of the literary source of the first hundred years or so of his religion is unthinkable. It would be blasphemy.

Look at it this way. If you are convinced that certain statements in the Gospel are without any doubt from the very mouth of our Lord, would you feel free to criticise them in any way, whether you understand them or not? Presumably you would not. Very well; the Muslim believes the words in the Quran are the very words of God. Now, regardless of how he looks at or criticises your Book, he expects you to accept it just as he accepts the Quran. Consciously or unconsciously, you do not. And that, for him, is a great stumbling block.

(c) Finally, you will find that the Muslim usually lacks mental integrity. Check up on yourself and see if you are always honest in your thinking. It is a well known fact that we deceive ourselves constantly, and if we stop to think it over, *we know it*.

However, we are constantly aware of this painful tendency and also alive to its dangers, and therefore we keep a curb on it. This curb is usually lacking in the Muslim.

Of course he is up against a tougher proposition than you are. First he is faced with definite contradictions and mistakes in the Quran. Then again Islamic history in relation to the original Arabic Islam is a nightmare, because Islam did not develop according to the pattern that was laid down in the beginning. Again, look at modern trends in Muslim countries in their relation to the Quran. For example, while the Quran permits and regulates slavery, modern Islamic countries are working hand in hand with other countries to wipe out slavery. Or this: when India was divided, thousands of Hindu girls and women were carried off as booty, a perfectly legitimate procedure according to the Quran. Yet all local Muslim papers raved against this brutality, etc. and not a voice was raised to say that the Quran justified the capture of women as war booty.

Now what is the Muslim going to do? On the one hand the book is held to be eternal, perfect, and everlastingly valid; on the other hand there are obvious faults, and developments in Muslim countries seem to contradict its validity. He just simply develops a lawyer-mentality: win your case—right or wrong. This crooked thinking is as clear as daylight in the

Ahma-diya-Qadiani Movements, but it is surely also a very present evil in the thinking of every Muslim when he looks at Christianity. Take for example these two statements made by an Indian Mullah. (In *Towards Understanding Islam*, pp. 97, 98.)

- (1) ‘The Jews and the Christians themselves admit that they do not possess their original books, and have only their translations, wherein for many centuries many alterations have been made, and are still being made.’
- (2) ‘The Quran exists exactly as it had been sent down to the Prophet; not a word—nay, not a dot of it has been changed. In the previous divine books man mixed his words with God’s words, but in the Quran not even a minute alteration has been effected, as admitted even by the opponents of Islam.’

Either the man is an ignorant person (which is hardly probable) or else he is simply out to win a point. Yet these lectures were given by one Muslim in Urdu, translated by another Muslim into English and printed by a third Muslim. Obviously any argument will do to win the point.

14. What are we going to do about it? Many—far too many—Christians give up, but not in the sense that they drop out and keep quiet. Their giving up is far more dangerous. They argue that preaching, discussing and witnessing are of no use. We never get anywhere by putting doctrine against doctrine, prophet against prophet, and book against book. We have to live Christianity, they assert: we have to show them we have a source of spiritual power they know nothing of. That may help to open their eyes and cause them to enquire.

Of course we all know that Christianity is life, and life that is not living is not life. But, let us go slowly. Remember the Pharisee in the temple. Anyone who dispassionately studies the life and words of our Lord comes to the conclusion that He did not expect us to use our spirituality and our good deeds as a means to draw indifferent or hostile people. On the contrary, He even goes to the opposite extreme and says deliberate concealment was to be preferred (Matt. 6:16–18). (In a subsequent chapter this matter is discussed more fully.)

15. Now there are two reasons why our Lord does not want you to insert yourself between Him and other people.

(a) Once you fall into the temptation of thinking of yourself *in relation to God* as better than the Muslim, you have moved into the position of the

Pharisees in the New Testament, whom our Lord condemns so mercilessly. If you live to be a hundred years old your *fundamental* relationship to God will still be that of a sinner receiving unmerited pardon and life. If you *must* talk about yourself, why not say the really fundamental thing, that which you can say to both God and man, that which is so positive that it negates anything you are or could imagine yourself to be in relation to God? Why not tell the Muslim that *fundamentally* you are in the same boat as he is; today, now, your *basic* relationship to God is that of a sinner who needs unmerited pardon and as a free gift from God? The one fact—that you by faith, through Christ and through His Church, are constantly receiving and accepting unmerited pardon and life and the Muslim is not—does not change the other, basic fact: that you and he are both in constant *need* of unmerited pardon and the free gift of eternal life. If you constantly remember this unity of *need*, you will never look down your nose at the Muslim, nor will you ever intrude yourself between him and our Lord.

(b) There is another reason why our Lord tells you not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing by way of spiritual power and good deeds. If these things in any shape or form are presumed to be a witness to Christ, the issues are being confused. Remember we and the Muslims are bound in on all sides by relativity. Every single thing we do or say is related to something else. You interpret your own words and actions in relation to one thing; the Muslim interprets your words and actions in relation to something entirely different. You say, for example, I have a source of spiritual power, I live a good Christian life and I sacrifice myself to help these poor people, etc. in a thousand variations. That, then, is supposedly your witness to Christ. The Muslim looks at your well organised, streamlined activity and what does he see? A man who has developed a knack for leadership, and who has money and brains enough to make a go of it, and is thereby accumulating a reward in heaven. But the same Muslim probably approaches you about what he, in his relativity, thinks to be of much more importance than your ability to keep a philanthropic organisation going smoothly, and (probably as an introductory remark) says he cannot possibly understand how Christ can be both God and man. You can do one of two things: you can either start with his question and preach the Gospel to him (even though it be in the form of an argument), or you can ease him gently to the door, while you assure him that no good comes of arguments, and that you have spiritual power which he has not, and thereby (delicately and indirectly, of course) suggest that if

he would only study your good life he would become a true enquirer. That is called, letting your light shine.

That Muslim goes away saying, 'He knows how to run his own show all right, but he evidently does not know anything about his own religion; either that or he would not spare the time to talk about it'.

16. Probably the Muslim is so right that it hurts. Just what do you know about Christ as God and man? Just what does Incarnation mean? Why does the Church hold so firmly to the dogma of the Holy Trinity?

These questions and many others *are* there. They are a vital part, the very foundation of your own faith. The Muslim has a right to ask you to forget yourself, your spiritual power and your good life, and explain why we believe in teaching something so hard to understand. And the answer will never be a demonstration of the truth in your way of living, no matter how good it is.

In short: the Muslim is thinking in relation to one thing; you are thinking in relation to something entirely different. Because of this obvious fact you are just confusing the issues by inserting yourself in any form between Christ and the Muslim.

17. There is still one thing left to be said. From the trend of argument on this whole subject, one would suppose that only two possibilities existed: either useless and endless discussion of doctrine; or else the so-called silent witness of the Christian life. There is a third possibility and please do not blink at the mention of it: preaching (see chapters 5 and 6). *That*, you may be sure, is the most difficult of all. But as surely as Christ is a living reality, every true doctrine rightly understood is an unparalleled starting point for preaching Christ. We have doctrine, dogma, and theology, not to argue about with non-Christians, but to help us to preach Christ, and to know that what we are saying is not private interpretation, but the faith of the universal Church.

Let us hope enough has been said in this introductory chapter to help you to see what you are up against and to understand that this book is designed to help you come to grips with Islam, and in so doing to help you relate your own faith to the faith of the Muslim so he will be brought face-to-face with the fact and necessity of God's revelation in Christ.

**QUESTIONS**

1. In the light of the following texts, what do you consider is the truth of the statement in paragraph 14 (Matt. 5:16; 6:2–4; Luke 18:10–14; and Matt. 6:16–18)?
2. What three things are lacking in the Muslim when he looks at Christianity?
3. What are the three possibilities of presenting the Gospel to Muslims?



## SECTION ONE

JUST HOW ARE YOU GOING  
TO APPROACH THE MUSLIM?



## CHAPTER 2

# Means

1. In this and all the following chapters it is being taken for granted that you, yourself, are a captive of Christ, that He is your Master. If this were not so, if you were not a captive of our Lord, you would not have heard His command to proclaim the Gospel, nor would you be interested in what this book may have to say to you. But now, being a captive of Christ, you desire to be obedient, you wish to live and work according to His good pleasure. But you know that doing so is not easy, for we live by faith and not by sight. *How* is the command of Christ to be carried out by *you*? If you could be dead sure about this ‘how’, your act of obedience in carrying it out would no longer be a ‘walking by faith’, you could then use your intellect and get on with the job, without constantly referring back to Christ. As it is, you cannot. Daily you come back, hoping to get a clearer, better idea of the teachings of our Lord and His apostles. Faith—walking and working by faith—makes you dependent on your Master. Man is, however, always up against that very natural sin of wanting to walk and work by sight, and not by faith. The work we do must at least ‘make sense’, it must be such that people will not say we are crazy, devil-possessed or ‘Samaritans’. They said that about our Lord, but in some undefined way we seem to think it is just not the right thing to say about us. The ‘Cause’ might suffer. Of course, the disciple is not above his Master but, even so, we prefer to avoid facing up to situations of this kind, if we can.

2. You know the Gospel must be proclaimed. Then the question arises: Can’t we do it in such a way that it makes ‘sense’? In such a way that people will realise we are not fools, pure and simple? In such a way that those hearing our message will also be forced to admit that it makes good sense? Naturally, therefore, one of the things you will be interested in is *means*. By what means can you, the missionary-minded Christian, get the Good News of the revelation of God in Christ across to Muslims?

3. This question has been answered in a great variety of ways throughout the ages, with the result that the Churches now have many different forms of work that are not, properly speaking, the special, unique task of the Church at all. You will probably admit that the Church of our Lord, as Church, as the body of Christ, has that one unique, apostolic task of confronting the world with the revelation of God in Christ. It is only when we start thinking about the means by which this task can be accomplished that various answers are given.

4. Now when you start thinking of means, you must take into consideration that your problem is not primarily a question of what means you can best use. You are taking too much for granted if you start thinking there. Actually, you are dealing with a threefold relationship of which all three sides have to be studied. This relationship is the Doer, or Subject, then the Means he uses and finally the Object, that is, person to be contacted, or the goal to be reached. So we have a threefold relationship that can be expressed in this way: Subject–Means–Object.

5. This relationship holds good in all human activity, but what we need to consider is this: When the unique task of the Church is under consideration, then who is the Doer, the Subject? Your entire attitude toward the Muslim will depend on how you answer that question. Of course, the Subject, the Doer, can be none other than *God*. This is a simple, obvious and fundamental starting point in all Christian thinking, which is often forgotten. And when it is forgotten confusion reigns supreme. The Church universal has always held that when and where it pleases God the Holy Spirit works faith in man to believe the Gospel. The same truth might be expressed in these words: God's self-revealing in Christ, although already accomplished, cannot be apprehended by man until, by the working of the Holy Spirit, he becomes capable of apprehending it through faith. Correctly understood, this statement means that the identity of Christ continues to be concealed throughout the ages. When Christ lived on earth He was God incognito, that is, His real identity was concealed. Man's intellect could not break through that incognito. Man only sees God in Christ when the Holy Spirit opens his eyes. This means that in the final analysis the Doer, the Subject, is *always* God. So in thinking about what *means* may be employed, your thinking will be all wrong unless your starting point is the fact that God is the Doer, the Subject, and it is He Who uses the Means. And if it is He who uses the means, He will have decided also what means it is His good will to use.

6. It should now be crystal clear that, if you accept this basic starting point, your thinking will go in an entirely different direction from what it would if you started off by wondering what means *you* could best use. For now the next question that arises is: Since God is the Doer, the Subject, by what means does *He* work? Again, there can only be one answer to that question. The Church is the creation of God, to be used by Him to proclaim His message. In other words, the Church is God's *means*. When we Protestants insist on calling our Churches apostolic it is not, as in the Roman Church, an external and mechanical succession we are thinking of. The meaning of the Apostolate lies in the purpose of its institution. Christ gave His Apostles the specific command that they should be His witnesses unto the ends of the earth. They, the Apostles, were His means. The spirit of the Apostolate must pass from generation to generation until the end of the age. The Church which is not apostolic in spirit is no Church, and being apostolic in spirit means primarily having the goal of witnessing for Christ to the ends of the earth. Obviously then the Doer, the Subject, is God and His means is the Church, and His purpose is to reach all humanity, the object.

7. Theoretically, I dare say, we are all agreed that this statement so far is universally accepted by the Church. However, in our practical work a difficulty arises. In the threefold relationship already mentioned, usually all three, that is, subject, means and object, are concrete and visible. For example, a king (subject) with an army (means) defeats an aggressive nation (object), or a man (subject) with money (means) buys a house (object). In both cases all three in this relationship are visible and concrete. However, when God is the Subject, the Doer, then only two of the three are visible; that is, the *means* and the *object*. When the Subject, the Doer, is invisible, the means at once becomes unique, different from everything else known to this world, and therefore foolishness in the judgment of wise men. And here it is we are sadly tempted to make our first great mistake. No one likes to be called a fool. Whatever we do, it must make sense. The wise men of this world must be able to see that it makes sense; the common people must be able to see it makes sense, etc. And so we begin thinking of means in an entirely wrong way. The Church is God's means, how then can *we* start talking and thinking of using means? Do you realise what is happening? We are moving from our rightful place as God's means to an usurped position of being the Subject, the Doer! This change is very subtle and extremely dangerous.

8. The nation of Israel gives us a good picture of what can happen. God had chosen Israel as the means by which He would bless all mankind. God was to be their God and their King. God was the *Subject* using this nation as a *means* to bless all mankind. The relationship was: God–Israel–Humanity. But when the Israelites were more or less established and began to get into touch with other nations, they felt they appeared foolish in the eyes of the world, without a king. They went astray in that they wanted to appear rational and sensible. So they asked for a king. God granted their request, but the relationship now became: Israel–King–World. In other words, God was left out of the picture. No doubt Israel became like other nations, but this was their greatest misfortune; for as God’s means they should have retained their utter uniqueness and in this uniqueness they would have been strong. Now they became like other nations—but a tiny little people, crowded in on all sides by larger, more powerful nations, and persecuted more than any other nation on earth.

9. The case of the Church is parallel. The relationship should be God–Church–Humanity, just as with Israel. However, the moment the Church discovers that it looks foolish in the eyes of the world, and begins to use means, that relationship is changed to Church–Means–Humanity. This catastrophic change may not be so obvious as it was in the case of Israel, but it is just as real nevertheless. For now the Church has been rational and sensible in the judgment of wise men; now the Church can justify itself in the eyes of the world; now non-Christians can ‘understand’ with their own intellect, without the working of the Holy Spirit, without faith, that the Church is a valuable institution. But what is the result? We have all seen it, and possibly wondered how it happened. Much running hither and thither; much competition with various forms of religion and philanthropy; much hollow activity; no depth; no poise; no strong faith; fear for the Church; fear of what may happen to this or that activity; fear of persecution. God is no longer in the picture. Not really. As Israel became a feeble little nation between powerful neighbours, so the Church becomes a feeble, worldly-wise organisation, pressed in and threatened by the powers that be. For the consciousness of being God’s means is lost, and the intuitive feeling that our own means are weak and inadequate makes us insecure and depressed. The Church is and can only be strong in its uniqueness. Foolish in the eyes of the world, yes; but that foolishness is God’s wisdom.

10. Now there is still one point to clear up before we go on. Some people think of the Bible as the *means* the Church must use. On the

surface that sounds all right; actually it is not, for the Bible itself can—and sometimes does—become a means in the hands of Christians, in such a way that the genuine relationship God–Church–Humanity is disturbed, and it becomes Church–Bible–Humanity instead. The position of the Bible is much more fundamental as it is an integral part of the Church. The Church, properly speaking, is no Church at all without the word of God. The word of God is the Church’s living proclamation, which is based upon and includes the Old and New Testaments. We must maintain firstly that in the New Testament the Church has its norm and standard for all Christian proclamation, and secondly that the New Testament is in itself proclamation. In that way the Church and the Word are so closely connected that the Church must consider the living Word as an integral part of itself, without which it is no Church at all. The point might be illustrated in this way: an army, according to the proper definition of the word, is a body of men armed for war. Weapons are an integral part of an army; so much so that a body of unarmed men could not be called an army in the proper sense. Likewise we must think of the Bible not as a *means* we can use, but as an integral part of the Church itself, as it is included in the proclamation of the living Word. The Word is the sword in the hand of the Church. It is wielded by the Church and made effective by the Holy Spirit.

11. You may now be wondering why such strong emphasis is put on this point of the Church being the *means*, and therefore not in any way able to use other means. Let me illustrate the point before taking it up in detail. Most countries have what are known as shock troops. These are usually old, experienced soldiers who can take the strain of sudden battle without becoming demoralised. Shock troops are in existence for the specific purpose of taking that first initial shock of sudden invasion. Let us suppose that they, when needed, refused to throw themselves into the battle, but tried to find some other means for stopping the invaders. Suppose they tried to get hold of grain enough in their country to try to strike a bargain with the enemy; suppose they did anything but just what they ought to do, that is, throw themselves into the battle. What would be the result? Failure to stop the invasion. Why? Because the means on which the nation depended failed, in that they, instead of functioning according to purpose, tried to find other means. Confusion, chaotic confusion, would be the result of such action.

12. Now what does all this work out to? Simply this: in your practical approach to the Muslim *you* are God’s means of approach. You are the shock trooper, who with the sword of the Spirit must throw *yourself* in.

There are no means you can use; because you are God's means. This is what Kraemer calls 'the iron law': you yourself are the point of contact; but *God's* point of contact. It is human nature to have a tendency to shield one's self, to avoid taking the brunt of the impact, to find an easier, a more sensible way of doing things, than God's way. The blood of the martyrs may still be the seed of the Church, but apparently we think of that statement as having greater applicability in times gone by than now.

13. But let us see if there really is an easier and a more sensible way than God's way, that is, His using you personally as His means. Time and again we have heard that the philanthropic work done by Christian organisations is a means of breaking down prejudice and fanaticism. Now a statement is not true simply because it has been repeated numberless times. The idea at the back of this statement is presumably something like we heard during the war, that before a drive on the enemy 'softening up' tactics were used. But does it work that way in the Kingdom of God?

14. What actually happens when Christian philanthropy goes to work? Rightly understood, the Church is the ambassador of Christ, speaking with authority, entreating men everywhere to be reconciled to God. It is therefore the bearer of Light, the preacher of the Word. St Paul was beaten, stoned, manhandled, condemned to death for this reason. And the impressive picture of the martyrs in the Revelation of St John hints how from age to age and place to place the bearer of Light has been an offence to non-Christians. How this offence will show itself is dependent on the culture of the time, social and political conditions, and whether the evil is concentrated in another religion. The ambassador of Christ, then—as far as his position in the non-Christian community is concerned—is an offence. He is despised and, wherever possible, persecuted. This is also in accordance with the words of our Lord: 'In the world ye shall have tribulation . . . They have hated me; they will also hate you . . . A servant is not greater than his Master.' Thus the fundamental position of the Church amongst non-Christians is provocative. It is in the world, but not of the world, and therefore the world hates it.

15. But in our day the Christian philanthropist is usually a highly respected individual occupying an honoured place in the non-Christian community. This is true quite apart from what the prevalent religion is. How has it become possible for the servant to become greater than his Master? How has it happened that they hated the Master but honour and respect His disciple? But the disciple is not honoured and respected because he is a disciple of our Lord, because he is a bringer of Light, the



messenger with a word of reconciliation. On the contrary, it is because of the work he is doing that he is honoured—whether by individuals, municipal committees, or governments as such. (Parenthetically let me say this: missionaries who are not in philanthropic work of any kind can also easily devise ways and means of getting themselves accepted while their message is being rejected. That urge is probably one of the greatest pitfalls on the path of every missionary. However, here it is brought to your attention in relation to philanthropic work, as that is the subject of this chapter.)

16. The result is a colossal confusion of issues, for his position in the community of non-Christians should not be in relation to philanthropic work but in relation to the message he has to bring to that community. He should stand or fall on account of and with his message; he should be accepted or rejected accordingly as his message is accepted or rejected. When this is not the case, when the message is rejected but the bearer of it accepted, the real issue becomes confused, the polemic in Christianity is weakened.

17. Here you may also ask, and rightly so: Is the person who insists on using means, instead of throwing himself into the struggle, really getting his message across? Does he have time to get down to brass tacks, to find out what the Muslim is thinking, to find out how to put Christianity across on Islamic wavelengths, so that the Muslim is forced to face up to the issue at hand? Christ did many wonderful works but records show that time and again His message, spoken at the occasion, so upset the people that they murmured against him and finally—in one episode—took up stones to stone Him. When He wanted to know for what good deed they were wishing to stone Him, they said it was not because of His good deeds, but because of His teaching. Obviously Christ got His message across. Likewise, if you succeed in getting your message across to the Muslim you are going to meet opposition, persecution, and maybe death, even if you are a Philanthropist a hundred times over. So the question one has to ask oneself is: Am I getting my means, my good deeds, across as a *substitute* for the Gospel?

Again and again it is said that Jesus continued to do good deeds, although it confused the issues and weakened his polemics. In a certain limited sense this contention is true, but it cannot be dealt with here, as it comes up in a later chapter. Suffice it to say, here, that from the very first miracle in Cana until his last before being crucified there is nothing that can be said to be parallel to the humanitarian philanthropy of present-day Missions. Therefore no comparison can be drawn between the powerful

works of Christ and the ordinary human efforts of men trained in certain sciences.

18. Let us look at this same question from the angle of the convert. The disciple of our Lord has become a highly honoured man in the non-Christian community. Prejudice, fanaticism and hatred seem to have vanished. He is glad he has been of service to help prepare the way for the Gospel. People are now friendly toward him. In all probability he is not witnessing or preaching in such a way that he is getting the essential message of Christianity across. However, let us suppose that some member of that community takes his preaching seriously, is drawn of God, and comes out openly and confesses himself a believer in Christ. What happens? The selfsame community that honours the one persecutes the other. Why? Obviously because the fanaticism and intolerance and prejudice has never really been broken down, but only held in abeyance as far as the philanthropist is concerned, because the community is taking advantage of his work. When persecution broke out in the early Church, St Paul and the others could say they carried the marks of the suffering of Christ in their bodies, and so they had the fellowship of suffering with the new converts. That was because they did not try to find means to break down prejudice and fanaticism but they threw themselves in as shock troopers and took the impact. But the person who uses means to break down prejudice finds, in the end, that he has actually isolated himself from the very person he wants to help. What is the result? The convert sees himself boycotted and persecuted by the very community that honours his 'father in the Lord'. He becomes bitter, often becomes demoralised, oftener recants in his loneliness. His spiritual father, in the meantime, is miserable in his helplessness. This is probably more true in the Muslim world than in any other community, and yet to a certain extent it is true wherever Christians have tried to use means to break down prejudice.

19. It does not follow at all that you should court persecution or death. On the contrary. Not all soldiers who go to war are wounded; and fewer still are killed. But it does mean that you, as a soldier of the Lord, fighting against the powers of darkness, must realise, especially in Muslim lands, that regardless of how kindly, and with how much sympathy and understanding you put your message across, yet the very act of putting it across may expose you to all kinds of persecution and maltreatment. And there is no avoiding it, no real breaking down of prejudice and hatred for the Gospel, except in so far as God gives man the faith that accepts it.

20. Let us take another illustration. You hear it said that the Bible can speak for itself by itself, and many people think that in handing out small tracts with a few Bible verses, without any intention of follow up, they have been evangelising the Muslim. Nothing could be further from the truth. Actually that method is akin to superstition and a belief in magic. It is only another way in which the Christian is able to escape from throwing *himself* in, another way in which *he* finds means, instead of being God's means. According to the plan of God it is the living Church that witnesses to the reality of the revelation in Christ. That Church has its scope, its teaching, its norm in preaching, from the Bible—but the sword of the Spirit is wielded by the Church. You are to put on the whole armour of faith; you have to know how to wield the sword of the Spirit. Take this example. You hand a Muslim a tract, on which John 3:16 is written, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life'. Now what does he read into that verse? The following:

For Allah was so merciful that he sent the prophet Jesus into the world with a book; and people who accept that book are Ahl-i-Kitab, and therefore not doomed to burn in hell, but to enjoy the pleasures of Paradise'.

The Muslim will react in one of three ways: (i) Probably he will not even bother to think it over. He will throw your tract away or use it as packing paper; (ii) He may get wildly fanatical because you call God love, and Jesus His son. That is blasphemy. He will shout the 112th soura of the Koran at you:

Say: He is God  
The One and Only;  
God, the Eternal, Absolute;  
He begetteth not,  
Nor is He begotten;  
And there is none  
Like unto Him  
(Yusaf Ali's translation)

and he knows that chapter, for he probably repeats it every time he says his namaz; or (iii) He may be of the mystical type who, while he does not like your choice of words, realises that in the final analysis what you are trying to say is the same as what Muhammed said, only of course the Arabian prophet said it better and clearer. The point is that, whatever type of

Muslim you gave that tract to, you have not really reached him with the Gospel by simply handing out that tract. In the first case you have not arrested his attention; in the second case you have only made him mad; and in the third case you have only strengthened him in his conviction that when all human limitations are accounted for you both belong to the one brotherhood of true faith.

21. Undoubtedly John 3:16 is Christianity in a nutshell; but it is a nut the Muslim unaided cannot crack. It is only when the living voice of the Church reaches him and he hears that Allah and God the Father are not one and the same, that Jesus was not a prophet but the eternal Word of God incarnate, that it is not acceptance of a book, but living contact in faith with a person that Christianity requires, that you have succeeded in giving the presupposition necessary for the Holy Spirit to enlighten his mind. That means, however, that you must know why and how Allah is not God the Father, why and how Jesus is the incarnate Word and not a prophet, etc. Which again means: if you as God's means throw yourself into the struggle, you must *know*. You must have knowledge of Christianity, not your particular type of traditional Christianity, but essential, basic, universal Christianity, and knowledge not only of historical Islam, but of the particular type of traditional Islam you are up against. St Paul stresses this point in his pastoral letters.

22. These two illustrations have been used just to show you how easy and at the same time harmful it can be to shield yourself behind things you call *means*, when you should accept the startling and challenging fact that in God's plan, you yourself are the means, and if you do not throw yourself in, there is no substitute. None whatsoever.

23. When it becomes a fact of faith for you, that you personally are God's means, your attitude towards the Muslim may change considerably. First of all you will want to be *yourself*. Before you were possibly hoping to contact him by something you could do, now you realise it has to be something you are. And the only thing you are is yourself—a human being among other human beings. Admittedly the background of religion and culture and national traditions and all that kind of thing may differ widely; we will come to that later. If you are a Pakistani, if you are English, American or continental, be yourself. Only thus are you a real human being among other human beings, for only by being yourself can you make generous allowances for others being themselves. Deeper and more basic than religion, culture, national traditions and all else, is this elemental fact: we are all human beings. If you, for any reason on earth,

consciously or unconsciously look down your nose at the people with whom you have to do, your most fundamental qualification for usefulness as God's means is lacking. This statement does not mean that you should try to treat every one you meet as a graduate from your own college. On the contrary. You respect a child as a human being, when you take it seriously, *just* as a *child*. Supercilious, pious condescension is spotted by a child at once. Also by a grown up. The European-American attitude of condescension usually originates in a feeling of cultural, educational and technical superiority. The attitude of condescension in the Christian Pakistani often springs from a feeling of religious superiority, for he has accepted the true religion, the eternal truth.

24. We all know the Muslim has a strong feeling of superiority as far as religion is concerned. Just why he should have that feeling is a riddle to every serious non-Muslim student of Islam. Nevertheless, there it is. Now, if you as a Christian meet him with an attitude of superiority (cultural or religious), obviously you will get nowhere. Two superiority complexes pitted against each other cannot yield any fruitful result. If you try to use means, the very act of using them breeds a superiority complex in you. Our book is better than yours, therefore read our book; our medical treatment is better than yours, therefore come to our hospital; our educational system is better than yours, therefore come to our schools and colleges. Now, humanly speaking, all this may be true. Christian medical and educational work may be, perhaps is, the best in the country. As long as the Muslim Pakistani feels he needs this help he is going to keep his annoyance at your superiority in abeyance. However, the moment he thinks he can get along just as well without your aid, his annoyance at your superiority is going to break all bounds. This is already the case in political and military circles, it is developing in medical and technical circles, and will undoubtedly soon be felt in education also. This is only a natural reaction, and must be anticipated. On the other hand, if you are alive to the fact that you have no means and can use no means, but that you are God's means, there can be no feeling of superiority in any way, for there is nothing that can be compared with anything else to cause a superiority complex. As God's means, you possess nothing; it is not your enterprise that is at stake; your educational and technical superiority mean nothing; every move you make is effective only when the Holy Spirit makes it so. Therefore you can quietly and sensibly be yourself and allow all others to be themselves. That makes you a man among men—the very first and the most basic requisite of the man who is to be God's means to

reach humanity. Just by way of illustration, one might say that Christ was God's *perfect* means in that he was perfect man. He succeeds in breaking through every culture, every tradition, every idiosyncrasy, and reaching the man himself.

25. Finally, one more remark. If you are God's means, you have nothing at stake—nothing except your own stewardship. The Subject, the Doer, is God. If there is anything at stake, it is His. He may remove the candlestick from a certain country; He may not. He may close doors; He may not. All that is decided in the eternal counsels of God. It is God's purpose, God's doings. If He removes the candlestick from Pakistan (or any other country), if He closes the door in Pakistan, you can do nothing about it; you can neither delay the action, nor change it. If you are constantly conscious of being God's means, you do not worry about that side of affairs. Your only 'worry' is being God's means, that is, getting your message across without compromising it, without getting it mixed up in all kinds of other things, so the Muslims will be forced to face the issue. If the result is persecution, well, they persecuted the prophets before you; if the result is a closed door, God closed it; if the result is you are thrown out, God removed their candlestick. This single-mindedness does not mean bullheadedness or a lack of genuine wisdom. It simply means you are being realistic and serious in taking up your job as God's means.

26. On the other hand, if you are the Doer, the Subject, if you have many things at stake—buildings, institutions, schemes for welfare, groups of Christians, plans for big campaigns, lots of invested money, prestige and what not—you will naturally be worried, apprehensive and fearful. Then you are sadly tempted to clever compromises, questionable diplomacy, confusion of issues, soft-peddalling of the truth, and unholy alliances. If you can read between the lines in both Church and Mission history you will see this state of affairs glaring at you in almost every period.

God has constantly to humble us and teach us that He is the Doer, the Subject, and the Church is His own interim creation, created to be His means, to carry out His purpose, namely, the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the earth until the end of the age.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What means does God intend to use for the calling of men to Himself?
2. Discuss the use of philanthropic methods as agencies for 'softening up'.
3. How can you make yourself best fitted for your task as a Christian missionary?

## CHAPTER 3

# Criticism

1. As we saw in the previous chapter, you yourself are God's means, and there is no substitute you can find to take your place. Now if you not only hand out a tract, or teach in a school or work in a hospital, but also are prepared to throw yourself actively into the primary struggle of the Church, that is, into the promulgation of the Gospel, you may find yourself wondering just what your attitude to the Muslim and to his religion ought to be. Should it be critical or not? Should it be controversial or not? Should you try to adapt your message to his general background or not? Should you acknowledge truth in his religion or not?

2. In one respect your position is definitely unique. While all other religions (except Judaism) are naturalistic and have no historical connection with Christianity, Islam like Christianity is prophetic and has such a close historical connection with it, that many students are inclined to regard Islam as a heretical offshoot of Christianity. You will admit, I am sure, that your attitude towards any form of Christianity you consider heretical is very different from your attitude towards, let us say, Shintoism or Confucianism. For example, a rabid anti-Catholic will let his feelings run away with him when arguing about Roman Catholicism; whereas he will probably be cool, detached and objective when the subject is Hinduism. Psychologically, this is quite natural. If you have a brother or a cousin who is a black sheep of the family you are definitely more annoyed than you would be if some neighbour across the street had the black sheep in his family to contend with. Whether one is justified in calling Islam a Christian heresy or not, the fact remains that every point of contact with Islam becomes a point of collision, for Islam has something to say about the Bible and every important person in it, which in every case is either implicitly or explicitly a contradiction of what you have to say. The same is true about doctrine and dogma. Begin wherever you like, the Muslim is ready with his conception of that doctrine and dogma, and it contradicts



yours. This contradiction may not appear in every fragment of teaching when isolated from the rest, but the contradiction will appear as soon as the isolated teaching is placed where it belongs in the context as a whole. For example, many of the attributes of God found in all Christian theology will likewise be found in Islamic theology, yet the overall picture of the Islamic Allah is as different as can be. Because of this relationship of contradiction you will invariably come to look at the Muslim *not* as some far off person with whom you have no affinity, but as a relative who unfortunately has been led astray. That makes your position precarious, difficult and delicate. If you could put something else in between yourself and the Muslim, it would be easier; but precisely because you yourself are God's means for making contact with the Muslim, you will so much the more want to be exceedingly careful that you do not err in these fundamental and vital matters.

3. Now let us take up the three questions of criticism, controversy and adaptation. In reality they all belong together.

First, then, comes *criticism*. That word criticism like most other words is ambiguous. It can mean just ordinary fault-finding. Admittedly, there are any number of faults to find when you are dealing with Muslims; but remember, there are also any number of faults to find with you and your conception of Christianity—and if not with yours, then with those of other Christians. And as you are dealing with the Muslim, he is also dealing with you. It is a two-way affair. There is hardly a more depressing scene than that of a Christian and a Muslim engaged in finding fault with each other and each other's ways of thinking and believing. On the other hand the reaction often noticed in generous people to this kind of fault-finding is a rather superficial and unreal praise of certain elements or teachings in Islam, or in the conduct of Muslims. Take just one example. There is a teaching of brotherhood in Islam which western writers often praise unstintedly. And yet any one who has seen the actual working of this brotherhood knows it to be a simple system of communal self-protection, nothing more. Self-protection is, of course, justifiable, but there is not anything startlingly noble, unusual or revelational about it. Criticising and finding fault with the system gets you nowhere; and praise of the system is—to put it bluntly—rather childish. Further, the Muslim who knows a little about Christianity will tell you, and rightly so, that the New Testament teaches a brotherhood that is confined to 'the household of faith'. In other words, he will criticise and find fault with the Christian brotherhood, along the same lines of your own fault-finding with his

Islamic brotherhood. The result will probably be that you both will become irritated and leave it at that. Which is just what should not happen.

4. The word criticism, however, has another meaning, namely, to acquaint yourself seriously with something in order to make a sober and—as far as possible—correct judgment concerning it. It is just as impossible for you to avoid criticism of this kind as it is for a doctor to avoid diagnosing a case before starting a treatment. There is, however, one very important prerequisite; you must have the necessary background and knowledge to make a sober and—more or less—accurate judgment. This does not mean that you cannot talk to a Muslim about Christ or Christianity until you have a very complete knowledge of Islam. But if you will think it over, it should help you to see how careful and thoughtful you need to be. To use the same example; admitting that the Christians are the ‘body of Christ’, that the Church is the ecclesia, the ‘called out ones’, and therefore a brotherhood with very definite boundaries, can you, with a good conscience, criticise the Muslim conception of brotherhood and still keep your own intact? If you have the necessary background and knowledge you can, if not, your criticism will be of the fault-finding kind and not the kind that results in a sober and correct judgment, and therefore not one that will help you reach the Muslim.

5. In order to get a sober and accurate judgment your criticism has to be radical. The word radical is interesting. It comes from the Latin *radicalis*, meaning pertaining to or proceeding from the root. In other words, a radical criticism will always go to the root of things.

An approach to the Muslim on the basis of experience in relation to religion is not radical, therefore not valid and effective. The reason for this is that it does not go to the root of things but places emphasis on experience rather than on objective truth, that is, it looks at the flowers rather than the root. But the flower of religious experience can be matched in other religions. When the person whose thinking is not radical finds this flower of religious experience outside Christianity he does one of two things: he either condemns it as a counterfeit, a paper flower, so to speak; or else he gives it full marks and stops preaching (what he thinks is) the Gospel. C. F. Andrews was a typical example of this.

C. F. Andrews found that Gandhi had ‘experience of God’ equal to if not superior to his own. Logically, therefore, he could not preach Christ (that is, his conception of Christ) to Gandhi, and if Hinduism could help some men (such as Gandhi and Tagore) to such a sublime experience of God it could also help others. There was therefore no sense in trying to

win Hindus to Christ. Andrews gave up his orders in the Church and contented himself with being a friend of the people. What else could he do? He could not stamp Gandhi's religious experience as a paper flower without stamping his own the same way; he could not honestly try to convert a man who already had what he (Andrews) wanted to give him; and he was evidently unable to go deeper, get down to the roots, and find eternal truth that was not dependent on religious experience.

6. You will soon make—if you have not already made—a startling discovery; if you attempt to criticise Islam and the Muslims on the level of religious experience and ethics, you will find that while you are pointing one finger of criticism in that direction, you are at the same time pointing three fingers at yourself and your fellow Christians. While it is wrong, and will hinder you in making your message intelligible for the Muslim, it is admittedly easier than genuine, radical criticism. There are two reasons for this: one is that it is always easier to find fault superficially than it is to go deeper and discover what the *root* of the fault is; the other reason is that while the Muslim usually is very patient with fault-finding, he gets fanatical when you go deeper. A Muslim thinks of Islam in two parts: one he calls Islam (or iman), that is his name for eternal objective truth as revealed by Muhammed; the other he usually calls Mussalmani (or din), that is the Muslim's practice of religion. Now as long as you find fault with the latter he may shout shabash to all you say—which means you are not getting your message across at all; but the moment you go deeper and criticise—soberly, kindly and with knowledge—Islam, you are up against something entirely different. But this is where the breakthrough must come. And it is only when you present Christ so that He gives Islam the lie, that you are coming to grips with things. The Muslim does *not*, contrary to what so often is said, rest in the efficaciousness of his own Mussulmani (or din); in the end he expects to be allowed to enter Paradise because of Islam, the faith. This question will come up in a later chapter. It is only mentioned here to emphasise the point that your effort to convert him is only valid and justifiable when you give up superficial fault-finding with regard to the flower, and get to grips with the root of the matter—with Islam itself.

7. The second question is *controversy*. A couple of generations ago hard-hitting controversy was the approved method of trying to reach the Muslims. That method was possible in those days, partly because there were giants in the land, men of great learning whose theological knowledge encompassed both religions, whose sagacity was almost miraculous,

and whose courage made it possible for them to take on in public debate and controversy the best maulvis in the country; and partly because the general principles underlying the Christian theology of those days so closely resembled the principles underlying Islamic theology that debate along certain general lines was possible. For example, both sides believed they had a book that was inspired from cover to cover; therefore both sides could indulge in some hard hitting along the same general lines. It was pretty much like a boxing match, where the pugilists are weighed in to be sure they are more or less equal, and the fight follows a number of rules, adhered to by both sides.

8. Admittedly the set-up in our day and generation is entirely different, as far as the Christians are concerned. Although theology, as such, is making a very long needed come back, for years it has been in the black books of the majority of missionaries. Furthermore, theology now emphasises the uniqueness of Christianity to such an extent that no parallelism can possibly be found for a straightforward debate or controversy, as in older days. Let us take the example of the book again. While the Muslim still holds to the inspired book teaching, Christian theology is putting stress on 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us'. The controversy would now have to be book versus person, which is hard to visualise.

9. Having gone this far, we have to be careful. Too many people jump to the conclusion that controversy in every sense is harmful. In the January, 1950 issue of *The International Review of Missions* is the following:

It is most unfortunate that the method of approach during the past decades has also been in the same spirit. It has been a 'contest between two armies with separate banners, the cross and the crescent'. The great champions of this method of approach were Pfander, Imad-ud-din, French, Lefroy, Rouse, Tisdall, who have rendered invaluable service to the cause of the Gospel message. We remember them for their labours with much gratitude to God, for their work has made the task of the later missionaries easier. They have revealed the weaknesses in Islam and have refuted Muslim error about the Christian faith, but there have been consequences which have proved their method of approach to be of doubtful value. First, as a result of controversy, many Muslims, though defeated in argument, have become more embittered towards Christianity and their pride has driven them further from Christ. Secondly, much anti-Christian literature issued by the Muslim press has been provoked by the method of controversy . . .

In dealing with Muslims the missionary should avoid controversy as much as possible. He should begin conversation with a Muslim by touching on things which are common to both Christianity and Islam, on what the Muslim admires in

Christianity, or even on what the missionary appreciates in Islam, and then the conversation can gradually be led on to the deeper things of Christianity (pp. 85–86).

10. First of all, just what is controversy? Let us be sure we agree as to what we are talking about. The word is made up in Latin of *contra* and *versia*. In controversy you are presenting a ‘contrary version’, one conception is being argued as against another. It may not be necessary or advisable to make controversy explicit or formal. You may find it wiser not to stage a debate. But you may be sure of one thing; if you open your mouth in an effort to get your message across, you are implicitly engaging in controversy. When dealing with Muslims you are up against an either-or; either contra-version, or you keep quiet. The reason for this is obvious. He already has a ‘version’ which is contrary to the ‘version’ you want him to accept. It is puerile to say, ‘Don’t indulge in controversy but try to win men to Christ’. He already has a ‘version’ of Christ; your version is contrary to his, and he has a perfect right to want to argue about it.

11. Let us go back to the passage quoted above. There is a very serious question that needs to be asked. It is this: Fundamentally, are we up against ignorance or evil? Much depends on how you answer that question. Is not all true Christianity in the world a struggle? Is not the New Testament conception of Christianity this, that God defeats the evil one? Can any one deny that Christ Himself was in a certain sense a controversialist? In other words, evil is not a vacuum, not a lack, not an emptiness, not (only) ignorance. Evil is positive, a force, a desire and a will to do something or be something. If you will re-study the life of Christ you will see that this evil, this darkness, this positive force is most clearly seen in the life of the religious community in Israel: in the Scribes and the Pharisees. And it is in His relation to just this religious community that Christ was a controversialist. The common, irreligious people heard Him gladly. They followed Him—and in the end they also shouted, ‘crucify Him, crucify Him’. That is what you can expect of the common people everywhere. They are sheep without a shepherd, following every wind of doctrine, good or evil. Christ had great compassion and pity on the great crowds of common people. But the religious community—the ones who knew and followed the Scriptures—that group He opposed constantly; and that opposition finally brought about His death. We all know that Pharisaism in Judaism is of exactly the same composition as in Islam. It therefore follows that if Christ were on earth today His attitude towards Muslim Pharisees would be the same as His attitude towards the Pharisees

of His day. Now the fact that Christ was a controversialist in His relation to the Pharisees does *not* mean He was ‘down on them’. It is written that many Pharisees believed on Him. St Paul was a Pharisee. Definitely—the Gospel must be preached to Pharisees. The point is that in the Pharisees as well as in many Muslims you find a clear-cut, definite conception of things, both generally and in detail, which already is in direct opposition to the Gospel.

12. Try and work this out. The traditions say that a child of seven should be taught the prayers, and when he is ten he should be forced to say them whether he wishes to or not. Now suppose you are talking to a young man 20 years old, who has said his prayers regularly (a few do!). In ten years he will have said more than 12,000 times that the Christian teaching about God is untrue, at least that is what he thinks he has said. In all probability he has said the 112th Sura (mentioned in the previous chapter), and at the end of the prayer he has raised his right index finger and stated, ‘There is no God but Allah’. There you have a ‘version’ definite and clear cut, and your ‘version’ is definitely ‘contra’ his. If you want to make that man understand that it is only through Christ he can know God, how are you going to do it without controversy?

13. Now do not get the idea that I am recommending that you go about calling Muslims whited sepulchres, hypocrites, etc. Only a person who himself is sinless, and who can see where and how that kind of approach can be successful, can do that. The argument here is that not only from the teaching of our Lord but also from His method of approach you can see that controversy is unavoidable if you are to get your message across. Likewise to suppose that you can start off with some nice words of appreciation in regard to Islam, and then later come out with the truth, is taking for granted that you are complete master of the trend of the conversation. You may be, but in that way you will never find out what is on his mind. You may be able to get a nice rounded-off little talk about Christianity off your chest, but it is innocuous, it is tilting at windmills, if it is not an answer to the question in the mind of the listener. And if you do not allow him to talk, you will never find out what that question is. And if you do, you will discover his question is always a contradiction of what you have to say.

14. The next point in the quotation given above is bitterness. There can be no doubt that much of what is said and done by overzealous Christians unnecessarily provokes bitterness. Again your only criterion can be: are you getting your message across to him, on his wavelength? For example,

you may tell a man, who for years on end has done his level best to keep the difficult and tedious laws of religion, that he is no more pleasing in God's sight than the harlot or the tax-collector. And that is true. However, he may become very bitter. What could be more natural? But until you have told him why you make such a statement, you have done no good whatsoever. And if you are not able clearly and concisely to say why you make that statement, you are only doing a disservice to the cause of Christ by making it. For the bitterness it engenders can never lead to repentance. That is a very important point. You hear any number of Christians make statements which in themselves are true enough, but which are left hanging in the air because the person making them cannot explain them. In this way they do definitely more harm than good, for their statements are thought of as unwarranted attacks.

15. On the other hand, the average Muslim must go through a stage of bitterness if someone succeeds in making the Gospel intelligible to him. That bitterness caused the death of Christ. It caused St Paul to persecute the Church. It has caused many a staunch Muslim to fight against Christ. Simeon in the temple prophesied that Christ was set for the fall and rising again of many and for a sign which shall be spoken against. The Cross is and always has been a stumbling block for all religious men. The well-known phrase of 'winning souls for the Lamb' is not biblical. The whole idea behind it is wrong. It presupposes nothing more strenuous than a 'courtship'. The New Testament attitude is a struggle against the power of evil. It is beseeching men everywhere to be reconciled unto God. But reconciliation can only come when man is acutely aware of the need for reconciliation. It is sheer nonsense to beseech a Pharisee or Muslim to be reconciled to God while he still thinks he is pleasing in God's sight because he is doing what the law demands. The Pharisee in the temple (Luke 18:9-14) is a good illustration here. Let us suppose there was a Pharisee who actually heard our Lord tell this story. What would his natural, immediate reaction be? Bitterness of course. A sense of injustice. Why should the sinner go home justified and the saint go home a sinner? It does not make sense, at least not common sense. Only divine sense. You may be sure of one thing: the Cross of Christ, properly preached, is always a stumbling block for religious minded people. (This is true also among Christians.) Therefore a sense of deep irritation will always follow a proper preaching of the Cross to the genuinely pious. The only way you can avoid this bitterness is by modifying your preaching in such a way that the Gospel gets hidden behind a smokescreen. That is being done, we all

## 34 Mission to Islam and Beyond

know it; but the power of the Gospel is completely vitiated, made of no effect. So do not be afraid of bitterness—if it has been caused by your getting the Gospel message across. And do not worry about the results: in some cases it will give you a lifelong enemy; in other cases it will, as with St Paul, bring the man to the foot of the Cross. That is in God's hand; you must leave it there.

16. There is still one thing more to be said on the subject of controversy. There is the question of prestige. Not yours or mine, but the prestige of Christianity. Dr Kraemer says in *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, Kregel Publ., Grand Rapids, 1977, pp. 305–6:

... controversy in a higher sense than the well-known kind of contest in theological and religious acumen cannot, and even should not, always be avoided . . .

Often in such a case, by the way in which this unsought controversial situation is met, religiously and intellectually, the spiritual prestige of Christianity and the Gospel comes to be at stake. Taught by past experience and by a surer grasp of the non-intellectualist and super-rational character of religion, it is of vital importance that one should be alert to avoid the two principle weak spots of all controversy—the religious and the psychological—and turn them to advantage. This requires real grace, a thorough contact with the atmosphere of the Bible, especially with the tender and yet forceful way in which Jesus dealt with people, a good knowledge of the religious situation and a clear insight, springing from sympathy and love, into the psychology of the people. This side of the approach thus points again to the central importance of combining a vigorously religious conception of Christian truth with real knowledge of, and sympathy with, the people among whom one works.

This higher form of controversy as a mode of approach should not be avoided, for the sake of the moral, religious and intellectual prestige of Christianity. In countries where grand and imposing religio-philosophical systems have been developed, and where at present all specimens of modern thinking exercise thousands of minds, yielding their contribution to the moulding of the spiritual outlook, Christian truth in its fundamental nature and characteristic structure needs to be developed against the background of the concrete spiritual scene. Then these systems and spiritual currents can be laid bare as to their fundamental tenets, aspirations and aberrations in the light of the revelation in Christ. If this is done in a spirit of deep religious sincerity and moral dignity this higher kind of controversy may be a very precious thing.

Professor Hocking expresses in his pamphlet on *Evangelism* the opinion that there are wanted in the mission field what he calls 'watch-towers of thought'. This suggestion is very valuable, for indeed the missionary enterprise and the Younger Churches need such men in the colossal confusion of our present transitional period.

17. There is one thing Kraemer does not mention which has great value. Your convert will seldom be the strong, independent type of



Christian. He will want to know and get comfort and strength from the fact that the Christian faith has its champions. Every experienced missionary or Church worker has seen how the ordinary convert glows with satisfaction when he hears a clear, bold, sincere controversial address given to Muslims. The older Christian himself enjoys exactly the same thing—although the controversy may be directed against something other than Islam. That is natural the whole world over.

So, regardless of how much or how little controversy you are capable of, do not let it degenerate into a boxing match—but get on with it!

18. Taking for granted that criticism (not fault-finding) and controversy (not wrangling) are necessary to any approach to Muslims in which you have given up the idea of trying to use means, your next problem is the question of *adaptation*. How, on the particular spiritual background in your area, are you going to form your ‘version’, which is contrary to that of the Muslim, and yet make it intelligible to him? Whether you like it or not, you cannot avoid this question. In this matter you will find three schools of thought. First: some folk, usually the hyper-orthodox, maintain that the purity of our message depends more or less upon our using the very words and phraseology of Scripture, and of the liturgies and rituals of the Churches to which they belong. But no Christianity, including that of the New Testament, exists, or ever has existed, that is not adapted to a specific, particular background. Each of the four Gospels has its own overall picture of Christ because each is adapted to a different background. The Logos doctrine of St John is an adaptation; and St Paul uses so much of the language of the mystery religions of his days that critics for a while really thought he had drawn the contents of his message from them! And surely you must realise that your own conception of Christianity is the result of a process of adaptation. That process started when Christianity first came to grips with Greek philosophy, and since then has gone through many stages of change, the last probably being either Pietism or Neoprottestantism, depending on your own particular geography! So to tie the Gospel to any specific wording as phraseology or symbolism to insure its purity is an utterly impossible task.

19. The second school of thought is diametrically opposed to the above. The idea here is to reduce Christianity to its pure essence. All the trappings of language and custom should be removed. Then when people become Christians they will build up their own background. Their Christianity will then not be foreign to their soil—and soul. Taken superficially that doctrine sounds very correct—until you try it out. You will

soon find two difficulties. First, Christianity is like water. If you want to give a person something to drink, you have to have a container. It may be your cupped hands; it may be an elaborate glass; but it must be something. The cupped hand is just as much a container as an artistically carved glass. Therefore it is impractical theory to propose that only the purest essence of Christianity should be passed on without any trappings of languages, rituals, creeds or customs. Furthermore, history shows us that where such an attempt is made on the supposition that the people will work it out for themselves later on and develop an indigenous form, it simply has not happened. To keep to the illustration, if you give them the water of life in your cupped hand, you will find they will accept that form as though Christianity were to be identified with it, although in fact it is no more indigenous than any high-Church form might be. The point is that all Christianity must have a container; but the container is not the important thing. Your second difficulty will be that you never can get away from the foreignness of Christianity. *Not* because it came from Europe, for it also came to Europe as a foreign element, but because it came from above. It is radically and absolutely foreign. It does not allow itself to be absorbed. It never becomes a genuine child of the soil—or of the soul. It is always as restless as the waves of the sea. You cannot make it grow quietly and peacefully in the soil together with the religions of mankind. Even when it becomes indigenous its pure foreignness makes itself felt, possibly more than before it became indigenous. Therefore the effort to make it ‘fit in’ is futile.

20. Thirdly, you find a small group who presume to know beforehand what the indigenous form of Christianity will be, and they work on the assumption that they already at the beginning can mould their own Christian proclamation and teaching in that form. This is arrogance. You might just as well look at a child in a cradle and decide what it will become at 50 years of age. Every nation has a genius of its own, which will affect the form Christianity will take when it becomes indigenous. But what that form will be no one can possibly say. For example, Lutheranism, which is probably the most universal of Protestant denominations, has so many different forms that one would hardly suspect them all of belonging to one single branch of the Protestant Church. The reason for this is that from its very beginning Lutheranism was less interested in the outward form than in the purity of the contents. Contrary to this, the people who presume to know what form indigenous Christianity will take are more interested in form than in the contents, with the result that vital, fundamental Christian

teaching is sacrificed in order to make Christianity fit into some previous form of heathenism.

21. The difficulty all along the line has been that the central problem has been lost sight of, and people have been sidetracked by secondary issues. Let us put it this way to make it as clear as possible. It makes no difference if you are a Pakistani or a foreigner; as God's means you are not primarily interested in any country's culture, traditions, politics or religions. While you are in the world you are not of the world. Do not misunderstand that. It simply means your one great objective in life, without any sidelines, is to get the Gospel across. If there is culture, usually a heathen culture—you are not out to save that culture (you cannot do it anyhow)—your aim is to get the Cross planted firmly in that culture. If the Cross causes it to crumble—well, it was doomed anyway. Any thought, word, custom or tradition that can be of genuine service should not be scorned in your effort to get the Cross planted there. At the time of the Reformation, the struggle was not only with Rome, but also with Greek philosophy. Luther once had a picture of himself painted, in which he stands holding the Bible, and a dove, representing the Holy Spirit, hovers over his head like a halo. Many have spoken derisively of that picture; but in those days theologians had their pictures painted with their master, or teacher, set in a halo over their heads—and it was usually Aristotle! Luther was just telling the world that he had broken with philosophy, that he had stopped trying to fit the round peg of Christianity into the square hole of philosophy. That does not mean that philosophical terminology and expressions were taboo, but it did mean that every thought was to be made captive to Christ. His famous saying, 'I know no other God than the child in the crib', shows how his one central idea was to get the Gospel message across.

22. It may sound startling to you but without doubt we have to admit that, taken as a whole, the Muslim community is not really aware of what the Church is trying to tell it. It is impossible to put a finger on any particular thing and say that this is the reason, but one of the obvious reasons is that we have not yet solved the question of criticism and controversy and adaptation. It can only be solved when you, and many others, make it your primary concern to make the Gospel intelligible to the Muslim—but the *Gospel*, the living Gospel. Not dead, stereotyped words and phrases, not nebulous essence, not a hybrid thing, not something put together by adding equal parts of this and that. The task of the Church here is stupendous. However much or little you can do, one thing is necessary, namely,

## 38 Mission to Islam and Beyond

that you throughout your whole life develop single-mindedness of purpose, so that you may not be led astray into a thousand secondary or non-essential things.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Distinguish between the right kind of controversy and the wrong kind.
2. Define criticism in its proper sense. Can such be avoided?
3. Is there a sense in which the Gospel can be adapted to local conditions?

## CHAPTER 4

# Politics

In our day the subject of politics is one of the most fundamental and difficult problems we have to contend with in coming to grips with Islam. Properly, politics should only be one aspect of the larger subject, culture, but for our purposes it may be treated separately.

1. Christianity itself presents us with the first and primary difficulty, for as a prophetic religion it brings with it a necessary tension, a tension which must exist between two apparently contradictory dogmas concerning God. We hold that God is both Creator and Judge. If He were only Creator, it would be simple to accept a doctrine in which politics and culture, such as they are, were to be thought of as coming from God, and therefore God's will. If conditions were favourable, we could rejoice and be happy; if they were difficult we could accept an attitude of resignation and carry on as best we could. However, when we proclaim and believe that God is not only Creator, but also Judge, it simply means that Creation—as it is now—is being Judged. Politics and culture must not be thought of simply as God's creation and therefore God's will, for, being under His judgment, they are doomed; they carry the death-mark on them. And yet the very fact of their being death-marked makes man restless. For man is, so to speak, the custodian of these things.

2. This tension can be seen more clearly if you consider the command to love your neighbour. If this command is conceived of as law in the same sense as the Muslim accepts the shariat, it is utterly impossible even to approximate perfection in politics or any other aspect of culture. A man obviously joins a political party for his own interests; a man looks first and foremost after the welfare and education of his own family. In our present world these narrow loyalties are a necessity, but class distinctions—cultural and economic as well as political—useful as they are, are in opposition to the command to love your neighbour as yourself. Logically, then, it

would appear as though Christianity, because of its impractical ethics, cannot really be related to any present concrete situation. This argument against the Church is well known in Christian countries; and Muslims, too, enjoy making this same point. It is true that in some schools of thought you do meet with an objectionable quietist resignation in the face of political injustice, cultural inequalities and economic slavery. This quietism is based on the argument that God has willed it so, and the judgment of God is thought of only as a judicial act on the great Last Day. On the other hand, when people forget that the redemption of the race is a work of God, they accept the command to love your neighbour as yourself as a simple straightforward order, the fulfilment of which is within human possibilities. The result is superficial optimism which ignores the vice-like grip evil has on the whole race, and therefore it makes the Gospel of no effect.

3. It is so important to keep this idea of tension before us in this chapter that it is worth the risk of saying it in still another way. The thinking Christian is very much aware of the brokenness of all human life. Finiteness, sin, perversion and ignorance are everywhere—not excluding the Church. You belong to the body of Christ, the saints; you want to live according to God's will, and yet you know—better than anyone else—how far short *you* fall. But this same brokenness exists in the large spheres of life also. Politics at their very best succeed only in restraining evil, in giving everyone a fair chance in the competition of Life. Love of one's neighbour is clearly beyond its scope. And in international politics, if equality and justice ever are reached, even spasmodically (which is doubtful), love of one's neighbour remains a utopian dream. Conditions are such—in ourselves, in our narrow group, in our class, and in our nation—that we are apt to get accustomed to taking human helplessness for granted. It seems natural, and therefore no guilt attaches to it. In other words, God the Judge has been forgotten and the tension has been relieved. On the other hand, you may be so aware of your share of the guilt that you live and work on the false assumption that, if you and millions of others like you would only get on with the job of 'Christian living', the Kingdom of God could be realised here on earth. This idea is actually the fallacy of communism: that is, super-optimistic conception of human nature. Again in this way the tension is relieved.

In coming to grips with Islam you must avoid both pitfalls: fatalism on the one hand, idealism on the other. That this is not easy must be obvious for everyone.

4. If politics have proved difficult for the Church to cope with in so-called Christian countries, how much more so for Muslims in Muslim states. A backward glance at the development in Islam will help you understand why; it will also help you understand the present situation. The following statement may startle you, but it is alas—alas!—all too true. Islam, in so far as it is Arabian, has no politics. Before Muhammed's time the Arabs were split up into hundreds of small tribes warring with one another. It was more or less a fight for survival. Muhammed and Abu Bakr welded them into a state by putting allegiance to the Prophet above allegiance to the tribe. The state then had to be theocratic. Obey Allah and his Prophet, is a constant refrain in the Quran. The law was the Shariat, supposedly God-given. The executive was the Prophet and after him the Caliph. But that was too easy. It never worked out that way. Even during the first 200 years when the Islamic armies were victorious, and the canon of law was worked out in detail, this simple arrangement was never carried to completion. Sin, ignorance, greed for power, and misguided enthusiasm ruined it from the very start. Degeneration set in which brought about the final breaking up of the Caliphate in the beginning of this century. And with it died, for the time being, the ideal of one theocratic world-state.

5. The fact is that Islamic nations have culture and politics only in so far as they have been able to give expression to their own genius in spite of the Arab conquerors. And what the Arabs do possess has been copied from other countries—Rome, Greece, Persia and India. The present writer knows of no book on politics or economics published by Indian or Pakistani Muslims which is not a rehash of some European theory—ancient or modern—in an attempt to make it 'Islamic'.

In the time of the Caliphs, when thousands of non-Arabs and non-Muslims were in the service of the state, the Islam which we know today was created. Probably the only exception to the above was the dogma of 'innovation'. This dogma forbids any new interpretation of the Quran, or the introduction of anything new into Islam. Naturally, Islam became rigid and sterile. Degeneration had to follow, and when western penetration became serious it brought with it a fatalistic despair and resentment. The dream of Islam as a world-state on both levels, secular and spiritual, was fast becoming a pipedream.

6. So everything looked really black for Islam until the First World War started. Then remarkable things began to happen. Small independent states came into being. Later, Turkey blossomed out, followed by Iraq,

Iran and others. Finally Pakistan, the largest of all, was carved out of India. Each of these—in contradistinction from the states in the Ottoman Empire—insists on calling itself Muslim. Turkey's break with traditional Islam was most spectacular and complete. Egypt has been most conservative. Iran has chosen a middle-of-the-road policy. It is still too early to say what will happen in Pakistan, since the comparative strength of the puritans and the liberal party is not yet apparent. The present predicament of this bloc of Islamic states can be seen in all modern Islamic literature. They all want to play their rightful part in the family of nations; but that means the sixth-to-eighth century barbarous civilisation has to meet and cope with modern western civilisation. This is being done frantically, one might say almost hysterically.

7. There is, however, no agreement between them. The puritanical school fears that western influence is going to cause Islam to crumble and decay. For them the way of salvation lies in the strictest adherence to Islam's tradition in every sphere of life. Arguments that look like corkscrews presume that any Islamic state can and should be a theocratic state, and the ruler of that state can take the place of the Caliph in Pan-Islamism. They assert that the glorious Shariat is even more applicable today than when the four Imams worked the thing out. The change that is needed, they insist, is not in the legal system, but in the hearts and minds of Muslims. Muslim solidarity, according to them, is spiritual, and therefore the outward forms are secondary at present—although, if Islam is to take its rightful place in the world, its dominion should be from 'palm to pine' and therefore a single ruler will be needed. World dominion is, of course, a long-range goal; but it must be kept in mind. Therefore Islamic states should now get together on questions of culture and economics and thus prepare the way for a power-bloc later on. At the Whitby Missionary Conference, Islam was classed as 'totalitarian' by one speaker—and rightly so. For this group of puritans have as their model state the Ottoman Empire, even though they are far from realising it at present, nor do they agree on how it may be realised in the future.

8. Then there is the liberal school of thought. It may be questioned whether many of the leaders in this school have any personal interest in religion at all; but Islam as a rallying point, as a symbol of national unity, is an absolute essential. The usual procedure here is to adopt Western methods, culture, legal systems, economics, etc. and prove from the Quran that these things really are basically Islamic, that Western nations in a bygone age absorbed them from the Muslims, and that by re-adopting



them Muslim countries make themselves truly Islamic. For example, how often do we hear and read that real democracy is Islamic. The usual definition of a democracy is a state in which the power to rule derives from the people. In a theocratic state, the supreme power is in God's hands, who rules through a viceroy. Yet 'real' democracy is to be found in Islam! How do they get around this difficulty? By letting the people 'choose' God's viceroy. That is one way of getting westernism incorporated in Islam. Another is by 'ijtihad'. Ijtihad is the dogma that the learned divines may make a judgment independent of the Quran and the Sunnah, if the subject under discussion is not mentioned in either of these. Although the liberals put great stress on this teaching, the puritanical element argues violently not against ijtihad, but against the liberal interpretation of it. For according to the orthodox view no *living* divine, be he ever so learned and clever, is allowed to make such independent judgments, while the cry of liberals is: 'Keep the door of ijtihad open!'

9. The developments in the last 50 years of Indian politics have confused Muslims in this country even more than elsewhere. Before 1909 communal disturbances were unheard of. When the first Reforms were introduced, intelligent Indians soon realised that there would be a squabble for power and economic preferment. As common people knew nothing whatever of politics, the leaders very naturally used religion as a rallying point. Then later on, when the Communal Awards were introduced it simply depended on your *religion* whether you were eligible for a job or not. In this way politics and economics came to depend upon religion.

10. This is a very short and incomplete sketch of the political and cultural aspects of Islam in the modern world. Anyone who has lived with Muslims or followed the trends of development for even a quarter of a century has seen changes which were considered unbelievable in 1914. The problems are new; they are pressing; and Muslims are alive to them. Only one thing seems to stand out clearly in all their aspiring, confused, confident, hopeful groping, and that is that the Muslims slowly but surely are shifting their position, so that their conception of religion is becoming pragmatic. That is to say, originally, Islam was basic and all other factors had to serve it; now religion is judged according to how it serves the ends of politics, economics, culture, etc. Islam is a political religion; now it is becoming the servant of politics.

11. These are the conditions, then, under which you have to proclaim your message, a message that carries with it the tension between time and eternity, the tension between our imperfect struggle against sin and God's

redemptive power. How are you going to go about it? The Pakistani and the foreigner will have to face this question each in his own way. The foreigner is here by the good will of the Pakistani Government. He is living on a passport, and can always leave and go home if things get too hot for him. He is a guest, and everyone expects him as a guest to obey the rules of hospitality. A weekend guest in the home of a friend does not begin to interfere in the upbringing of the children of that home. This attitude toward a 'guest' is found in every country. The native of America, for example, would be rightly annoyed if a foreigner, who came to preach some new religion, got himself mixed up in the politics of the country. The Monroe Doctrine, as it is called, was America's first attempt to keep European powers from trying to influence politics in the two Americas. Likewise the native of Pakistan—Muslim or Christian—may justly resent foreigners meddling in the politics of their country. This resentment will probably be stronger in a country where independence is a newfound treasure. On the other hand the Pakistani is in his own country, and as a Christian he is duty-bound to accept co-responsibility for the politics and culture of his homeland. However, it would be wrong to jump to the conclusion that this is an easy and acceptable way of separating the foreigner and the native, for *both* have the same Gospel to proclaim, and *both* should throw themselves into the struggle as men among men, as human beings living concrete lives among other human beings. While there are certain spheres in which the missionary, the foreigner, has no right to meddle, in the main struggle both the foreign and the native proclaimer are up against the same thing.

12. First of all, in the East life is not divided into compartments. The community life is a holdall in which social, cultural, economic, political and religious attitudes and teachings are all bundled together. We are concerned here with Islam only, so let us look at it: a complete civilisation, a cultural solidarity, a political religion. Look at the new Islamic books that are flooding the market. Here are some of the titles: *Economics of Islam*, *Islam and Socialism*, *Muslim Conduct of State*, *Public Finance in Islam*, *Political Theory of Islam*, *The Ethical Viewpoint of Islam*. These mostly maintain that Islam gives not only general principles, but detailed instruction about every aspect of life. Furthermore, the attitude of the true Islamic state towards other faiths is made clear. In Arafat, a quarterly 'Journal of Islamic Reconstruction' (no. 1, 1948, now defunct), an article appeared on constitution making in Pakistan. The following paragraph was suggested (page 55):

Whereas non-Muslim citizens shall be free to preach their religious beliefs within their own community and among communities belonging to other non-Muslim religions, all missionary activities directed at converting Muslims to another religion shall be deemed a cognisable offence and shall be punished by law.

I am sure you see the difficulty. The very act of preaching Christianity becomes political. It is illegal and seditious. From the Muslim point of view the argument is logical. You *are* weakening the *Islamic* state by trying to win converts. Probably that paragraph will never be incorporated in the constitution, but you may be sure it expresses the attitude of millions of Muslims. How then is the true Christian going to avoid politics? The moment he opens his mouth he is 'in politics' willy-nilly, *if he preaches the Gospel*. He who brings the message of the Church is the Ambassador of Christ. The contents of his proclamation are the Judgment of God and the grace of God welded together, for in Christ we have the condemnation of the old and the promise of the new. The message is therefore a proclaiming of ultimate hope in a new heaven and a new earth, or in other words, in the Kingdom of God, which is God's final answer to man's sin and finiteness. From this conception of the ultimate, it follows that the Church—here and now—can never live at peace in any theocratic state, for the real theocratic state is the Kingdom of God, both present and coming. Therefore in preaching Christ you are both directly and indirectly engaged in political polemics. Admittedly the Kingdom of God in Christ *is not of this world*, and the struggle is not for kingship in this world; but in proclaiming the ultimate theocratic state in which Christ is King, every other theocratic state, be it Islamic or Jewish or any other conceivable, is put in the position of Herod, who, fearing what would happen if the 'king of the Jews', the Messiah, were allowed to live, killed off all the children under two years of age in and around Bethlehem. This content of Christian proclamation is not a matter of choice—to avoid it or soft-pedal it is to betray our Lord and His message. Obviously the foreigner and the native Pakistani are both in the same boat, as far as this side of the question is concerned; neither can sidetrack it and still claim to be preaching Christianity.

13. There is still another point. The Christian can never give *religious* sanction to any of the parties concerned in a conflict of politics, if his message is to be serious and genuine. This statement is true in two respects. First of all he, as a spectator, cannot label one party 'Christian' as against the other. Words or deeds by the Christian that can be construed to mean that Christianity is on the one side and not on the other are false, and

succeed only in hiding Christian truth behind a smokescreen. Let us take two concrete examples from the days before partition. A seven day non-stop prayer meeting, to which people of all faiths were invited, was sponsored and led by a missionary. They were to pray for the work of the constituent assembly and for the health and welfare of Gandhi and Nehru. On the surface it sounds very nice and religious. Actually the missionary by this action was siding against the British and the Muslims in favour of the Hindus. Not only that, but he was making it appear as though Christianity and the Christians too were on that side. If not, why should the health and welfare of Lord Wavell and Jinnah not be included in the prayers? And if this prayer meeting were not a political stunt why advertise it in the papers and make it a spectacular seven day non-stop show? Another case. In the days when the British were having most trouble with Gandhi, a certain missionary college ran a day of prayer for Gandhi. Obviously the missionaries in charge did not approve of the British way of taking care of their own problem. No one can condemn them for that. But to call it un-Christian and demonstrate against it with a prayer meeting was far more un-Christian than anything the British ever did. For tacitly they gave Christian religious sanction to Gandhi. But Christianity is not on anyone's side: Christianity is above and over all. It shows all men everywhere the sinfulness and brokenness of their politics. It teaches men how far they are from being able ever to create conditions in which man really can love his neighbour as himself.

14. Furthermore, in a clash between communities, no outsider is able to lift himself to a higher vantage point where he is able to see and understand the actual truth regarding the opponents. Every appeal to law or ethics on the part of the opponents is always with the idea of self-justification, but an outsider is even more impotent, for how is he to judge in a conflict between races and religions, each with its own economic and cultural impetus, each with its own struggle for survival which slowly is transformed into a struggle for power? By what standard can the outsider judge the merits and demerits of either side? Every standard is involved in the conflict.

15. This argument is equally true regarding the Pakistani Christian, who as a spectator looks at the struggle of religious communities, and of the foreigner who both nationally and religiously is an outsider. When this fact is recognised the temptation arises to sit back and twiddle one's thumbs. That is wrong, it is sinful quietism. Somehow prophetic Christianity, with its tension, has to be related to every concrete situation.

When our Lord preached that the Kingdom of God was 'at hand', He related it to every concrete situation, whether it was the healing of a leper or the denouncing of a hypocrite. In your concrete situation, where you meet the Muslim, your only headache should be how to preach Christ into that very situation. That means first of all to try to bring the minds of men under the influence of Christ's super-human teaching, full of tension as it is. Let me use one illustration to clarify the point. The Muslim will argue heatedly for or against the possibility of enforcing Shariat as the law of the land. The Christian will answer that neither enforcement nor lack of enforcement brings man nearer to God—that is, the Shariat as such has no redemptive quality in it. If it can be revised enough to be applicable in our times, it will still only be man's feeble attempt to keep sin suppressed, not God's answer to sin. God's answer to sin is a new heaven and a new earth. The Christian is—or should be—always interested in suppressing evil (primarily in himself of course) and striving for fair and righteous conditions in all the relationships of life, but also to be conscious of the fact that man's efforts can not, and never will, usher in the Kingdom of God, that is, can never be a final answer to sin.

16. Thus, by bringing the tension of prophetic Christianity to bear on concrete problems, if done soberly and thoughtfully, the proclaimer is making the Muslim face up to the Christian polemic to such an extent that his mind may be enlightened by the Holy Spirit to see in Christ the Redeemer of the world.

17. So far, then, the foreigner and national can go on side by side. But the national must go on a step further, and this is where the second aspect of the problem comes in. Every person is a native of some country, a member of some group. As such he is co-responsible with all the nationals of that country for the politics and culture of the country of his birth. Here the Pakistani is up against it. Let us be honest and look squarely at the problem. Labelling a political party with a religious tag is demonic. It is making use of God for party ends. But the development in India from the beginning of this century has been such that not only politics, but economics also, have had religious labels. Whatever the case may be with Hinduism and Islam, so much is absolutely certain. No political party has a moral right to label itself 'Christian'. This unequivocal statement can be supported by several good arguments.

(a) Political parties are the grouping together of certain people in order to get security, economic advantages (not necessarily unfair) and power. Christianity has never commanded people anywhere to get together for

these aims and ends. Christianity knows only one grouping together of people—and that is in the body of Christ.

(b) A man genuinely belonging to the body of Christ may have as his political faith a belief in democracy, despotism, dictatorship, oligarchy, or even a modified form of communism. Whatever his political faith, he should realise and confess openly that his and every other form of government is man's necessary, but feeble and imperfect, attempt to make the world a livable place while we are awaiting the glorious liberty of the sons of God. This waiting, this expectation, is both the basis and background for his attempt to do something about it here and now. But this attempt falls far short of anything called Christian in the true sense of the word. This is the attitude of *every* Christian; he cannot therefore arrogate to himself and his party the title 'Christian', as against a brother whose political faith is different, nor can he by calling it 'Christian' distinguish it from non-Christians who make other political parties with religious tags.

(c) The label 'Christian' in the field of politics should say something about loving one's enemies, turning the other cheek, covering a multitude of sins, etc. What we actually see in so-called Christian parties is not one whit different from what is found in all political parties: unscrupulous manoeuvring for power, unfair attacks on others in nasty propaganda and an unholy scramble for economic advantages. A political party which does not carry a religious label can never be so contemptible as one that does, because in the latter case unparalleled hypocrisy enters in, which is the worst of all sins.

(d) Christianity is universal: It speaks to both the amir and the faqir. Politics are always built on differences of class and cultures. To call a party 'Christian' is to give one class or one culture religious sanction above another. Christianity towers above 'the wrecks of time', it brings its message to men of all classes and all cultures. And here another danger arises in countries that incline toward democratic government. It was brought out by Dr Dutta years ago in the Viceroy's Privy Council. Let us suppose a serious minded Pakistani is an active member of some political party calling itself 'Christian', but who, because of his deeper allegiance to Christ, also has the feeling St Paul expressed in, 'Woe be unto me if I preach not the Gospel'. However, the moment he opens his mouth about Christianity he is under suspicion. Why? Because the person he is addressing himself to will ask (and rightly so): Is this political propaganda under religious cover? In an age where every kind of trickery is being practised in politics, how are you going to make your non-Christian

listener believe that you, quite independent of your party ambitions, are genuinely interested in obeying God's command to proclaim His Gospel? Actually this last argument is more or less theoretical, for in practice the so-called Christian who is an active member of a political party labelling itself Christian has a mentality so cluttered up with questionable ambitions for himself and his party that Christ's command to His Church about being His witnesses simply cannot find root there. It would be an explosive that would blow his party ambitions to smithereens.

18. Truly the Pakistani Christian is in a difficult position. If there were a party with no religious label which one could conscientiously join, and there, in every concrete situation, work, talk and live as a Christian, the difficulty would be solved. As it is, this is impossible. Superficially the dilemma is, on the one hand, to be true to the call of the Church to witness, and on the other to accept co-responsibility for the politics and culture of the country. It is, however, not really a dilemma, for one may differentiate between politics and party politics. In other words, while he rightfully refuses to join any party, he can at the same time be active in trying to help others, both Christians and non-Christians, to see the error of the present system. He can have a very positive relation to politics by struggling not against this or that candidate, but against the whole demoniacal system in which religion is made to serve the ends of a few ambitious politicians. Having taken this attitude, he is able both to throw himself into public life as a Pakistani Christian and also, as a representative of the Christian faith, to come to grips with Islam.

## QUESTIONS

1. Define and discuss 'Politics in Islam'.
2. What is the place of the Christian on the political scene in Pakistan?
3. What is the peculiar problem of the Christian evangelist in endeavouring to present the Gospel to the Muslim, while at the same time remaining non-political?

## CHAPTER 5

# Proclamation—I

1. When you yourself are God's means of getting into contact with the non-Christian world, and you realise that your proclamation has to be related to concrete situations where you are, probably the greatest danger you are faced with is that of losing the very definite content of the message you have to proclaim. For example, a proclaimer may say, 'I find discussion, debate, and arguments hopeless, so I usually begin by asking the Muslim if his religion gives him spiritual power'. Another may say, 'The ethics of Christ are such that they ought to convince any man of the supernaturalness of Christ, so I use ethics as my starting point'. Some even go so far as to consider all preaching useless, and rely on 'Christ-like lives' for a silent witness. There are almost as many variations as there are proclaimers. All of these 'systems' usually spring from a misunderstanding of Scripture and from a zeal for making contacts. The making of contacts is notoriously hard. Adam hid from God in the garden of Eden, and man has carried on this game of hide-and-seek ever since. One wants to see Christ in Christians before he believes; another says if he were rich and independent he would come out; a third says he would lose all his wealth if he were to accept Christ; a fourth says science makes faith impossible; a fifth says if only he could read and write he could find out the truth—and so on in almost every case. Man will hide behind something, just as Adam did. To get your message across you have to ferret people out, and in your zeal to do so, your one great temptation may be to accommodate your message to the people. In the final analysis this is a betrayal of the Lord, for to evangelise, to preach Christ, to proclaim the Kingdom of God is something very definite, something that *never* varies, something no one can add to, subtract from or change. There it is—complete; take it or leave it.

2. One reason for the apparently fluid condition of the Church's proclamation today seems to be that the Church has lost sight of a differentiation which is very obvious in the New Testament. Evangelisation (as to



content) was never confused with teaching or exhortation. Quite different words are used in the Greek NT for each of these. 'Preaching' is generally used in English as a translation of 'proclaiming' and 'evangelising' in the Greek. We have, however, come to look upon the 'message' the pastor delivers to his congregation, his 'household of faith', as 'preaching'. Nothing could be further from the original meaning of that word. This subtle change in language (which will be brought out fully later) is responsible in some degree for the way Scripture is often misused and misunderstood in evangelistic work. In aim, content and atmosphere, proclamation is unique in the Church.

3. It is vitally important for you in your work with Muslims to remember that all the writings in the New Testament from Acts onwards were written to and for Christians. They presuppose that the readers had been evangelised and had accepted the Evangel. These writings are the superstructure on the foundation that had already been laid. People who had accepted 'the way', as St Paul said, needed guidance in both spiritual and secular matters. That is just what the Epistles set out to give—but to those of 'the household of faith'. If your purpose is to make the Christian proclamation known among Muslims, and you *uncritically* use all the New Testament material, instead of discovering just what that proclamation to non-Christians was (and is), you will not only find yourself in deep water, but you will be doing the work an actual disservice. Take just one example. You will have seen that St Paul's 'I' plays a big part in his letters. He tells about his conversion, his spiritual experience, his many sufferings for Christ, his zest for the work, his endurance in prayer, his righteous life as a Pharisee, his good parentage, his authority as an Apostle, and lots of other things. Suppose, then, you follow his example—or think you do—and go among Muslims telling them of *your* conversion, *your* spiritual life, *your* zeal and (maybe) *your* suffering for the work, *your* prayer life, and things of that kind. While you may think you are following in his footsteps, actually you are very far from doing so. Whatever St Paul had to say to the saints, to his fellow Christians, one thing is sure: when he was proclaiming 'the Gospel', when he was evangelising, he has left no trace of ever having spoken subjectively, that is, of himself and his own religious experience. When he reminded the Corinthians of the fact that he would know nothing among them except Christ and Him crucified, he was not being rhetorical, as some would have it; he was in deadly earnest as we shall soon see. The other Apostles had the same attitude towards this message, which they called 'the Gospel'.

4. What we are up against in the New Testament is this: evangelising, preaching, proclaiming is done ordinarily by word of mouth, and therefore no clear and concise record has been kept of what that proclamation contained. The letters, however, are teaching, guidance and exhortation to those who had heard and accepted that ‘by-word-of-mouth’ proclamation. It is only by diligent study and searching that we can find out what that proclamation was. We cannot *uncritically* use the entire New Testament as though it all were of one category, that is, all proclamation material, although much of it will help us to understand what proclamation was.

5. In the following, while building up the actual contents of the Apostolic proclamation, no effort is made to do so in chronological order. That has been done very satisfactorily by C. H. Dodd in his book, *The Apostolic Preaching & Its Developments* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1970), and by others. We can take advantage of their work and begin with what we find in the Acts of the Apostles. This book has been through the fire of textual and historical criticism, and although this testing has brought out many interesting and colourful shades of difference in the wording of the proclamation at various times and by various speakers, it has also confirmed what St Paul says, namely, that the fundamental, basic content of the proclamation is the same, regardless of whether it is the original Petrine or the Pauline proclamation. For the purposes of this chapter we need not therefore differentiate between the various speakers, but only try to get the trend of what the Apostles actually proclaimed to the non-Christian world. Presumably, none of the speeches in Acts are verbatim, otherwise they would be longer, but even as a resumé they give a clear conception of what the early Church considered the proclamation to be.

6. If you take the four speeches of Peter in the second, third and fourth chapters, and the speech in Cornelius’ house in chapter ten, together with the two speeches of St Paul in the thirteenth and seventeenth chapters, you get the content of the proclamation of the early Church, when preached both to Jewish and to Gentile audiences. And what do you find? It is most important for every person who wishes to reach Muslims with the Evangel to study these speeches in connection with the scattered references to the Evangel found in all the Epistles.

7. First of all it had to be established that Jesus of Nazareth, the man who went about doing good and helping all those oppressed of the devil, was identical with the promised Messiah of the Old Testament Scriptures.

St Paul, ‘as his custom was’, went to the synagogue and argued from the Scriptures, ‘alleging’ that ‘this Jesus whom I preach unto you is the *Christ*, that is, the Messiah’ (Acts 17:2–3). Although the Epistles say next to nothing about the ministry of our Lord, the fact that the Apostles had to identify Jesus of Nazareth with the promised Messiah indicates that they in some manner (probably as it is done in St Matthew’s Gospel) had to present the teaching and ministry of Jesus. It would seem rather ridiculous for them to say a man by the name of Jesus was the Christ, without showing *why* they had reached that conclusion.

8. However, the overwhelming emphasis in the proclamation is on the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. When speaking in the synagogue, St Paul (Acts 13) pivots his speech on this point; when arguing with the Greek philosophers (chapter 17) it is the same thing; and when addressing the governor in his own defence (chapter 22), the death and resurrection are still in the foreground. Likewise, when he reminds the Corinthian Christians of what his proclamation in the beginning had been, when they were unbelievers (I Cor. 15:3f.), it is the same story. The other Apostles are just as emphatic about this point as St Paul.

9. This death and resurrection has a very definite setting. This Jesus, because He was the Messiah, was of Davidic origin and therefore was closely related to all Old Testament history (which is often repeated in various versions) as the fulfilment of prophecy. Note that the prophecy element is extremely strong in the proclamation of the early Church, from the very start.

10. By the resurrection, Jesus, who is the Christ, is exalted, glorified and is now on the seat of authority in heaven. He is Lord of all, Peter says to the audience in Cornelius’ house, which is only expressing the same thought in another way. Another aspect of this glorification is that He sent the Holy Spirit to His Church on earth. Finally, because Jesus is the Messiah who is to reign until all things have been put under His feet (also a prophecy), He will come again in power and great glory to establish the Kingdom of God, which is completed in the Second Coming.

11. The Apostles maintain that they are the witnesses of these things, chosen of God, and they therefore call men everywhere to repent and believe this message, this good news from God, for when Jesus comes again it will be not only as the Saviour and Restorer of all things, but also as Judge.

12. That, then, is the proclamation of the first Church, it is their message, their good news of which God has chosen them to be witnesses.

Every clause of this proclamation, although taken exclusively from the speeches reported in the Acts, can be found in various places in the Epistles; not there as *proclamation*, but as presupposed data on which a superstructure can be built, or as an article of the faith already received which in a certain situation needs further clarification or the implication of which needs to be made explicit *for believers*. Let me repeat: there is a difference between the basic, fundamental content of ‘the Gospel’, and the teaching, the doctrines, the dogmas and the exhortations which are derived from it. If the Church is to grow in Grace and is to be established in the faith, this superstructure is a vital necessity. But the foundation, the ‘Gospel’, the proclamation, is what must first be heard, accepted and believed. St Paul says no other foundation can be laid than that which is laid. In words that relate to our situation, that means that if a Muslim confesses himself to be a Christian for any other reason, be that reason ever so good, he has not accepted the Christ of the New Testament, but an idol carrying the name of Christ—an anti-Christ if you like. Therefore too much emphasis cannot be laid on the necessity of the proclaimer knowing just exactly what message he has to proclaim.

13. Now in analysing this Gospel, four definite points emerge:

(a) There are the facts. Inside the framework of history something very definite happened: Jesus Christ was born, he laboured, suffered, was crucified, died and was buried, then arose again. It is of vital importance for the Apostles to make it known that here was something that actually *happened*. The mystery religions of the time were full of symbolism which was meant to aid man in getting a rich, spiritual experience, but none would for one moment think of dwelling on any myth as historical. For in the mystery religions there was no need of history; the experience of spirituality lifted one above history. Not so in Christianity. History is all-important, for in it eternity and time meet. Or said in another way: history is vitally important, because only history can act as an index-finger pointing away from time to eternity.

(b) None of the Apostles is satisfied with presenting bare facts. The facts are there, but they have a very definite, a very special significance; they mean something, and just that something and nothing else. The Apostles insist that the facts mean this: God has visited His people; the Kingdom of God is realised; the judgment and final destruction of the Evil One and of all evil is guaranteed; the Messiah will come to reign in power and glory; God has given His final answer to sin and death. Here we all have to face a devilish snare, a real danger. Christians and non-Christians

through the ages have tried to pervert or ignore the significance of these facts as presented by the Apostles. Rationalistic, humanitarian and pietistic doctrines in the Church have time and again falsified the Apostolic proclamation in regard to the *significance* of the facts. The humanitarian and pietistic distortions are very prevalent on the mission field. The humanitarians preach ethics, brotherhood, philanthropy, human possibilities, etc. and always by plucking Christ and His teaching out of their original context and transplanting them in modern secular or religious thought systems. Likewise the pietists separate Christ from His significance in relation to the new age and make use of His name as the giver of a rich, spiritual experience. Outside Christianity you find men like Gandhi, telling us the significance of the Cross is that it symbolises the beauty and nobility of self-sacrifice. The Muslims would have us believe the significance of Christ is that of a prophet with a divine law book.

(c) Another point which emerges when we analyse the Apostles' proclamation is that the meaning the facts have for them is not the product of their own thinking (although the superstructure in the Epistles definitely is); but is based exclusively on the Old Testament. The Apostles believe implicitly in 'the law and the prophets'. The logic of their thinking was apparently as follows: if Jesus has any significance at all, it is as the Messiah: the Messiah is known to us only through God's dealings with Israel. Therefore one must search the Old Testament to find the significance of the facts relating to Christ. This point has also been blurred in the preaching of the Church, especially by that false doctrine called 'Logos spermatikos'. In that doctrine the argument is that God has not left Himself without a witness in any land or religion, and if that 'seed' can be found it can be related to Christ in the same way as the Jews related their own Scriptures to Him. Bluntly, to accept that doctrine means to forsake the very basis of Apostolic proclamation. It should be noted here that nothing of this kind was attempted either by St Peter or St Paul when they proclaimed the Gospel to the Gentiles. That this is so is very obvious in the fact that from the earliest beginnings the Jews found it impossible to reconcile their conception of the Messiah with suffering and death. This point is brought out clearly in the Gospels, both before (Matt. 16:23) and after (Luke 24:25ff.) the Death and Resurrection. It also comes out, both directly and indirectly, in the proclamation speeches in Acts. Christ Himself, and the Apostles after Him, had to find an overall picture of the Messiah in the Old Testament which could be reconciled with suffering and death. No Muslim will accept your statement, or that of the New

Testament, that Jesus suffered and died on the cross. That statement cannot be reconciled with his preconceived idea of what a ‘prophet’ is, and unless you are prepared to go straight back to the ‘law and the prophets’ and show your Muslim enquirer that the whole conception of the Suffering Servant, Who is the Anointed One—that is, the Messiah—is an integral part of God’s dealings with man, you have no other possibility of getting this revelational conception across—and nothing else can take its place. There is no getting round this point: the Apostolic interpretation of the ‘fact of Christ’ is derived exclusively from the Old Testament. It is only when the Old Testament significance is ignored that the door is opened for every kind of ‘private interpretation’ to enter.

(d) This special significance which the facts have demands a theological interpretation. That is to say, the relationship between prophecy and fulfilment must have a theological explanation. For example, how do we know that when Christ died, it was for our sins (I Cor. 15:3), or that it was to save us from this present wicked age (Gal. 1:4), or that when He arose again it was for our justification (Rom. 4:25), or that when we believe in this resurrection we are saved (Rom. 10:9)? The Muslim has a right to ask you how you know that this theological interpretation is correct. And if you love your neighbour as you love yourself you will not say that you feel it, nor that you have ‘experienced’ it; nor that it is obvious and demonstrable in history—neither in yours nor in any one else’s. You must say that the whole Christian Church lives by faith, and goes on the assumption that God spoke through the law and by the mouth of the prophets of old; proclaiming a way of salvation which was completed in Jesus and interpreted for us by His Apostles. Christ as He is proclaimed in both the Old and New Testaments then—and only then—becomes the Evangel, with which we are to evangelise the world.

14. We have now seen that the ‘Gospel’ had a very definite content. In the early Church ‘preaching Christ’ or ‘preaching the Kingdom of God’ was just as specific and definite as any message an earthly king might proclaim to his people. Obviously such a specific message, because of its content, determines its own method of promulgation. It is only when the actual content of the proclamation is hidden behind a smokescreen of pietism, humanitarianism or rationalism that people begin asking what the best method for promulgating the Gospel is.

15. In order to avoid confusion, it is going to be necessary to introduce two very common Greek words. The one is *kerygma* and the other is *evangelion*. The former means ‘Proclamation’; the latter ‘Evangel’. A

study of these two nouns and their corresponding verbs will tell us all we need to know about the New Testament method of promulgation.

16. Let us begin with kerygma. St Paul writes to the Corinthians (I Cor. 1:21) that it pleased God by the foolishness of kerygma to save them that believe. In the English Bible you have 'the foolishness of preaching', but if you will take the trouble to look up the word 'preach' in a good dictionary you will see that while the word 'preach' derives from the Latin word *praedicare*, which means 'to make known before someone' (that is: to proclaim), its present definition is 'to deliver a sermon or to give serious advice, as for example, on morals'. In other words, the New Testament idea of proclamation has been lost in the word 'preach'. According to Apostolic usage, our usual sermon is either exhortation or teaching; it has nothing to do with 'preaching', that is, with kerygma. But the picture which comes to our mind when we think of preaching is probably entirely different from that which the Corinthians had when they read about the foolishness of preaching. In Greek the preacher was called a *keryx*. He was simply a herald of any message that came from the king or the civil or military authorities.

17. Who, in the East, has not seen the town crier? He beats his drum to attract attention; he then proclaims his kerygma, his message, so all can hear and understand it. Having finished at one spot he goes farther on down the bazaar, repeating the procedure every so often until all have heard and understood. It is only when you replace the picture of the pastor in his church with this picture of the town crier, that you can understand how seriously St Paul means it when he speaks of the *foolishness* of proclamation. Any one can see that a pastor exhorting and teaching his congregation really makes good sense. There is no foolishness about that, nor did St Paul ever speak of that as foolishness. But kerygma—proclamation—both as to content and procedure, is something very unique in religion. It is the broadcasting to those outside the Church of a definite message, purporting to be from God. The adoption of kerygma to promulgate knowledge of revelation, with the conversion of the hearers as its aim and goal, indubitably originated in Christianity. The Jews, although very zealous missionaries at the time of Christ, were propagating a religion, the very contents of which could not be reconciled with heralding, for Jerusalem was the centre of all true religion and the purpose of the Jews was to draw men towards this centre. And the mystery-religions prevalent at the time received adherents only through initiation. But St Paul says it pleased God by the foolishness of kerygma to save them that believe.

18. Not only did kerygma originate in Christianity but it is bound so closely together with the very existence of the Church that the vitality and theology of any church can be accurately gauged by the place kerygma takes. For example, in the Roman church the concept of heralding was completely eclipsed by that of the Sacraments as *ex opera operato* (meaning the Sacraments are effective in the use thereof, with or without faith)—mysticism taking the place of mystery. And when the Reformers redefined the concept *Church*, it was a dynamic definition, based on kerygma. The Reformers said that the Church was present wherever a group of people preached and heard the pure and undefiled Gospel, and the Sacraments were rightly administered and received. Every modern theology of immanence<sup>1</sup> is forced by its very nature to end with a complete rejection of the concept of kerygma. The writers of the book called *Rethinking Christian Missions* show clearly that the modern theology of immanence can get no further than mere sharing. Public crying, heralding, proclaiming is so foreign to its very structure that its introduction would be as dynamite that would blow it to pieces. For, whereas the Reformers, in the footsteps of the Prophets and Apostles, were heralds of a message that began ‘Thus saith the Lord thy God’, the exponents of modern theology cannot lift their eyes. Since heralding human possibilities is utter nonsense, kerygma has naturally been superseded by spiritual sharing in the theology of immanence.

19. But even in genuine Pietism kerygma does not find its lawful place for it is made dependent on a ‘something more’, namely a hidebound religious experience of the kerygma. And this experience is considered to be a necessary commentary on the contents of kerygma, without which the kerygma itself falls to the ground. And in many instances this commentary, this necessary experience, has assumed so great an importance that it has replaced the kerygma and itself become kerygma. Thus it must logically end just where the modern theology of immanence ends, inside the boundaries of human possibilities.

20. Kerygma however, the foolishness of preaching, although rejected by many builders as though it were man’s foolishness and not the foolishness of God (which is wiser than the wisdom of man), has from the very beginning been the cornerstone in the living building of the *ecclesia* (Church). Take it out of any Church and you have removed the candlestick

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<sup>1</sup> The theology of immanence, concisely defined, is the teaching that Christianity’s aim and purpose is confined to the welfare of man here and now.



of that Church. Obviously kerygma, as a method of procedure, is what the Apostles both practised and taught.

21. Let us now go on to the other Greek word, *evangelion*, translated 'evangel'. We all know the word 'evangelise', but the significance of the word is more or less lost. The noun 'evangel' simply means 'good news', nothing else, and to evangelise means to announce good news. That is all. In daily life among the Greeks it was used to announce such happy events as the completion of wedding arrangements or the birth of a child. Its use in the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament shows this clearly. For example in I Samuel 31:9 we read that when the Philistines found the body of Saul they cut off his head, stripped him of his armour, and sent a message home to 'evangelise' those of the house of their idols and the rest of the people. The idea is of course to publish the good news, and that is also how it is translated into English. Isaiah 40:9 has the same word, also in the sense of announcing good tidings. There are also other passages which clearly show that the word 'evangelise' simply means to announce or publish good tidings.

22. When we turn to the New Testament we find it used there a couple of times in the ordinary way, that is, in Luke 2:10 where the birth of our Lord is announced. However, the original Christian use of the word probably came from Luke 4, where Jesus spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth. His text was taken from Isaiah. The Greek in St Luke reads this way: 'He hath anointed me to evangelise the poor . . . to proclaim deliverance to the captives . . . to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord'. In the *King James Version* both 'to evangelise' and 'to proclaim' have been translated 'to preach', and essentially the two words mean the same thing. The original text in Isaiah is Messianic: it is the proclamation of a New Age, the Kingdom of God, the reign of the Messiah. Jesus used this text in the synagogue at Nazareth in just this way, and the New Testament writers follow this usage pretty closely. To proclaim, to announce the kerygma, is to evangelise the people. Whether they accept or reject that kerygma has nothing to do with the fact of evangelisation. Hebrews 4:6 shows this. There it says that those who were first evangelised did not enter in because of unbelief.

23. According to the New Testament, then, when the town crier goes down the bazaar, beating his drum and crying out his message from the authorities, he is evangelising the people. Mark this: the foolishness of evangelising does not lie in the method, for every new dynasty, every new reign, has always been announced by proclamation. Every new king, on

the death of his father, is proclaimed king. It is the most natural of all methods. The foolishness lies in the presupposition that the Church has such a proclamation from the King of kings, and that it can become *effective simply by proclaiming it*. That is the stumbling block for wise men, both inside and outside the Church. In fact it is a stumbling block for us all—at one time or another. Can *any* herald of the Church truthfully say he has never felt the hopelessness of it all when he has stood up in a bazaar full of Muslims to proclaim the Gospel? Probably not. Actually, of course, as will be shown in a later chapter, our belief in the Holy Trinity is usually so theoretical that in experience and practical work we forget that the *effectiveness* of the proclamation is 100 per cent under the control of the Holy Spirit.

## CHAPTER 6

# Proclamation—II

1. In the last chapter the picture of the New Testament *keryx*, the preacher, was brought to your attention. Now we will try to analyse the picture into its component parts. Please do try to concentrate on this one point, for whatever else missions may be doing of social, philanthropic and church work, it is obvious that in the New Testament our Lord Himself and then the Apostles gave the Church this one definite command in relation to the world at large: Proclaim! Evangelise! The picture of New Testament preaching contains three parts:

- (a) The Preacher
- (b) The message
- (c) Its comprehensibility

Let us take them in this order.

### THE PREACHER

2. According to the New Testament, the preacher can be either the Church, as such, or the Church's chosen representative—the individual who actually stands up to proclaim the message. The latter is, of course, in every way dependent on the former. Therefore, it will not be out of place to begin with the idea of the whole Church, as such, as the *keryx*. Whether we like it or not, whether we actually are co-responsible or not, we must face up to the fact that the apostolic *kerygma*, both as to content and procedure, has in present-day work, to an appalling extent, been superseded by more 'sensible' methods. On the other hand, Kraemer's opinion is that, 'The real meeting between Christianity and the Eastern

systems of life has not yet taken place, and is still a matter of the future' (*The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*). If that is true, and it undoubtedly is, then the Church's 'sensible' methods, whatever else they may have done, have evidently not facilitated this meeting, in spite of the fact that this very meeting is its primary job.

3. Why has the 'foolishness of evangelisation' been replaced by 'wise' methods? We all know that there are any number of so-called Christians who no longer believe in the Evangel, as preached by the Apostles. That those people cannot evangelise must be obvious, and we cannot stop here to discuss their predicament. Amongst those who profess to believe in the Evangel, you will find that historically the motives which caused the change to more 'sensible' methods are many. One point must, however, be made: the humanitarian argument is a comparative newcomer. Schools for non-Christians sprang up on a purely rationalistic basis: Christian *culture* was a necessary background for Christian faith. Medical work was primarily introduced to 'open doors' and 'break down prejudice', or in order to get a better hearing for the kerygma. Both educational and medical work were considered, not first of all as Christian humanitarianism, but as preparation for the Gospel. However, humanitarianism is now the strongest motive. Let us take each of these in turn. They all still exist.

4. First then, the *rationalist* approach. It has long been an admitted fact that the proclaiming of Christianity *by itself*, while it may produce a few 'compound Christians', does not really produce the results the first missionary churches of this modern era expected. Politics, culture, economics, wars, etc. all play their part. One might use the mechanism of a watch as an illustration. The principle of a watch is the relationship of wheels to wheels, or cogs to cogs, if you like. The one wheel is religion, another culture, a third economics and so on. The mainspring is God's will. Where the rationalists go off the track is that they by their interference try to regulate the relationship between the wheels, so to speak. Said in other words, they forsake the wheel of religion and try to hasten the turning of the wheels of culture, politics, etc. in order to bring about conditions favourable to the acceptance of their religion.

5. Behind this effort lies the erroneous belief that as man is a rational being, he will of necessity choose the religion which produces the best background for his total life here on earth. This type of rationalism can be both obvious and subtle. For example, Alexander Duff preached it openly; whereas in our generation it is subtle, the argument being that humanitarian work inspired by Christian ideals is a form of Christian witnessing.

Both mean the same thing: that man, being sensible, will choose the good life and the religion which produces it, when he comes into contact with it. Undoubtedly there is a danger here for the keryx also. When a preacher faces persecution and even death in obedience to the command to preach, he is also considered to be an example of the good life (for obedience to God is obviously *the* good life) and therefore some expect their own obedience to be a form of Christian witnessing which will force men to choose this good life and the religion which produced it. Rationalism in its blatant form is now more or less dead; in its subtle form it is always present and always a temptation for the Church, tempting it to soft-pedal its proclamation activities and to rely on man's common sense to accept that which is 'good' for him.

6. Let us now look at the second motive. Work, obviously not proclamation in itself, is often spoken of, especially in its relation to Islamic countries, as a wonderful agency 'to open doors' and to 'break down prejudice'. Doors may be opened and prejudices broken down, *but for whom?* Obviously for the European. There is no type of philanthropic work that has ever made a convert welcome in his own community. Think that over. What does it mean? Remember the Christian keryx is proclaiming his message to a people who are rebels. The keryx is therefore not looked upon with favour, presupposing they know what he is talking about. One has to read the story of the Gospels and the history of the Apostles with eyes that do not see, to escape from this crystal clear fact.

7. It is the very nature of the case that the essential contact between the keryx and the people is impact or collision. If the struggle really is a struggle between light and darkness, then it follows that the keryx will be hated, humiliated, maltreated, and in some cases killed. The degree and kind of opposition that darkness brings to bear against the light varies in different countries and different places, but essentially the keryx is proclaiming a message to *rebels*, doomed to death. Whatever efforts the Church may make with its 'sensible' methods to sidetrack the issues, essentially whenever anything does happen, the struggle between light and darkness is still there. The hatred may not strike the European who succeeded in getting the struggle started, *but it will strike*—if only a very weak convert.

8. Let us now look at the third point—namely the argument that because of philanthropic work the keryx gets a better hearing in the district. This argument is usually presented in two ways: (i) A simple statement of the fact that the keryx is received in a more pleasant and respectful

way and is given a hearing he otherwise might not get, because of the philanthropic work with which people associate him; and (ii) A belief that the eyes of the people have been opened to the love and compassion of God, as demonstrated through the loving care and professional skill of the philanthropic workers, and it has made them more open to be approached with the Gospel.

9. We take (i) first. Admittedly the people in the village received you gladly. But why? Was it not because they knew, or thought, you were related in some way to that philanthropic work? They *need* your hospital, your school, your philanthropy, and therefore they sit wooden-faced and pretend to listen to your preaching. On the basis of their own mentality, they argue that if they treat you rough, you will make it tough for them next time they come to your hospital, your school or your other help-giving agency. That is what they would do. In other words, while the institution increases the possibility of contacting a large number of people, it does not necessarily follow that you have had a 'hearing' at all. You may have been rejected just as completely as the fellow who gets thrown out of the village. In fact you have in all probability aroused less interest in what you are about than the fellow who gets stoned and kicked out of the village. In the latter (getting kicked out) the issues at least are clear, in the former case they are confused and apt to deceive the over-optimistic keryx.

10. There is a current belief that our good deeds reflect the love of God, so that people who see it have their eyes opened and become more receptive to the preaching of the Gospel. This idea presupposes Christian thinking in the background of the non-Christians, which of course is not the case. The Muslim, according to Islam, knows nothing of the love of God, nor does he connect any good deed of any individual with the idea of reflecting anything of God. Good deeds and piety of any kind are for him a witness to the efforts and faith of the individual in question, whatever the motive.

Another important point is that, whatever God in His freedom does, the Church has to proclaim the love of God as revealed in the Word become flesh. 'For God so loved the world . . .' Therefore the Church has no right to expect that people will be given ears to hear with because of its philanthropic work.

11. Humanitarianism is also often a motive that sidetracks the Church in its proclamation work. The work of a Church active in philanthropy, and the work of any humanitarian organisation, look so much alike on the surface that great numbers of even intelligent Christians are deceived when

missions go off on a tangent of philanthropic humanitarianism, as though that were Christianity. This question will come up more fully in a later chapter. Let it suffice here to point out two things: humanitarianism has its start and goal in humanity; and Christian activity has its start and goal in God. Because of this difference of centre, humanitarianism can organise itself into any efficient grouping it cares to; Christian activity in 'love' is strictly personal and individual. When, therefore, humanitarian motives are argued in favour of Christian institutional work, the Church has moved away from Christian activity into humanitarian activity, away from God and towards man.

12. Behind these two motives for shifting away from the New Testament procedure lie two words, which are a sort of funeral dirge: *nothing happens*. Every church group which understands the call to evangelisation of Muslims has to face the pessimism of these two words. *Nothing happens*. We all know that even now, after 2,000 years, the Church as such is not more mature in spirit than to be prepared to pour in thousands of pounds where there are thousands of converts, and to starve evangelisation where there are no converts. Crudely said, converts mean money. The reason for this attitude is that from the very start of the modern missionary age the Church has been playing at heroics. It has been 'attempting great things for God' in spiritual conquests. In an age of expansion, when Western governments were knocking down Nawabs and Maharajahs like nine-pins; the Church was attempting the same thing for God. It just did not work out that way. There were prejudices, closed doors, ignorance, strange freaks of culture, etc. which stood in the way. Something had to be done about it. Modern missions, like Abraham when he had received the promise of an heir, had faith to do everything, literally everything—except *to wait*. To wait was to 'doubt the promises'. Remember that when Abraham accepted the idea of a substitute for Sarah it was not because he did not have the promise of God, on the contrary, it was because he did have that promise. All that was needed, he thought, was a little cleverness, a little common sense, a little activity, then God's promise would be fulfilled. He might have spared himself the trouble for, as we know, God fulfilled His promise in His own way and in His own time: Abraham's activity only resulted in his having Ishmael on his hands. What we need to remember and constantly call to mind is that doctrine of the Reformation: 'When and where it pleases God, He gives men faith to believe the Gospel'. When the Church proclaims the Gospel, it is not 'attempting great things for God', but simply being obedient. Whether

anything happens or not is in no conceivable way related to that obedience. The Church has only one worry, but it is a double one: does it really know what the basic, fundamental, apostolic kerygma is, and is it getting it across in all the world? Rest assured that the slave woman and her son may give you the feeling of accomplishment for a short while but they will be your headache later on. The history of Missions has certainly shown this to be true. The slave woman and her son *always* end up by conspiring to usurp the place of the legitimate child.

So far, then, we have talked about the Church as a whole, as the responsible agent for preaching the Gospel in all the world.

13. Let us now take the case of the individual keryx, the man who is actually the town crier, who actually gets up in the bazaar to evangelise the Muslim. Remember, he is a man, a human being. He will have many different feelings regarding different people he meets in life's long bazaar. There are rich and poor, strong and weak, good and bad, cultured and barbarians, learned and ignorant. Some he will like, some he will dislike, of some he will be hopeful, others will cause him to despair. In life's tumult *as a preacher*, his spiritual experience, his zest for converts, his good deeds, his vague love for humanity do not seem to fit into the overall picture. There is only one real anchor, and that is *strict obedience*. God so loved the world that He sent His Church out everywhere to tell all nations of the Son, Whom He gave. If the Church in any way at all can go on the presumption that it also loves the world, that love will be expressed in obedience. Not a legalistic obedience to a law, but a constitutional act conditioned by faith in the love of God. There is therefore only one qualification in the genuine keryx that is apparent at all times, and that is his *obedience*. He has been sent out to proclaim a certain message, and the fact of his obedience indicates love. Undoubtedly he has his feelings, but they are his *own*, and he has no justification whatsoever for letting them get mixed up in the message he is proclaiming. If he is obedient, he tries to get his message across to the rich and the poor, to the strong and the weak, to the good and the bad, regardless of their conditions or qualifications. But the genuinely Christian virtues will become apparent in the keryx in relation to the amount of persecution he has to bear. Genuine Christian experience, genuine love for mankind, genuinely good deeds, genuine spiritual power, in other words, 'the fruits of the Spirit', come to the surface because of the impact or collision caused by the keryx in obedience to his Master's command proclaiming his Master's message to rebels. This question is brought up in the next chapter on *Intolerance*. Suffice it



to say here that there is indeed nothing cold and impersonal in being a herald, presupposing the herald is really getting his Master's message across to the rebels, in such a way that they understand it.

14. And yet it is true that in the final analysis the man himself does not count. He himself is not a part of his proclamation. The very nature of his kerygma limits him. When an earthly king sends a keryx with a proclamation it is so worded that people can grasp its meaning, understand what they are to do, and make a decision accordingly. Not so with the Christian keryx. When he proclaims his message, he knows that men will see with their eyes and yet not see: they will hear with their ears and yet not understand. In other words, the keryx knows that the working of the Holy Spirit in close connection with the proclaimed Word is an essential in all Christian propaganda. The rather difficult Reformation teaching about the relationship between the Spirit and the Word is only rightly understood when the keryx realises that the acceptance of his kerygma by the rebel to whom it is addressed does not depend on the ability or the desire to apprehend it, nor does it necessarily follow that it will be accepted because it has been understood. The Word proclaimed is bound to the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit to the Word. Which is to say, that God keeps the power of His Word in His own hand. Not even the most clever and subtle inventions of the zealous keryx, who burns with a desire to see results in the shape of converts, are able to tempt this power out of God's hands.

15. When a keryx, to the very best of his ability (and always with the consciousness of imperfections that need forgiveness), has put his message across, he has finished his job. This is not as easy as it may sound, as you will see in the following section. His job is finished, not because he does not care, not because he is unkind, not because he lacks keenness or enthusiasm. On the contrary, he has demonstrated all of these virtues in that he has laboured strenuously to get his message across to them. But in the nature of the case, there is no more he can do. The proclamation itself is of such a nature that the keryx simply drops out of the picture when his job is done. If he has done his job, the rebel is face-to-face with his King through the medium of that message. What happens is a matter between the King and the rebel. This again conforms to the Reformed conception of the priesthood or ministry. The Roman Catholic teaching that ordination is a sacrament that changes the character of the person and makes him a mediator between God and man was rejected as false, and in its place a functional conception was accepted. The keryx' activity is limited to the bringing about of a meeting between the Word and the rebel; having done

that, he is finished. This limitation does at times become very irksome. Who has not seen missionaries bringing pressure to bear or coaxing and tempting people to accept baptism and ‘come out’? Who has not seen the disheartened, discouraged missionary shamefacedly admitting he has proclaimed the Gospel for years without any results? Every missionary may have something to be ashamed of—probably has. But the reason for his shame can never be gauged, measured or known from what results he has in the form of converts. If the keryx has something to be ashamed of, let him look for it in his carelessness regarding his knowledge of the specific content of his message; let him look for it in his lack of diligence in learning the native language in order that he may get his message across; let him look for it in his laziness in his not acquiring knowledge of the people’s religion, customs, etc.; let him look for it in his lack of concentration on the job he was sent out to do; let him look for it anywhere he likes but *not* in the results of his work in converts. No keryx sent out by God need bow his head in shame because he has no converts. He knows, or should know, that when and where it pleases God, He gives faith to men to believe the Gospel.

16. The crying need in Pakistan is for the keryx to get the right perspective. On all sides—even among Christians—he is laughed at. He becomes a voice in the wilderness. The foolishness of his enterprise is so glaringly foolish that, unless he very clearly and definitely *knows* what he is doing, he will be knocked out, or what is worse, sidetracked into a ‘sensible’ enterprise.

### THE MESSAGE

17. In this and the following section there is going to be an apparent contradiction. For while the Church has a rigid, unalterably definite message to proclaim, that is, what God has revealed, it has at the same time the difficult task of making that message intelligible to particular people here and now. Yet the tension that comes from keeping the original message intact and still making it applicable in a thousand different circumstances has always been the Church’s headache.

18. First, then: the definite message from one in authority. Every proclamation in the Bible—all the Prophets and all the Apostles—either implicitly or explicitly say, ‘Thus saith the Lord’. There is an all too prevalent

danger in present-day evangelisation that it may concentrate upon the ‘spiritual experience’ of the ‘evangelist’. Undoubtedly St Paul developed his theology in one way, St Peter developed his in another and St John in still another; *but*—and we must remember this—their Gospel, their proclamation, their kerygma—*was the same*, and it was authoritative. You may quarrel with St Paul’s theology or St John’s, or you may make a wild effort to make syncretic theology out of both, but you can not quarrel with their Gospel. For it is not their own Gospel, as their theology is their own, but it is a proclamation from One in authority—from God. There *is* a foundation and there *is* a superstructure. It is only when men begin putting the foundation on the roof and the superstructure in the basement that confusion reigns supreme and every kind of destructive anti-Christian teaching gets its opportunity to sneak in and completely vitiate that definite, authoritative proclamation of which the Church is steward. If the keryx, however, is to be able to say, ‘Thus saith the Lord’, he must previously have received a certain message over which he has no power whatsoever. The Communists, for example, are the masters of the pseudo-religion they propagate. They can reshape it and remodel it so that it suits any psychological background. When they wish to bring about a certain effort in any particular country, they shape their propaganda to that end. You do not have that liberty, for your kerygma is *specific*, and has been given to promulgate. You want to get your kerygma across to a Muslim. You know that he, like all other men, is in open rebellion against God, as revealed. You know that the Muslim likes your wonder-working Jesus. He will listen for hours to our tales of all the miracles Jesus did. He may even add a few himself that make yours look pale by comparison. But if you stop there you might as well not have started. The specific kerygma you have to proclaim is *not* stories of a wonder-worker. For example, the Muslim says, oh yes, he believes Christ brought people back from the dead. Take the story of Lazarus and read that Christ said that *He* is the resurrection and the life, and that whosoever believes in Him, though he were dead, yet shall he live, etc. If Christ really brought Lazarus to life, even after he had been dead for four days, it must mean He had that power from God. But surely God would not give that power to a person who could make a statement so blasphemous as the one above. Since Christ, however, *did* make that statement and *did* bring Lazarus out of the grave, we must conclude that the statement in *His* mouth was not blasphemous but true. Likewise the overall picture of Christ. If He was what He was, then what He said must also be true. This is the procedure of St Peter in

Acts 10:37 onwards. In other words, the Muslim is only pleased with the wonder-working Jesus as long as you allow him to isolate the miracles from the entire person of Jesus. But you simply cannot allow him to do that—for your message is specific. Likewise, many Muslims like your compassionate Jesus, but that same Jesus condemned, in no uncertain tones, Pharisaism, for example. The Muslim is often a pharisee, and he will not like to hear talk of that side of Jesus' teaching, but you have to get it across, because your message is specific. It is not what you would like to say, but what you have to say. There are some Muslims who love to talk about spirituality. If you begin comparing notes on spiritual experiences instead of proclaiming the definite facts of your kerygma, you are deserting your job. You are an unfaithful herald. The moment you, as a herald, realise that because of carelessness, pressure, ignorance or fear of being unpopular you may be sidestepping the real issue, you will never cease from careful study and diligent heart-searching. After every encounter with a Muslim you will review the whole talk in detail to see if you really were true to that specific proclamation you have to make; and if not, you will want to know just where and how and why you were sidetracked. As this point is so important, let us take just one more illustration. Time and again the Muslim will tell you that Christians are ethically better than Muslims. If you argue on the basis that we are better because we have spiritual power, you are falsifying that very specific message you have to bring. Your message says nothing about who is better than someone else, or why. On the contrary, your message says we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God, and are therefore 'dead'. And God's answer is, through Christ, a new heaven and a new earth in which there is no sin, but eternal life. In other words, we are all sinners. Why then waste time discussing who is the best and who are the worst sinners? For, in any case, the wages of sin is death, but the new age, the new creation, the new life, is the gift of God in Christ. If you always have your specific message in mind, any question or any argument the Muslim has can be brought into relation to that. It is only when, for some reason or other, you are confused about your specific message that you will flounder like a fish on dry land.

19. There can be no doubt that the first, essential, overwhelming need of the Church in Pakistan (not to mention the Church in other countries), including missionaries, is to sit down and find out definitely what the Evangel is, and to stay at it until an overpowering sense of authority gives staying power, poise, direction and courage.

### ITS COMPREHENSIBILITY

20. The message is, without doubt, unalterable and definite; but it has to be comprehensive for the hearer. This is the job of dogmatics, or if you like, theology as a whole.

As we said before, the keryx has this task of bringing about a meeting between the King's message and the rebel. It is this very specific message, to this very people with all their idiosyncrasies. The Gospel is universal only because it can be made specific for every tribe on earth. But it must be made comprehensible to the very people where you are. It is a fallacy to suppose that comprehensibility is in any way aided by philanthropy or secular education, as these things have no direct relation to the kerygma of the New Testament. The kerygma is something God has to say about *Himself* and *His* deed, and it has to be proclaimed, explained, and made understandable on that level. Probably the one single factor, more than any other, which has been a real hindrance to world evangelisation is the fact that the Church has not made its message comprehensible to the people where it has gone. The kerygma is definite, clear-cut, unchangeable, and true, but its comprehensibility in each given situation is the responsibility of the keryx.

21. Comprehensibility and faith, however, should not be confused. Mark (and others) use the expression, 'that seeing, they may see and not perceive' (4:12). 'Seeing, they may see' is comprehensibility. They must see, understand, comprehend. 'Perceiving' is faith. Perceiving must follow after seeing. In other words, the gift of faith does not come in a vacuum. '*I know* in Whom I have believed.' Faith is no hocus-pocus or magic. Causing men to 'see' is the job of the keryx; causing them to 'perceive' is the work of God, through the Holy Spirit.

22. Finally, a word of warning. Nothing in this chapter should be construed to mean a soft-pedalling of the *urgency* of the proclamation. Soft-pedalling is equal to misrepresentation, for we never know when and where it pleases God to give men faith to believe the Gospel. Therefore, '*today, if ye hear His voice, harden not your hearts*', is always and everywhere applicable in the Apostolic kerygma. What the result of this urgency may be lies in the hand of God.

23. Evangelisation or kerygma in the New Testament, then, amounts to this: (i) a specific, definite message from one in authority, that is, God; (ii) a keryx or herald proclaiming this message as an act of obedience; and (iii) the message being made comprehensible to the people so that God,

through the Holy Spirit, can give faith to men to perceive and believe the message, turn from their rebellion and become partakers in the Kingdom of God.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. How much may be said in favour of humanitarian aids to the preaching of the Gospel? And how much against?
2. Distinguish and define the work of God and the work of His herald in the preaching of the Gospel and the creation of faith in man.
3. What are some of the sources of confusion in proclamation?

## CHAPTER 7

# Intolerance

1. This chapter follows naturally in the wake of the previous ones. If you try to carry out in practice all that you have read so far you will obviously be faced with the question of tolerance. This question becomes the more vital because Muslims generally are known to be fanatical and intolerant. Tolerance, an easygoing, live-and-let-live tolerance, is often proclaimed as a virtue in Christian circles. We need, therefore, to make a short study of the conception and history of intolerance, in order to discover what the Christian attitude really is.

2. One would suppose that in Judaism, Islam and Christianity, that is, in the three religions purporting to be based on revelation, the concept of intolerance would be more or less alike. This, however, is not the case, for both Judaism and Islam are theocracies, although constituted differently. Where the theocratic state has its standing army and police force to ensure obedience to its will, physical force is invariably applied in order to enforce its decisions in religious matters also.

3. The Israelites were told to kill false prophets arising from among themselves, as well as the false prophets of foreign religions who perverted the Jews. On Mount Carmel hundreds of these prophets of a foreign religion were put to death. And when the Israelites were subduing Canaan they were told in some cases to destroy each and every living thing in the land. The purpose of this intolerance was to keep Israel clean and undefiled. Although the Jews later (at the time of Christ) had developed a great system of proselytism, the Jewish theocracy was based on the theory that the centre of religion was geographically and ethnologically in Jerusalem. Theirs was *not* the work of bringing the truth out into all the world but of preserving Israel pure so that the rest of the world could come to them for religion, pure and undefiled. The entire Old Testament is a testimony to the struggle to keep Israel free from defilement by heathenism. The intolerance of the Jewish people has therefore always been an effort at self-preservation in religion.

4. Although the issues in Islam were terribly confused, and as a matter of fact still are, there can be no doubt that in addition to the craving for loot, authority, and power there was the urge to spread the truth of a one-God religion. The fundamental intolerance of Islam may be seen in the division of the world into 'Dar-ul-Islam' and 'Dar-ul-Harb'; the House of Islam and the House of War. 'Exterminate the unbelievers' is the essence of the Quranic injunction in the sword verse that has caused much argument in exegesis. Parallel with this command is the system of poll-tax subjugated nations could pay as the price of retaining their own religion. In this way, political, social, and cultural issues have been so thoroughly confused with religious issues in Islam, that it is impossible to say that Islam teaches this or that definite doctrine with regard to the conduct of its adherents in their relation to those outside the fold. One thing, however, has always been maintained; namely, that apostasy from Islam is punishable by death. That this law does not always function is due to other factors, for example, government by European Powers. In older Islamic countries where the rulers are Muslims, religious freedom is interpreted to mean that non-Muslims may either remain as they are or become Muslims—not that Muslims are free to choose whom they will follow. And even this degree of tolerance can both be attacked and defended by means of Quranic injunctions.

5. We note in passing that in naturalistic and tribal religions the question of intolerance takes on a very different aspect. That which some missionaries mistakenly praise as tolerance is in reality a deeply rooted and logical indifference to the central question of Truth as absolute. Hinduism has been able to absorb Buddhism and Buddha has become one of its avatars. It is even now trying to assimilate Christianity and Christ in the same way. In Japan and China the masses are adherents of two or three religions. By the very nature of the case, tribal religion and naturalistic religion *must* consider truth as relative. Even men like Tagore and Gandhi profess tribal religions and consider the question of absolute and final Truth as a matter of indifference. The argument of every nature-religion, regardless of how highly it is developed, is the pragmatic argument of values. When the Hindu says Hinduism is the best religion for Hindustan, he is clearly not interested in Truth but in pragmatic values.

6. The adherents of nature-religions are usually 'open-minded' and friendly towards the truths found in other religions. Hindus will, for example, make speeches praising both Muhammed and Jesus. Each is a great personality worthy of admiration. But the religion that is logically



indifferent to Truth as absolute and therefore is able to be friendly to truths presented from other sources is definitely not in the nature of the case disinterested when the argument is one of *values*. The immanent value of a nature-religion expresses itself in the whole structure of the nature or people. Nothing social, cultural, or political is outside the realm of values. And just because it does not believe in Truth as absolute, but in the pragmatic value of its own religion, intolerance shows its teeth at this point. A Hindu can, for example, ostracise his own son or daughter for becoming a Christian and at the same time show great friendliness and open-mindedness to truths presented in Christianity.

7. Some would suppose that the strong feeling of nationalism awakening in the East, building as it does on racial distinctions and practically ignoring the sanction of religion, would also in the realm of religious values break down the intolerance of religion. That is far from being the case. National solidarity is being interpreted as one of the 'values' of religion, and therefore he who changes his religion is weakening the nation and bringing disruptive forces into it. It is very interesting to note that this pragmatic evaluation of religion is not foreign to the thinking of many Muslim leaders.

8. Now we come to Christianity. Theoretically, TRUTH is intolerant. TRUTH cannot live on good neighbourly terms with relative truths or with a lie. Light cannot co-exist with darkness. It has never been difficult to see that there is an incompatibility between TRUTH and the lie, that makes harmonious association impossible. But the issue does not seem so clearly defined when the incompatibility is between TRUTH as absolute, and relative truths that parade as absolute or obscure the absolute. As an illustration of this lack of clarity one might point to the very common attitude among Christians towards idolatry and towards Islam. While all plainly see the urgent need of preaching the Evangel to idol-worshippers, a great many are not so sure that the need to approach the Muslims is just as urgent, for Islam, they say, is a good religion, having faith in one God. The lie of idolatry is, of course, obviously incompatible with TRUTH, but, although for some people less obviously so, the truths of 'a good religion' are just as, or even more, incompatible with TRUTH, for they parade as TRUTH and obscure it. TRUTH is always obscured and falsified by truths. 'Many shall come from the East and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of heaven. But the children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness.' 'Publicans and harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you.'

9. Darkness, then, is not only the lie, but it is also the relative truth in man's possession, set up by him as absolute. But darkness cannot co-exist, in either form, with light.

10. TRUTH is not only intolerant, but it is aggressively intolerant. The attack is always from the side of TRUTH. The history of the Old Testament is a history of TRUTH attacking on all fronts. The Jehovah of the Old Testament waged incessant conflicts against idolatry. Jehovah was intolerant, saying, 'I am a jealous God'. Idolatry, the lie and relative truths are always willing to live in peace with TRUTH. If they receive the right of existence they are satisfied. Not so with TRUTH. The Ark cannot spend the night peacefully together with Dagon in the temple. 'Thou shalt have no other gods beside me.' TRUTH is aggressively intolerant; it is not just defensive nor willing just to hold its own.

11. Our Lord said, 'I am . . . the TRUTH . . .' And He was intolerant, aggressively intolerant. Not only in His own work and preaching did He conceive of Himself as the TRUTH of God, but His command and commission to His disciples were also intolerant. 'Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost', for as St Peter says, 'There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved'.

12. This is God's absolute TRUTH as far as mankind is concerned. It is desperately intolerant of every other name or system or religion that exists or can come into existence. St Paul was out to make everything *relative* in its relation to the absolute TRUTH in Christ Jesus. Jews, Greeks, and Barbarians must all be debunked—all are reckoned sinners, that grace might abound toward all, all must be deprived of their display of absoluteness, so that only the truth in Christ Jesus might become TRUTH indeed.

13. Why is it that from the uncompromising intolerance of the New Testament, the Church generally has gradually fallen into an easy tolerance that knows no absolutes? Of course the world is weary of hearing truths shouted at it from all sides. But that weariness is not new: already in the time of Jesus we have the tired, indifferent question: 'What is truth?' And St Paul in Athens was only another babbler! One only needs to imagine St Paul standing in Hyde Park in London, or in the bazaar of a Muslim village, and there saying that if anyone preach another Evangel than his, let him be accursed. Those words sound so brutal in our ears, yet it was only the man who could speak such words who could promulgate a universal Evangel.

14. There would appear to be three distinct reasons why so many Christians have lost their grasp of essentials and fallen into superficial, confused thinking and into an easygoing tolerance.

(a) The first and oldest reason is a proneness to *possessiveness*. In all the world people have their own truth, or body of truths, that they guard carefully and prize highly as their own. Some will hide it from others, some will propagate it and some will impose it upon others by force; but it always remains their own valued possession. This is a form of intellectualism that is of the earth, earthy, and its only success is the building up of barriers. When these barriers are high enough and strong enough, the task of getting the other fellow to see that yours is better than his appears hopeless, and hopelessness breeds tolerance of the easygoing kind. Some folks realised that wrangling over whose is best gets you nowhere. They got the idea of preaching with deeds, without words. ‘Show them the love of God in your deeds’ was the catchcry for a few decades. This again is another form of possessiveness, and a bad one. We possess spiritual power, technical education, science, and the will to sacrifice these for other people, as is being demonstrated in all our institutions. That is the unspoken argument, which was supposed to be so effective. Actually this teaching has helped in the building up of colossal institutions that have literally become the possessions of the Church and so dear to the heart of many that the Church’s witness concerning TRUTH again and again has been compromised in order to avoid harm coming to these institutions.

For the most part, that line of thought has now been abandoned; but following it came *sharing*. Again, at the root, is possessiveness. We possess spirituality, philosophy, ethics, culture and many other human products. But non-Christians have possessions of a like kind. We can enrich ourselves and them by sharing with each other! Of course we can. But what has that to do with Christianity? Where is the agonised cry of St Paul: ‘Woe be unto me if I preach not the Gospel’? ‘We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God.’

15. All of these—the intellectualist, the philanthropist and the sharer—are radically wrong in that the final analysis of their attitude is possessiveness. And they are all being met with indifference, both in the Church and in the non-Christian countries in the world. This indifference is called tolerance when found among non-Christians and many are proud of it. But it is as a matter of fact only a shrug of the shoulder.

16. Witness and proclamation—neither of these are possessions. When you say *I believe*, in the words of the Apostolic Creed, you do not say *I possess*. It is not a statement of change of life, spiritual experience, good deeds done by one's self, or anything subjective. Here you are professing faith in something outside yourself. The herald is proclaiming a message that has been given to him by another, as we saw in a previous chapter. Christ said to His disciples that they were His witnesses, for they had been with Him from the beginning, and St John said that they were witnesses to that which they saw and heard and handled with their hands. The Church is now and has always been proclaiming that apostolic witness in all the world: always, of course, on the background of its own faith, and yet in the final analysis it is that apostolic witness in which proclamation consists. In the Acts of the Apostles we have apostolic proclamation. It is never introspective talk about one's self and one's own spiritual experience, that is, one's own possession. Witnessing is proclaiming definite knowledge of an event or a series of events. When the Church gives up possessing truth and begins witnessing instead, it is of necessity intolerant. St Peter's proclamation was that there is no other name under heaven whereby men must be saved—in other words, everything else is a lie. A more intolerant attack could hardly be imagined. Of course, he got into trouble. The very nature of witnessing is intolerant. If a man stands up in a law court to witness, he does so—if he is serious—because he wants the truth to be known. The witness and the herald feel no nervousness about the final outcome. The witness may have to sacrifice his life because of his witnessing, but that does not cause anxiety. The herald may be maltreated for bringing his message, but that does not cause him sleepless nights: 'Be of good cheer for I have overcome the world'.

17. (b) *Relativism* is the second reason for the praise of tolerance that is now being sung so loudly. It is an obvious fact that the absoluteness of Christianity has been drowned in the relativism of Christianism. The Reformation brought the principle of disintegration into the totalitarian Christian society. It rightfully destroyed the outward authority by which Europe was bound to certain beliefs, both as to the physical and the spiritual world. When Luther broke the power of Rome he broke the chains on all free thinking, not only in the realm of the spirit but also in the realm of morals and physical law. It was, of course, in the realm of nature that the belief in absolutes first died. The law of cause and effect took the place of God. It was inevitable that the Bible should be attacked: first as

disagreeing with the newly found facts of nature; later, with history; and finally because of internal contradictions. In other words, when a large part of Christendom broke away from *Thus saith the Church*, it also broke away from *Thus saith the Lord*.

18. Now it was inevitable that history should develop in this way. It could not be otherwise because mankind is eternally restless, seeking on and on after new truths. But this onward urge leads to the building of the tower of Babel and when it has reached the skies, man discovers his own impotence.

19. The missionary enterprise has also made a contribution towards the downfall of the absolute—often unwittingly, but still a contribution. The study of comparative religion, which is only possible because of the wealth of information brought together by missionaries, has that one serious and basic fault that it usually does not differentiate between Christianity and Christian experience. In this the missionary is partly to blame. In olden days heathenism was of the devil—it was evil in a very demonstrable form, that is, the killing of infants, the burning of widows, the maltreatment of women, etc. When, later on, some missionaries discovered that various good elements also persisted in heathenism, that a different code of morals need not necessarily mean a rotten code of morals, and that in many cases there was genuine insight and spiritual experience, the conclusion was hastily reached that it was not all of the devil, for good and beautiful things cannot come from the evil one, and, as they said, the dark side of heathenism is in reality only deep ignorance. At the same time it became apparent that Westernism and Christianity are not just exactly synonyms. And this levelling process brought about a relativity which has crippled the Church to a very great extent. To propagate a relative truth is a meaningless and thankless task, for Christianity then becomes a silly and harmless thing which cannot be propagated successfully even as truth; therefore so much time and energy and money are spent in social service and sharing instead of proclamation. Social service and sharing are by their very nature tolerant, just as proclamation and conversion are of necessity intolerant.

20. An absolute is and must be intolerant. If there is no other name given under heaven, then that one Name cannot tolerate anything set up alongside of Itself. Let the witness say: ‘There is no other god’—in a land full of gods—and he is, of course, in trouble because of his intolerance. Let the herald bring the message: ‘Jehovah is a jealous God . . . Thou shalt have no other gods beside Him’—and he is stoned.

21. (c) *Specialisation* is the third reason why the Church has fallen into the abyss of tolerance. Specialisation has taken such a hold on the imagination that a man is considered very learned when he says, ‘This or that is not my speciality and therefore I cannot express an opinion about it’. Even inside theology the specialists refrain from expressing an opinion in any but their own speciality. For example, the specialist in ethics will not speak about the historical value of the Gospel of St John. Thus man has lost his power to see and judge anything as a whole. And therefore he cannot condemn anything nor really give himself to anything. When some wind blows a religious movement over a country, the usual attitude—even in high places of learning—is: This idea or thought seems good, therefore I cannot condemn the movement; but that teaching is wrong, therefore I cannot identify myself with the movement! Too many educated people in our day refrain from seeing a thing as a whole, as a unit, and judging it as such. The result is, of course, relativism and an easy—or uneasy—tolerance. Consequently, there are many viewpoints and opinions expressed, but no standpoints and conviction.

22. A person reared in viewpoints and opinions will of necessity present viewpoints and opinions to the non-Christian, and he will of course respect viewpoints and opinions in non-Christians. All is not bad, and all is not good—neither in Christianity nor in any non-Christian religion. Therefore—what? Compare notes. Try to make the best of it. Serve and share.

23. But let the Church accept its own message as a whole, as a unit, and let it look at every phenomenon in the world of religion as a whole, as a unit. There may be good, there may be bad, there may be indifferent elements in each and every religion. The question for the witness is not one of evaluating another man’s possession. He is not out to discover the good or bad in other ways of thinking. He is a witness and a herald proclaiming an absolute truth. A unit, a whole, not in relation to parts of this, that or the other system, but as one unit giving the lie to every other unit. In other words, radical intolerance.

24. To recapitulate: possessiveness, relativism and specialisation are three things which have made the Church of Christ tolerant. Without these three things the Church will be seen to be the most desperately intolerant thing that has ever been produced in the history of the world.

25. The question arises: In what way is TRUTH intolerant? In order to answer that question we have to consider what TRUTH is, or rather, what it is not. To begin with, TRUTH is not self-evident. Christ was God

incognito. The unknown God is not brought into the range of our natural vision. When that is done, an idol has been made, for that self-evident truth is an open lie. TRUTH, if it is absolute, unrelated, unqualified and unvariable, must be outside of history and outside of experience. TRUTH, therefore, is the Rock of Ages, upon which the miry waters of history and experience beat and are broken. TRUTH does not need to be established. It is eternally established just as God is eternally God. Therefore the puny efforts of man to establish TRUTH by the use of force are ridiculous. The very efforts of man to establish TRUTH falsify it, bring it down to the level of relative, historical, experimental truths, those truths which beat upon TRUTH and are broken.

26. The life of St Paul gives a very illuminating illustration of what happens when a man, intolerant by nature, is apprehended first of truths, and then of TRUTH. As long as he was zealous for the truths of Judaism he spread havoc in the Christian churches. Jail and death were his weapons to establish Judaism. That is the typical procedure when truths are to be established: intolerance showing itself in the use of force—mental and physical coercion. This intolerant man later became a captive of Christ. Was he then more tolerant, more ready to allow truths the right of existence? Definitely not. He laboured more than any other. Before his captivity to Christ his intolerance did not reach to the ends of the earth. He was not interested in the Greek or the barbarian. But as a captive of Christ his intolerance knew no bounds. He was debtor to Jews, Greeks and barbarians. At his conversion these remarkable words were said: that Christ would show him how many things he must suffer for His sake. His intolerance became the foolishness of preaching, of witnessing, of being an ambassador for Christ. This, to the non-Christians, is, of course, ridiculous, the reason being that all who fight for and champion truths recognise these truths as ideas for ideals, but they have no greater might nor power behind them than their own intrinsic value. If, for example, a man cannot see that democracy is better than monarchy, there is nothing left but to force him to accept it; or if a person cannot see that dictatorship is better than democracy, then he must be forced to understand it, as there is no power behind these ideals but the might of the men who live by them. So it is with all truths. TRUTH, on the other hand, does not belong to man, but to God. The power of Eternity is behind it. If the Church promulgates that which is self-evident or that which appears to have intrinsic value or immanent value, it is promulgating religion and not the TRUTH of God. TRUTH is revealed, and its apprehension

is dependent on the Holy Spirit, not on logic or philosophy or armed force.

27. One very good reason why the world at large, and especially scientific wise men, consider Christian preaching foolishness and a stumbling block, is the essential tension to which it gives birth. The tension is this: the Church is proclaiming the TRUTH, witnessing to the TRUTH, carrying the message of the TRUTH—but how? By proclaiming, witnessing and carrying truths. In other words, the Church has not been taken out of the world. The Church is part of that universal history and that universal experience which is beating against the Rock of Ages, against the TRUTH, and being broken by it. Or said in another way: Church History, Christian experience, and the effort of the Church to witness are all events within the natural order of things. They are all relative, and must remain relative. Christian experience never develops into or progresses so as to become Christianity. The two are always and must always be correlative. Scorn must be poured by the wise of this world on any group of people who—although aware of the relativism of their preaching, the errors of their group, the variability of the proclamation from one generation to the next, and the relatedness to contemporaneous secular thinking—aware of all this, continue on the assumption that eternal, absolute TRUTH is being revealed to man everywhere, through this maze of relativism. In other words, the Church goes on the assumption that through its relative preaching and its imperfect witnessing to Christ, God produces faith in the absolute TRUTH when and where it pleases Him.

28. This assumption on the part of the Church has brought it into ridicule in every nation and in every generation. Because of this tension, persecution has followed in its wake like seagulls after a ship. And yet the Church intolerantly continues on its course. It and it alone can hope that the light of absolute TRUTH will shine through its brokenness and incompleteness, its error and variability, its relatedness to the secular world of thought. This seeming contradiction is a stumbling block for thousands who do not realise that God is only understood as God when this tension is maintained in the Church.

29. Because of this tension which is always misunderstood by non-Christians hearing the message, the Church *must* be tolerant, it must tolerate scorn, persecution, hatred, death. St Paul, who preached that most intolerant message, giving the lie to all, making all sinners that grace might be universal, was a very tolerant man. Everywhere he tolerated the snarls, the persecutions and the beatings with good grace. After his conversion,



the idea of his carrying a letter from the authorities is incongruous. Then the measure of the suffering of Christ was fulfilled in his body. Then he knew what Christ meant when He said, 'Resist not evil'. The words which were spoken at St Paul's conversion are words which should be burned into the minds of all Christians, in order to give direction to their work: 'I will show thee how many things thou must suffer for My Name's sake'! Thou shalt learn what it means to be tolerant, to tolerate the contradictions of sinners against the TRUTH and against its witness. Thou shalt learn that the intolerance of thy message will demand of thee large-hearted tolerance. Thou shalt not resist evil, for thy message is universal and absolute, and the resistance can in no wise help to establish that which already is eternally established, nor can the attack of evil disestablish that to which thou art a witness.

30. The very fact that you want to approach the Muslim with the Gospel shows the belief of the Church in the intolerance of its message. That message cannot tolerate that a lie or a relative truth, even in the far corners of the earth or in the dense jungles of the tropics, should set itself up as TRUTH. It sends its messengers out everywhere, to face all dangers, in order to confront that relative truth, or that lie, with the TRUTH. And therefore the Christian has to be tolerant, he has to tolerate scorn, hate, persecution, disrespect, jeering and maybe death. He has to walk the same way his Master walked, for the servant is not greater than his Master!

31. In short, you do not possess TRUTH, you believe in it and witness to it. TRUTH is intolerant, and consequently if your witnessing and proclamation are true they can make no compromise with relative truth. Therefore, according to the temper of your hearers and the circumstances of your environment, you will either be ridiculed, scorned, hated and persecuted, or put to death. In the face of such persecution you have to be tolerant, understanding and even sympathetic. You will often be reminded of the Lord's prayer on the Cross: Forgive them, for they know not what they do.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What do tolerance and intolerance mean (a) in Islam, (b) in the Christian Faith?
2. How do relative truths fight against the Truth?
3. Discuss this question of 'possessing' and 'believing' Truth.

## SECTION TWO

JUST WHAT ARE  
YOU AIMING AT?



## CHAPTER 8

# Individual Conversion or Mass Movements?

1. In the first section of this book we have tried to start a discussion on just how it is best to approach the Muslim. Now we want to see what can be said about our aim. What is your aim in approaching the Muslim? To try to get him converted? To try to influence him so that a mass movement might get started? To try to sow the seed and leave it at that? Or have you some other aim?

2. In following out the thoughts discussed in ‘Just how are you going to approach the Muslim?’ we have eliminated completely two attitudes which are found quite frequently, and yet can in no way be called ‘Christian’. The first one is the ‘permeation attitude’. The second is the ‘character-building attitude’. No doubt yeast permeates. And it is also true, beyond questioning, that Christianity has infiltrated and caused many important changes among non-Christians in their attitude to life. But every result of this permeation is a by-product, a thing that, according to all the laws of psychology, must happen wherever you have a group—large or small—fervently working to propagate an idea. Russian Communism also permeates—for good or bad. In Christianity, any by-product ascribed to permeation, if it is allowed to be the aim of the Christian Church, has usurped a place to which it has no right.

3. Likewise with character-building. No one can get away from the fact that contact with the New Testament does affect one’s character. It must, in the same way as the cinema has much to do with character-building, again, for better or worse. But the purpose, the aim of the Church in putting the New Testament into a man’s hands, has never been character-building. Remember, the new birth is an act of God, a new creation. The new birth cannot ever be confused with character-building.

4. Whether you know it or not, whether you have faced up to the question or not, you have some AIM in your approach to the Muslim with the Evangel. Just what is it?

If you take a backward peep at Church history in India you will find that Protestant Missions began definitely as ‘soul-snatching’. Ziegenbalg, a German Pietist, came out in 1706 as a royal Danish missionary. His motive for coming lies in the following sentence which he heard while studying in Halle, the birthplace of Pietism:

If anyone leads a single soul belonging to a heathen people to God, it is as great a deed as though he were to win a hundred souls in Europe, since the latter daily enjoy sufficient opportunities of being converted.

5. Our Lord, of course, never said anything as ridiculous as this. But this number-bug, this counting and evaluating of souls, has been altogether too prominent in Protestant Missions ever since. The great majority of Missions baulk at doing work among Muslims because the statistical results are so poor. And even Missions which do work in Muslim areas have to touch up their reports home with all kinds of exaggerations if they are going to expect support. The donors want to count ‘souls’ just as Ziegenbalg did—and if they don’t get stuff about converts, they at least do get a whole lot of fairy tales about ‘true seekers’, etc.

6. The whole Pietist movement was a denial of the doctrine of *Corpus Christi*, the body of Christ, and it laid a false emphasis on an individualistic, experimental relationship to Jesus. In other words, the individual did not have his fundamental relationship to God through the Church, but by means of his emotional attitude to Jesus.

This extreme form of individualism was, in a way, a very natural reaction, first from the domination of the Roman Church, and thereafter from the error of intellectual orthodoxy. With the breakthrough of the Reformation, exuberance became wild. Men were now free to think as they liked! Secular and profane thinking ran helter-skelter and undisciplined. One should expect that reaction. But in the Church, in the body of Christ, the red light should have succeeded in stopping this wild race. The sound teaching about the ‘body of Christ’, clearly stated in the New Testament, should have given a more sober tone to all these individualistic persons. But it didn’t. And the result was—as far as Missions are concerned—that instead of being tied down to obedience to God’s command to the Church to preach and witness universally and let the Holy Spirit convict and convert, individuals (who were often in opposition to the Church)

began racing out to foreign countries, there to win other individuals to Christ. Solidarity was based on the fact of a common experience of salvation instead of, as in the body of Christ, on God's covenant in Christ the Head of the body.

Pietism as a movement never has had any principle of coherence. It is like a large family of children who are all adopted and therefore have no blood-relationship or principle of coherence among themselves, although each one individually calls his adoptive parents his father and mother.

7. In true Christianity the *Corpus Christi*, the body of Christ, is the principle of coherence. I want to explain this statement a little because it is so terribly important. Solidarity, hanging together, cohering, being all members of one body, is a condition of Christian spiritual life. For it is only in and through this body that we have the Word, both written and preached, and the Sacraments, as well as the fellowship of the saints.

8. Now if we admit this principle of coherence in the Church, which fortunately even some of the most rabid pietists are beginning to do, then the Church, as a missionary body, is up against a very big and complicated question, namely, the natural principle of coherence in nations and tribes. You hear it said again and again—especially in our day about Africa—that Christianity is breaking down the older, more natural allegiance to the tribe, and the result is that thousands of individuals, both converts and non-converts, are without ballast in life. It is true, and must invariably be true, that in heathenism (including also European heathenism) the principle of coherence will be attacked because of the new principle of coherence in Christianity.

9. The difficulty for Western missionaries is that, in the West, individualism has become so rampant that we find it difficult to think of coherence at all. Some say that what there is of hanging together, cohering, is due to the sex impulse, others that it is due to the power impulse, and still others say it is due to a fear complex. But there seems to be ample proof in the Orient that the conservation-of-life impulse is stronger and more universal than any other. This human desire for the conservation of life expresses itself primarily in religion, and the more primitive and animistic a religion is, the more it demands authority in all departments of life. The purpose of animistic religions is to strengthen and establish life: first of all the life of the tribe or nation, then in relation to the tribe, the life of the person. But since these great and ancient religions embrace the life of the people in all its aspects, they are of necessity collective and cannot be individualistic in essence. Through them the conservation-of-life principle

of coherence expresses itself, and this is still the case in countries like China and India, even though an infinitesimally small number of westernised individuals are very articulate in their propaganda for nationalism apart from religion. Religions may differ greatly in detail or they may produce remarkable similarities; that is dependent on other factors: culture, tradition, superstition, economics, land, values, etc. But whatever the ethical and social structures may be, life is collective and governed by religion. The conservation-of-life impulse is the national or tribal vitality that keeps the blood of religion flowing in the veins of the national body, and each individual person is a cell in that body. It is only as he is in the correct relation to the other cells that he can be a living cell. If that relationship to the whole is broken, the cell in most cases dies.

This conservation-of-life impulse is the natural principle of coherence in tribes and nations of the East. And then the question arises: what happens when the Church meets this natural principle of coherence in the East?

10. If the Church is fulfilling its proper function, according to the purpose of its creation, then it presents itself as the agency through which the apprehension of the faithfulness of God is mediated, and it is therefore of necessity polemical.

While the Church cannot say it has authority in itself, yet it does say authoritatively that here, in the Church, the apprehension of God's faithfulness is mediated, and not there in the religious ties that bind a community together. When social, ethical, political and economic relationships are sanctioned, guarded, and regulated by religion, and that religion is untruth, then the vitality of the entire structure is vitiated. It will crumble and fall in ruins in as far as it is anti-Christian. This is the reason why the Church will always meet with opposition, hate and persecution when entering a new field.

11. If the Church entered the new field with something better in the way of social, political, economic, or ethical regulations, it might be possible to get people to see the better value and accept it. But that would only be exchanging one natural principle of coherence for another; that would only be saying that this religion with its laws and regulations is of greater value than that religion. It would degenerate into a quibble about values, instead of a struggle to present eternal Reality.

12. But as the Church wishes to present Reality, it cuts right across every natural principle of coherence found in non-Christian lands. It upsets the ordinary function of the cells of the communal body. 'There shall be five in one house divided, three against two and two against three.'



That is the intolerable condition, humanly speaking, wherever the Evangel takes root.

13. The genuine position of the Church is, then, that while it attacks the untruth of the religion in every community, and thus invalidates the entire structure of social life, it does not, and cannot, give any substitute for that which has been invalidated. Although this seems to be an intolerable and impossible position, it is the only one in which the necessary tension of the Church is retained. For it has to present its message as foreign to *every* natural principle of coherence in order to be above all principles found in nature. For the principle of coherence in the Church is precisely that which gives the Church its elevated, paradoxical position of being in the world but not of the world. It is, therefore, utterly impossible for it to create or produce a principle of coherence that may or can take the place of the natural principle of coherence in any group in this world. It is logically clear that when the principle of coherence in the Church is just that which makes the Church to be *not* of this world, it cannot then be substituted for any earthly, natural principle of coherence in family, tribe, or nation. It must remain lifted high above and on a plane different from any other principle of coherence natural to this earth, of this world.

14. Some might object that if this statement is true, disintegration must follow on the heels of the missionary wherever he is successful. That would certainly be so if it were not for the fact that the preaching of the Evangel by itself seldom, if ever, brings a tribe or nation to the foot of the Cross. Actually, the Church in its function as a missionary body is only one factor in the great predestined scheme of things. Other factors are culture, politics, social environments, economics and technique. But the Church does not, can not, and should not try to control or mould any of these according to the purpose of its own will in order to be successful in its own job.

For example, one constant grudge the Protestant world has against the Roman Church is that it is always meddling in the politics of different countries to further its own ends. We know that the Church has its own specific task, for which it was created. It is to be everywhere proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes, and everywhere it must believe that God in His own time and through other agencies will so cause the co-working factors to change that His own purpose will be fulfilled. The Church works by faith and not by sight, and therefore it can afford to wait for years and years while it is constantly witnessing and preaching. Then in God's own time, when all other factors have been brought into line, one

or more of the stronger cells breaks away from the communal organism, and that breaking away results in many other—including weaker—cells gathering around the stronger. This is the beginning of a national Church. These stronger cells know from the message they have heard, that they are not simply exchanging one principle of coherence for another on this earth, but that they have been apprehended by absolute Reality not of this world. This drives them to work towards a new understanding of, and realisation of, a principle of coherence in their own family, tribe or nation, that need not militate against the absolute Reality proclaimed by the Church. For Christianity's only positive demand is that the relationship between men must be ethical. The details worked out in various places and at different times are of no eternal importance, in so far as they do not militate against eternal Reality. Thus and only thus is a national Church possible. It is superficial to think that a few idiosyncrasies in the church service or church policy make a church national. National means that the members do not live their common daily life in isolation; it means that they are national on weekdays as well as on Sundays; it means they are natural in their own environments, having a principle of coherence in themselves that does not militate against the Evangel. In other words, no Church is able to transplant itself with the hope that a *national* church will be the result in the new field. If a national Church comes in any country, it is the result of the in-working of God in the people of that country, and not through the Evangel alone but through the co-working of the Evangel with other factors.

15. A study of the question of coherence ought to help the Church to see that it is *not* the master of the situation in any sense of the word, but that God works all things according to the pleasure of His own good will. And the Church works by faith, believing that God can and will complete this great plan of salvation.

16. Now what about the missionary enterprise? It penetrated into the Orient, as we have said, without giving this great basic question serious thought. Its own conception of Christianity was a confused mixture of New Testament teaching and Western secular thought. The teaching of the New Testament regarding the ego that is duty-bound to choose, absorb and assimilate the truth regarding Reality was caught up in a whirlwind of individualism, and the Evangel was presented in the East as though each individual person stood on his own feet, bound neither by the laws nor the traditions of his community, neither afraid of the god that thundered at him from the mountains nor of the economic and cultural ties by which he is

inseparably bound to his people, in other words, as though he were not a cell that lived only because of a living relationship with the other cells in the body. And so wherever the missionary enterprise has succeeded in snatching individuals out of their natural relationships and environments, or they have been forced out by their own community, the Mission has also left the impression that he who accepts its message is justified in expecting a new set of relationships and environments *created by the Mission*, so that it becomes family, clan, tribe and nation for the proselyte. In as far as the missionary enterprise has acknowledged this to be its position, and 'compound' Christians in large numbers have been gathered in, the results have been deeply discouraging. A study of the psychology of these Christians has shown two things. Firstly, those people who are fundamentally unstable in character are the first to accept the news, and usually for a short time, supported by the Mission. They become enthusiasts; but their fundamental instability shows itself again very quickly and for the rest of their lives they are in and out, up and down, here and there, of no earthly use to themselves or to anyone else. Secondly, those weaker cells, who because of innate weakness never have been able to fill a really respectable place in their own community and therefore feel that they have been treated shabbily by the hand of nature, are quick to see the advantage in cutting loose from family or tribe and attaching themselves to that other group; that group of better, more loving and more compassionate people, called missionaries. This change usually results in a complete loss of all strength in the proselyte. Previously he had to make at least a certain amount of effort to keep himself alive; now he is carried on the hands of missionaries. But usually not for the rest of his life. Often the missionary has the erroneous idea that Christianity is going to make something very good out of this natural misfit. Only it never works out that way. In over a quarter of a century of observation, I have yet to see the misfit who turned out to be a strong, self-supporting, self-respecting, and witnessing Christian. The missionary expects him to, and tries to make him, stand on his own two feet. The inevitable result is quarrels, misunderstandings, estrangements and the convert's reversion to the religion of his people. The missionary has lost another convert.

*Please* do not misunderstand this statement. There are—without the shadow of a doubt—men here and there who have been helped by the Mission and who have become good, stabilised, self-respecting, hard-working Christians. But these men were not misfits, not unstable cells in their own community to start with. These are the men who, had they been

given better conditions when they became Christians, might have been the nuclei of a national Church. But even a superficial glance at converts from the whole Muslim world will make it evident that these men are few and far between.

17. This phase of missiology has been studied by not a few sober, thinking men, and some have even come to the conclusion that it is a sin against any individual to coax him to break away from the natural body, of which he is a cell, and try to get him to live alone in the 'spiritual' environment of the foreign missionary.

The majority, however, simply do not know what to do. Some insist that a seeker should at least bring his wife and family with him before he can be baptised; others insist on his bringing with him a certain number of fellow-seekers. All of these efforts at manipulating group-converts are absolutely arbitrary. The Holy Spirit does not necessarily draw and convict a group because some missionary thinks that is a good idea.

18. In this connection we must take a passing look at mass movements. Many a missionary among Muslims prays for and yearns after a mass movement in his area. Indonesia and Malaya are probably the only two areas in the world where there has been any group-movement from Islam to Christianity. However, in hoping and praying for a mass movement, the missionary is facing the very subtle temptation of losing the urgency of the Gospel message. Long-range firing by heavy artillery does soften up the enemy, but the infantry has to go over the top. The atom bomb dropped by God from heaven that destroys the enemy, lock, stock and barrel, is unknown in our spiritual warfare. The moment a missionary puts all his trust and hope in heavy artillery, he is actually shirking going over the top.

19. Mass movements must be divided into two kinds; those that come on the background of generations of Christian teaching (like the Welsh Revival or the Wesleyan Movement), and those that come in heathen countries. The former are rightly called 'Revivals', that is, a life that was there has been brought back again from the dead; the latter are movements toward something new. In this chapter we need not go into the question of revivals as it is not relevant. Mass movements, however, are. Whenever you have a movement towards something *new* you want to know whether or not the people in this movement know and appreciate that something which is new, enough to want to move towards it. Obviously that is not true of the general run of people in mass movements. Surely no one is blind to the fact that, at a generous estimate, not one in ten missionaries is

really doing anything to propagate knowledge of Christianity among the masses. And among national Christians the figure would probably be not one in a hundred. The question then arises: from whence do these people have any knowledge of the new, that makes them want to accept it? One startling fact always emerges when mass movements develop, and that fact is that this compact group of people—sometimes thousands and tens of thousands—are actually reacting in exactly the same way as the individual who joins the missionary, either because of instability of character or because he is a misfit in his own natural environments. As such, the mass movement is a thousand individuals each seeking something not found in his own natural group. If this were not so, then why is it that, with the exception of a very few smaller groups of caste Hindus, mass movements have always developed among the unfortunates, the Harijans, the Scheduled Classes? According to Christian standards, these groups are getting a dirty deal from their own countrymen—that we all know. There always is, and has to be, a small coterie of men who have been apprehended by the Reality of redemption, who guide and give direction to these mass movements; but, generally speaking, you find that even in second and third generation mass-movement Christians, the old heathen attitude to life is all too prominent. So much so, that one senior, experienced missionary said he doubted whether in many cases the pastors themselves who come from this group really are Christians in the genuine sense of the word.

20. However, the only point that needs to be stressed here is that a close study of mass movement Christians should soon deter any missionary from hoping that that sort of thing would happen in his area. For, generally speaking, no new principle of coherence is brought in at all; that is, no *national* Church is established. The label of religion has been changed, the names of the gods and the form of worship has been changed, but the life of the community still coheres on the old heathen pattern. The truth of this statement is not only apparent in India and Pakistan, it is also painfully obvious in Africa, where the Church is fast breaking up into small inimical groups again, just like the tribes and clans were before the white man brought his religion to them.

21. It is always easy to jump from one extreme to the other. The logic is: if soul-snatching is wrong, then mass movements must be right. But that does not, by any means, follow. The real fault lies where you probably least suspect it. There is a misdirected concern for the salvation of souls. Now do not misunderstand that statement. A missionary who is not

concerned about the salvation of souls has no right to be on the mission field, for that concern is God's concern and the Church's concern. What I said was, there is a *misdirected* concern for the salvation of souls. Let me illustrate. A child is ill, and the mother is so concerned for the child's health that she at once begins doctoring it with all kinds of quack medicines. Another mother in the same predicament realises that she can do nothing better than call in a qualified doctor, who must take the responsibility for restoring the child's health. In his concern for salvation of souls many a missionary forgets his job is only to bring about a meeting between the Holy Spirit and man, for when the Holy Spirit is come, He will convict the world of sin, He will enlighten men's minds, He will draw them to Christ, and through Christ to the Father. The Holy Spirit is, so to speak, the doctor, the one who can do something about it. And the Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and reveals them to man, with man's salvation in view. In other words, the Church's concern for the salvation of man should express itself in proclaiming and preaching the Gospel here, there and everywhere. When, where and how the Spirit moves must in the final analysis be a matter for the eternal counsels of God.

22. What we all need is FAITH, not faith to win converts (that is arrogating to ourselves the work of the Holy Spirit), but faith to confine ourselves to our own job, faith to believe that *our words*—weak, stumbling, imperfect as they are—still are the vehicle through which the Holy Spirit works. If you have the idea that what is being said here is only moving away from Pietism into Quietism, I challenge you to try it out. You will soon experience that there is definitely nothing quietistic about a genuine propagation of the Gospel among Muslims. First of all, it is disquieting (pardon the pun) always to have to face up to your own ignorance and incomplete knowledge, regarding both Christianity and Islam. Then you will soon find there is nothing quietist about a straight-forward propagation of that knowledge among Muslims. Admittedly, genuine faith, that expresses itself in keeping its hands off, may look like Quietism, but you will usually find that those who accuse you of Quietism are themselves spiritual quietists. In practice they always leave the matters of the spirit at status quo.

23. Now when you are proclaiming and preaching the Gospel here, there and everywhere with the urgency of expectation that is inherent in the Gospel itself, the predestined time may come when, in the eternal counsels of God, some individual cell may break away from the old national or tribal body, and through the work of the Holy Spirit become the centre of a

new grouping of cells. Here, then, the body of Christ is being set up, with the new principle of coherence. This cell or group of cells will not be misfits or unstable individuals in the old tribal body, who come like parasites into the mission compound. They will be men who, humanly speaking, already are able to stand on their own feet. And if they are given a little brotherly love, guidance in the faith, and sympathetic understanding, they will—as Christians—continue to stand on their own feet, and in so doing, they will, with fear and trembling, work out their own way of being Christians in the framework of their own people.

24. Let us try once more to be honest. We are all in the same boat, more or less. Our *practice* shows that we insist on certain *forms* of Christianity, and we are more prepared to try to give economic stability to unstable individuals, and to try to make good denominationalists out of misfits since these are prepared to accept our form of Christianity, rather than to give brotherly love, guidance and sympathetic understanding to characters who may quarrel with the Mission, its policies and its parasites.

25. Now you may say: supposing that in my time it is the will of God that the cell which is to be the nucleus for the new set-up breaks away. He comes to me for guidance and help. How am I to know he is not just another misfit, another unstable individual, disgruntled in his own natural environment? The answer is two-fold. Firstly: What does he say about his own people, his own clan or tribe? If he talks disparagingly about them he has at once marked himself as a misfit. You can be sure and certain that the man who is going to be the nucleus of the new set-up has no axe to grind with his own people. It is not because he despises or hates, or is disgruntled or is at variance with his own people that he seeks you out and wants to talk about the Christian faith. Be sure of that. And secondly, he will not at that moment be in need of economic help. Later, if persecution makes him destitute, the Church (if there is one) may need to help him tide over a rough spot. That, however, is not the case when he comes to you. Soul-snatching, be it of individuals or in mass movements, has always had an economic side, and in connection therewith, instability. A Pakistani pastor, who was carrying a pretty heavy load, once said to me bitterly, ‘You Europeans [including Americans], with your misplaced kindness and philanthropy, have laid a curse on our national Church’.

‘How so?’

‘Practically every Christian family in Pakistan who has children in school insists on the Mission subsidising them. Young men training to be

pastors all feel the Mission should pay for their education—whether they are worthless or not. Every time any bit of sickness comes they line up at the hospital and expect first, best, and free treatment. Whenever trouble comes they dash off to the missionary or to the pastor for monetary help. Isn't it their right? Didn't they give up their own religion because you asked them to? And now when we Pakistanis have to take over, who is going to be able to correct that cursed mentality you have developed with all your money?'

I said: 'Brother, I wish you would speak that piece on to a gramophone record and have it sent to all missionaries and Mission boards'.

Another experienced Pakistani Christian said this: 'The national Church can never become the centre for evangelising the people of this country!'

'Why not?'

'Because you have shown us by your actions and methods that the Gospel cannot get across unless you spend millions on all kinds of other sideshows. And we simply haven't got the money.'

26. This attitude is very common among nationals who really would like to be an indigenous Church, responsible to God for their own life and work.

27. Supposing now a man has the conviction (and the courage of his conviction) to say: 'My job is to get the Gospel across. Make people understand. Make them face up to God's No and Yes in Christ. Having done that I can do no more. If the time is right, and God's Spirit works, some individual will come who, quite independent of my finances, will break out. He will stand on his own feet, without my being a bulwark. Under no condition will I feed, clothe, coddle, and finance individuals because they are prepared to allow me to teach them some Christian truths or to baptise them. And when that individual has broken through and come out, others, probably weaker cells, will join him and that will be the nucleus of a national Church.'

In that case, what would happen? Probably no converts. At least that possibility has to be taken into consideration. Well, how many years did it take God, from the calling of Abraham, to prepare Israel for the birth of Christ, and how many were the prophets who longed to see the day of the Lord and did NOT see it? You may become like unto these prophets! One sows and another reaps. So first of all you will have to adjust yourself inwardly.

28. Then: probably all your missionary friends would throw Bible verses at you like brickbats, trying to prove *their* attitude is correct. Bible



verses have been used to prove the truth of every heresy the devil ever invented, so that should not worry you overmuch.

29. The next thing that probably would happen would be that your home board would take a dim view of your attitude, because people at home, the donors, would not understand you, and the donations might be small.

30. Finally, many of the Pakistani Church members would blackball you: 'He doesn't do *anything* for the seekers and converts: he can't be a real missionary!'

And the usual run of 'seekers after truth' would stop coming, wondering why this one missionary isn't pious enough to be fleeced.

31. In other words, you—Pakistani or foreign—would be a voice in the wilderness, crying out and, in the eyes of the worldly wise, accomplishing nothing.

However, neither did John the Baptist accomplish anything—except of course, to make straight the path and prepare the way of the Lord!

It might be, you know you never can tell, maybe some day even the missionary enterprise would be satisfied with preparing the way of the Lord, instead of making converts either by soul-snatching or by mass movement methods.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Is the Church really necessary? Is it a collection of saved individuals, saved masses, or what?
2. What is the 'principle of coherence' in Islam?
3. What results from the impact of the proclamation of the Gospel in a Muslim society?

## CHAPTER 9

# Preaching, Teaching and Witnessing

1. From the very start I want to draw your attention to the fact that these three words are NOT synonymous, and they cannot be used interchangeably. There is, or at least there should be, an element of witnessing in all real preaching and teaching of the Christian faith. But essentially they are three entirely distinct ideas.

2. And right from the start I also want to say that in this chapter we are not tilting at windmills as some may be inclined to think. Let me give you just one example—although there are thousands of them—to show you what kind of errors are being propagated in this country under the name of Christianity. The World Dominion Press has just put out a pamphlet called ‘What the Figures Tell’. Two paragraphs on the very last page read as follows:

To show how possible it is for Christians to tell all other people about Christ, this suggestion is made. If in one year all those who are true Christians endeavoured to teach another person and lead that person to Christ, by the end of the year the number of true Christians would be doubled. Then if this was repeated in the second year, that number would be doubled again. Continue this each year, and within a very few years the whole land would be evangelised.

The secret of all that the figures have been telling us is that if we are to fulfil Christ’s word and preach the Gospel to the whole creation, we have to think not only of our pastors and evangelists, but of every man, woman and child who knows what it is to be a Christian. When every member of the Christian Church is a witnessing, working Christian, seizing every opportunity to gossip the Gospel, then INDIA WILL BE CHRIST’S LAND.

3. If you read these two paragraphs carefully you will see the confused way in which our Lord’s command to the Apostles to proclaim the Gospel to every creature has become every creature’s gossiping the Gospel, and

this gossiping is then both teaching and witnessing. This kind of loose thinking is as dangerous as it is common, and it is probably one of the main reasons why:

- (a) The ministry in the Church is so weak and inadequate.
- (b) The lack of teachers in Christianity is so woefully great.
- (c) The witness or testimony of the layman leaves so very much to be desired.

4. I want to take each of the three words—preaching, teaching and witnessing—separately, for there is a definite place for each in the Church, and unless all three are there the Church is falling down on the job.

### PREACHING

5. I want to go back to that expression ‘gossiping the Gospel’, as it is used quite often, and it rather crystallises a certain line of thought. If you will look up the word ‘gossip’ in a dictionary you will find that, leaving aside archaic meanings, it is defined as: idle talk, tattling, spreading groundless rumours. Whoever first coined the expression, ‘gossiping the Gospel’, obviously did not look the word up in a dictionary, but was probably thinking of the effectiveness in spreading news (however false).

6. Let the most important point wait for a moment while you stop to look this fact in the face: two—only two—in every ten Christians can read and write. That was an optimistic estimate for undivided India. In Pakistan alone it would more probably be two in every twenty. Look at that great body of unlettered, ignorant Christian laymen, 80 to 90% of the Church membership. If any one could succeed—God forbid!—in getting this portion of the Church to gossip the Gospel, would it not in truth become idle talk and groundless rumours? There could be no more effective way of hindering any country from becoming ‘Christ’s land’ than to turn such a horde of gossipers loose on it! Think that over. In the West all of our older and higher institutions of learning were established primarily with the idea of giving thorough religious instruction so that the Gospel would NOT be left to the mercy of illiterate, ignorant, though often zealous gossipers.

7. In two previous chapters we took up the whole question of proclamation for debate. The point there was that the Evangel of kerygma is

a proclamation with a very definite content, proclaimed by a keryx, an authorised herald. If you were to distinguish between the methods of enthusiasts and that of sober Christians, no better definition could be found than by saying: the enthusiast wants every Christian to spread the Gospel by gossip; the sober Christian believes that trained, authorised and appointed heralds should proclaim or preach the Gospel as a message with a definite content.

8. That the enthusiasts have held sway in India can be seen from the two following facts:

The National Christian Council went on record in 1944, and again later, as saying that the paramount need of the Church in India is for men of high spiritual quality, adequately trained and equipped for the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments.

And Ranson, the author of *The Christian Minister in India*, from whom the quotation is taken, continues by saying:

This judgement is supported by evidence, from every part of India, of a general dissatisfaction with the present position in respect of the ordained ministry of the Church, and an almost universal desire that the ministry be strengthened both in quality and in numbers (p. 48).

9. Let me give you another startling fact taken from the pamphlet mentioned above. In pre-partition India the average was one—that is right, *one*—pastor for every *eight* congregations. Remember, that is the average. In some places it is much worse. Now what do these figures tell us? Simply this: through the years, the missionaries have spurred individuals on to be gossipers of the Gospel and completely ignored the fact that there was no one to even help them to learn what they were to say, what their ‘Gospel’ really was. Furthermore, Missions have simply ignored another fact: the Church must have a group of men at the highest level, trained and capable of polemics in any situation in which the Church may find itself. This is just as true of Pakistan, where the struggle is against Islam; as it is in America; where it is against secularism, or in Russia, against Communism.

10. If we are going to understand the vocation of the ministry in the Church, we have to get back again to the basic idea of what the Church is.

11. Some may ask: Why all this insistence on the body, the Church, when we are supposed to be discussing preaching, teaching and witnessing? The answer is simple. The New Testament shows us how the Church

is constituted and how it functions in its Service of the Word. And until we get that straight we cannot even begin to preach, teach or witness.

12. The Church, as *Corpus Christi*, is going somewhere. It is going to the ends of the earth to preach the Evangel. Going to the ends of the earth does not mean exclusively that someone leaves his home town and travels over land and sea to get as far away as possible. It means that too; but it also means the Church goes to the 'ends of the earth' in its own district or area. Now, it does not mean that every individual Christian in America or England should go to India, Africa or China, nor does it mean that every individual Christian in the Church should go dashing about in the district or area 'preaching'. The Church is everywhere by means of its representatives. It is in all the world, and in all the districts.

13. The great Reformers baulked at the Roman conception of the Church, and in so doing the question of the hierarchy or ministry was necessarily brought up in the debate. The Roman doctrine of *character indelibilis*, which teaches that the priest undergoes a magical change of character at his ordination, giving him a unique position in the Church, was rejected as a false doctrine. The Reformers, however, did not throw out the baby with the bath water; on the contrary, they redefined the Church, giving us a living, dynamic idea definitely in line with the teaching of the older Church Fathers.

14. The teaching of the Reformation, that is, of the Protestant Church, is that if there is a Church at all, if the body of Christ does exist, it is apostolic. The Church is apostolic, NOT because St Peter laid his hands on somebody, and that somebody on somebody else through the ages. That conception is too easy, too mechanical and, historically, too dubious. The Church is apostolic simply because the Lord created the Apostolate and left no other door open for us by which we can become members of His body except through the faith of the Apostles. Get this straight: we know NOTHING of Christ, either historically or theologically, except through the Apostolate. There is no possibility whatever of getting behind the Apostles directly to our Lord Himself. Consequently: there can be no faith in Christ that is not mediated through the body of Christ, the Church.

15. Let us follow up that thought. The Apostolate received the command to proclaim the Gospel in all the world. This is a command to the whole body as such, NOT to individuals. Nor does it mean that each individual should be a preacher. The collective responsibility of the Church—because it is apostolic—is to evangelise the world. At the same time

certain *charismata* were given to the Church. Charismata is a Greek word, now common in English also (the plural of *charis*), meaning gifts of grace. The Holy Spirit has given the body various gifts whereby some are apostles, some are teachers, some are preachers, some are evangelists, etc. The Holy Spirit has made the body organic; that is to say, because of spiritual gifts, one man has *this* function and not *that*, and the other man has *that* function and not *this*. The whole body is going somewhere, but in order to get there these spiritual gifts of functions should coordinate.

16. We are not going to discuss here any particular method of training, such as colleges, degrees, private tuition, or what have you. We simply want to bring out the fact that, from the very start, the Church has distinguished between the preaching of the Word, and every other kind of service. In other words, the spiritual gifts of the Church have been grouped in this way that some people are ordained to preach the Word, and others are appointed to serve in various other ways. Of course this grouping does not mean that one is better or bigger than the other ('He who would be greatest let him be the servant of all'), it is simply dependent on the distribution of charismata, spiritual gifts, in the body.

17. Let me stop here just for a moment and remind you that we are still talking about preaching. Teaching, which we will discuss later, is also a spiritual gift in the Church, given to one person, not to another. Witnessing, on the other hand, is definitely NOT a spiritual gift in the Church, but a necessary function of each and every member of the body of Christ, as we will see when we come to it. This is just a parenthetical remark to help us keep our thinking straight!

18. At the time of the Reformation thousands of enthusiasts thought that now every Tom, Dick and Harry could be a preacher, and the country was swarming with wild-eyed fanatics who 'preached'. That Luther did his best to stop them can be seen from the following quotation:

Yea, wert thou wiser and cleverer than Solomon and Daniel thou shouldest fly as from hell from speaking one single word, except thou shouldest be bidden and called thereto. If God need thee, He will surely call thee. If He call thee not, beloved, let not thy skill tear open thy belly. Thou thinkest very foolishly of the use and piety . . . thou wouldest do. Believe me none will do good with preaching, except he who is bidden and forced to preach and teach without his will and desire. For we have but one Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, who alone teacheth and bringeth forth fruit through His servants, whom He has called thereto. But whoso teacheth uncalled, teacheth not without harm, both to himself and to his hearers, for that Christ is not with him.

19. The Reformers did succeed in getting things straightened out to a certain extent but, later, the recognition of Christians as a 'body', with the Holy Spirit as the distributor of spiritual gifts, was again eclipsed. Individuals, for whom experiential religion is primary, consider the Church to be a sort of get-together club, where people who talk the same jargon talk it some more. Naturally, then, the coordination of functions, due to the distribution by the Holy Spirit of various charismata, is not an understandable doctrine. When religion is the experience of the individual, then 'each one preach to one' becomes the slogan. And that has been the case in the missionary enterprise since 1706.

20. Remarkably enough, in recent years the indigenous churches themselves have begun to grope their way back to original Christian collectivity, centred in the body, the Church. This is very obvious from the reports of the Tambaram conference.

21. Christian collectivity is not organic because of natural law; neither is it the collectivity of a big business organisation. The Church is organic in its collectivity because of the gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit. Theoretically (and more often in actual practice than some care to admit) the Church does call, train and set apart the very men who have received the gift of serving the Word as preachers.

22. Of course, one must admit that because of sin and ignorance not even a minor degree of perfection can be reached by the person thus set apart to serve the Word. Faith and humility are therefore conditions of this service, probably more than in any other, because the sense of vocation is unique, in that the Church confirms and corroborates the call of the person with an ordination not found in connection with any other gift of grace. But the lack of perfection, faith and humility in the ones called to this service is no excuse for masses of individualistic, uncalled, untrained, undisciplined gossipers spreading what is really idle talk in the name of Christ and Christianity.

23. Do not deceive yourself; proclamation is NOT child's play. It is not a thing every gossiping layman can do. Serving the Word as a preacher is the most exacting charismata in the Church, and besides faith and humility, patient, wearisome and continual effort and struggle are needed on the part of those whose gift it is to serve the Church in this way.

24. There is probably nothing more basically wrong in Mission work than the idea that every Christian, just because he is a Christian, can preach Christianity. To begin with, look at the missionaries that come out:



often highly trained specialists in some secular branch of science, and yet the Mission expects them to preach and teach Christianity as a sideline, just because they are Christians in a missionary society.

## TEACHING

25. When St Paul says that to some the Spirit's gift of grace is teaching, he is not thinking of natural inclinations. Many a person may be a Christian and a born teacher, and yet not have the grace to teach in the Biblical sense of the word. Look once more at the quotation from Luther:

*Yea, wert thou wiser and cleverer than Solomon and Daniel . . . If God call thee not, beloved, let not thy skill tear open thy belly . . . But whoso teacheth uncalled, teacheth not without harm, both to himself and to his hearers, for that Christ is not with him.*

26. Luther puts the point very sharply that even the wise and clever teacher of general knowledge is not, because of that wisdom and cleverness, naturally called to teach 'saving knowledge', which can only be had in the context of the body of Christ, in the Church. This is Reformation doctrine, not held by any one denomination alone. Let me illustrate the meaning of that doctrine in this way:

Every new generation of educationists that springs up has some hobby-horse or other as to a better method of teaching. Their ideas may or may not be good, as far as general education is concerned, but it certainly does NOT follow that because you can stick a picture of a flower on a piece of flannel and thereby help children to grasp their lesson, that you can slap a paper Christ up on the flannel-board or use a walnut shell full of coloured ribbons or a wordless book, and thereby teach 'saving knowledge', Christian truth.

27. Luther knew what he was talking about when he said those teachers who are not called of God, nor have the gift of grace to teach, only harm themselves and those who hear them.

28. Teaching, as a gift of grace, can in practical matters be divided into three categories: (a) teaching baptised children and seekers, that is, catechumens; (b) teaching Christian adults, for example, in schools, colleges, and in Bible classes; and (c) teaching candidates for the ministry, that is, teaching theology.

29. Now let us look at the work on the Mission field. What do we see? Has not the doctrine that teaching in the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit to certain individuals either been completely ignored, or else forgotten or misunderstood? Two things are very apparent. Firstly, practically every Christian teacher in Mission schools and colleges is expected, simply because he is a Christian, to teach Christianity; and secondly, practically every missionary who comes out has to be at the beck and call of an unsympathetic and often uninformed governing body or synod, so that one day he is appointed as pastor of a Church, the next as district missionary, the third as teacher of theology, etc. The only worry of the governing body seems to be the smooth-running efficiency of the machinery, while ignoring or conveniently forgetting the charismata of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

What can you do in the present set-up? You can search your heart and conscience and see whether you have faith to believe that God has called or will call you and give you the gift of grace for teaching. If you have that call, one sure result will be that you will ask your Church for the training that will prepare you to exercise that gift of grace. You will want a basic new re-orientation. If you do not have, or cannot have, or cannot get that faith, you should for your own sake and the sake of your hearers refuse to teach Bible classes, Christianity, theology, etc.

## WITNESSING

30. What is the overall picture today?

- (a) A neglected, ineffective, inadequate and (according to Western standards) semi-literate clergy.
- (b) Staffs of secular teachers teaching religion, the great majority of whom probably are ignorant of the primal necessity of having the gift of grace and many of whom have no vital interest in nor knowledge of the facts of faith in their fundamental relation to the Church.
- (c) A certain percentage of undisciplined, illiterate or semi-literate, ignorant laymen, prodded on by their foreign teachers, the missionaries, to preach, teach and witness, all under the general heading of 'gossiping the Gospel'.
- (d) The great body of the Church, inert, inactive, indifferent.

No one can deny that God in His omnipotence has raised up a number of truly great men out of this mess. On the other hand, who will deny that the overall picture is as stated in (a), (b), (c) and (d) above? Obviously the witness of such a Church must be so appallingly ineffective in the face of Islam that the Muslim does not even bother to find out what it is all about.

31. Now probably any one who knows a little about Church history will say that even at the very centre of old Church tradition and sound teaching there have always been serious lapses. How true! Because of sin, imperfect and partial knowledge and lack of faith, the Church is constantly wandering away from sound doctrine and being enticed by the easy falsehood of pious men. But, because the Church is the body of Christ, and the charismata of the Holy Spirit are active in it, it is also constantly being brought back. The Holy Spirit is constantly disciplining the Church, convicting it of sin, and bringing it back again and again to be guided, bound and disciplined by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the Church. The pietist individuals, on the other hand, who live on experiential religion, and ignore the gifts of grace functioning in the body, *use* the Scriptures, proving by them their own false doctrines. They are therefore never brought back as long as they continue in that way.

32. Now let us indulge for a moment in a Utopian dream, which is no dream at all, but is the picture we see through the eyes of faith. We are going to try to picture a Church functioning coordinately according to the charismata as distributed by the Holy Spirit; without the element of sin and ignorance in it, with which we now are all too well acquainted.

First of all, as the pure unadulterated preaching and teaching of the Word and the right administration of the Sacraments are the very life of the Church, it would spare no time, money or energy in finding out the men who have the gift of the Holy Spirit to serve the Word, and train these men as highly and thoroughly as possible at any given time or place. Some to be preachers, some teachers, some evangelists, etc. In other words, every rightful activity of the Church in relation to the Word would be given the highest priority.

33. Now it does not at all follow that these people all have to be 100% Church-supported workers. A man could easily be conceived of as being, for example, a teacher of history in a school or college and at the same time as being a called and highly trained teacher of Christianity as well. *Not* because he is a Christian, but because he, as a Christian in the body of Christ, has the scriptural gift of grace and the Church training to be a 'teacher' in St Paul's sense of the word also. There would be others—the

pastor, the evangelist or missionary, the teachers of theology, etc.—who probably always would need to be full-time, paid workers, although even that does not necessarily follow. Nor does it necessarily follow that every individual has only one gift of grace. St Paul, for example, was by the gifts of grace an apostle, a teacher and a preacher.

34. In our Utopian dream this Church is now functioning according to its charismata. What would be the result? Inevitably a real clash with the powers of evil and darkness would come. It could not be otherwise. But again collectively, not individuals here and there playing at heroics and getting sneered at, or stoned in the bazaar. And parallel with this clash there would be a strong Church, strong in the bonds of fellowship and in the knowledge of Christ, a Church that really could witness. Remember, our Lord said some rather frightening words about His attitude toward us on the last day being dependent on our witnessing to or confessing the faith.

35. 'If you believe with your heart and confess with your mouth' is the way St Paul puts it. Obviously as belief is personal and universal so likewise confession or witnessing is personal and universal. Therefore witnessing is not a gift of grace given by the Holy Spirit to some and not to others. We must, however, understand and realise that the entire life of a believer is to be found inside the context of the Church, and in like manner the entire life of the believer as a witness must be inside the same context.

36. We have been talking about two Churches: one, the Church as it appears to us; and two, the Utopian dream Church, the Church on which we, according to the Creed, believe. Let us see how witnessing appears in these two Churches. We take the Church of our experience first. I want to go back to the World Dominion Press pamphlet mentioned above, because this is not an exception to the rule but a very good example of what is all too common. On page 21 there is talk of 'the light of God's truth and joy in our faces', and in the picture (on page 22) that becomes an imbecilic holy grin and is interpreted as letting your light shine. You have all seen the same thing in Sunday School pictures. The one little girl is glum and bad-tempered. She, of course, isn't a Christian; the other has an idiotic grin on her face, and she goes about telling people that it is there because she loves Jesus. It should not be necessary to mention these things among grown-up, intelligent people and yet it is just exactly the kind of stuff that is being peddled today under the name of witnessing.

37. Here is another. In the same pamphlet (page 38) there is a composite drawing with eight pictures in it. You see one man stopping another

on the road, then one interfering with a farmer at work, one has even stopped a poor fellow with a load of wood on his head, then a woman is prating with another instead of taking care of her house—there are eight of these Christians gossiping the Gospel; collaring somebody or other and telling them what Jesus means to them. And in each case the other fellow has a happy, surprised look on his face. When we were children at home we used to get pictures with the caption: ‘What’s wrong with this picture?’ You’d study it for a while and find an ass with a bushy tail like a horse, or probably a horse with cloven hoofs like a cow, or something like that. Well, in this picture of the eight gossipers, what is wrong? Obviously that happy, surprised look on the face of those hearing what Jesus means to the gossipers. That picture presupposes that a *true* presentation of Christianity can be put across without a struggle, without opposition, without it being a condemnation of all the listener now believes and lives by. It presupposes nothing but ignorance and a willingness to hear. Or else (ironically) that the Christians who are ‘witnessing’ in reality are only gossiping, telling idle tales and spreading groundless rumours. For it is a lie to pretend that Christianity can be truly presented to anybody without a struggle, without opposition.

38. It follows naturally enough that in a Church where the work of the Holy Spirit as distributor of the gifts of grace is ignored, where the clergy is ineffective, where the teachers of religion are secularised and where the mass of Christians are inert, that witnessing degenerates into a pharisaical superiority complex with reference to ethics, and superficial, ineffectual talk of individual religiosity with reference to religion.

The work of the Church should be like a fire thrown upon the earth. Then every fire department the devil has in that area would be put to quench it. Then, and only then would our Lord’s warning ring in our ears: ‘He who denies Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father’.

39. The word ‘witness’ in Greek is *marturia*, and the person who witnesses is a *martus*, from which we get our English word ‘martyr’. Remarkably enough the Arabic root *Shahad* gives both *shahid*, a martyr, and *shahed*, a witness. The subtle connection seems to be that, even outside the Church, the fellow who has the courage to witness to the truth is up against it. It doesn’t in every case follow that the witness necessarily will lose his life, but what it does show is that the witness is not up against ignorance primarily but against evil. (By the way, John 1:5 translated literally should read: ‘and the darkness does not overcome the light’. The King James Version says *comprehend*.)

40. Now in our Utopian dream Church, which is the Church of our faith as opposed to the Church of our experience, the personal witness of the believer is like all else: inside the context of the Church, the *Corpus Christi*. There, in the Church, the very first and fundamental witness is baptism. Please don't misunderstand this. Baptism is NOT the witness of the individual that he now has faith in Christ. If it were it could never be a Sacrament, and it could have no more value than that which is put into it by each individual. Baptism, considered as a witness, is the testimony of the Church to an act of God. Baptism proclaims to the world that God has a pact with mankind, mediated through the body of Christ, the Church. Baptism is a witness to the fact that God claims His own, and that in each particular baptism, God has claimed this very person being baptised. In this connection it is immaterial whether the recipient of baptism is two months or eighty years old; baptism is still a witness to the fact of God's pact with mankind, in the Church.

41. Experience in all countries where Christianity is not the accepted religion goes to show that people seem to be aware of the fact that it is baptism that makes the real difference to a man's standing in the community.

42. The second witness in the Church is the Holy Communion. Call it the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist if you like. The fact still remains that in administering and partaking of the bread and wine the Church is witnessing—showing forth the Lord's death. Here each member of the body is accepting God's witness concerning His Son.

These two Sacraments are not the individual witness of any person regarding his faith or practice; they are the corporate witness of the whole body, testifying to the faithfulness of God to His creation. Each person partaking of these two Sacraments is identifying himself with the Church. And yet in prepartition India only three out of every seven adult Christians were communicants!

43. Wherever the Church is dynamic, the witness inherent in the Sacraments is followed by the witness that lies in the 'fellowship' of the 'saints'. Please let us not argue about who the saints are: you, I and the other fellow—we are the saints. It has nothing on earth to do with saintliness. The Church is not a club, nor an insurance society. It is a living, dynamic organism. Constant change takes place, something lives, something dies, something is bad, something is changed, something is petrified. And in and through all this we have the communion of the saints: a fellowship that is dependent—not on likemindedness—but on the

Sacraments and the Word. The Word explains the Sacraments; the Sacraments symbolise the Word. The Christian hearing the Word and partaking of the Sacraments is constantly brought back to the contents of that great classical confession of the faith called CREDO, or the Apostles' Creed. Many believe in the constant repetition of the CREDO, others don't. But the contents of the CREDO have, through the ages, been the basic, classical confession of the universal Church of Christ on earth. And when a man's witness—either in the body of Christ in divine service, or alone, outside, in the face of opposition, violence or death—is in line with the contents of CREDO, he is identifying himself, personally, with the witness of the *Corpus Christi* to the faithfulness of God towards mankind.

44. The Church then collectively, functioning properly and soberly is God's primary witness to His own faithfulness towards mankind! And yet India and Pakistan are full of super-spiritual individualists who have no need of the fellowship of the saints, that is, the very Church on the spot. One great hindrance to the effective witness of the Church is the pseudo-spirituality that in arrogant pride condemns the Church on the spot as 'dead' or 'unfaithful' or 'worldly', and either starts a schism, or ignores the 'gathering together' entirely. In this country we have a double curse: one is the individualistic attitude of missionaries and the other is the natural, human, super-spirituality of the people themselves.

45. In other words, the real emphasis on witnessing should lie on the acceptance by the individual of the collectivity of the Church through which GOD witnesses. Instead of that we have the emphasis on Christians trying to tell others 'what Jesus means to me'. And the result? Who cares? A shrug of the shoulders, a sneer, or a stone.

46. Supposing we had that dream Church that stood collectively on the witness of God, mediated through itself, and functioning according to the charismata of the Holy Spirit, then each individual would be ready—whenever demanded of him—to give a reason for the hope that is in him, namely that through the Word preached and the Sacraments given in the fellowship of the saints—that is, in the Church—God had laid His hand on him and claimed him as His own. And cost what it may, God's hand on one's shoulder cannot be ignored.

47. You are a missionary, a pastor, an evangelist, a teacher or a keen layman. You will therefore have to face up to one point that may appear to you as a contradiction. Our dream Church, which does not appear to exist, does really exist; for while it is not identical with the Church of our experience it is, through faith, the Church. Just as the believer is literally 'hid in

Christ', so the whole body of believers is hid in Christ. We say we believe in one holy, catholic (not Catholic) Church. Why do we *believe* in it? For the same reason that every believer is a new *creation*, although 'hidden in Christ'. There is no such thing as an 'invisible Church', but there is definitely a Church that is the object of our faith, just as Christ is the object of our faith, for the Church is *Corpus Christi*, the body of Christ, and He is the Head. And the union is *organic*.

Your work, therefore, in exercising the gift of grace which the Holy Spirit has given to you, does not depend on what you see and experience regarding the Church, but what you believe. Faith—living, active faith—in the Church (not in the Roman Catholic sense but in the reformed sense) as the body of Christ, will give you courage and stamina to carry on when everything seems utterly hopeless.

48. Finally, if you accept and adopt this attitude towards the Church and its gifts of grace you can see how fundamentally it is going to affect your attitude towards the work of the Church in proclaiming the Gospel to Muslims, and teaching them the contents of our Faith. And let me tell you that you are going to have trouble right away with your seeker and new converts. There are three reasons:

(a) The convert or seeker does not want to identify himself with the Church, because he knows that *that* identification is a very real witness that will bring persecution. As long as he can hide under the wing of the missionary he may be ever so brave in confessing himself a Christian on odd occasions. But it is only when he ties up with the Church that the fire-works start. And that, naturally enough, is what he wants to avoid. You must remember here that in Islam confession of the faith is always conditioned by the amount of trouble you might get into. Faced with the threat of death a Muslim is justified in recanting, provided he doesn't mean what he says. That attitude is very often carried over into Christianity even by serious seekers and converts. 'God looks at the heart, and He knows what was in my heart, regardless of what I said.' That attitude can be retained as long as the missionary is there in the background. The moment, however, your convert is tied to the Church, he has to drop that approach to the problem.

(b) Another reason why he probably doesn't want to identify himself with the Church is that the teaching he has received from the missionary reflects so badly on the Church that he despises the whole crowd. I have heard missionaries say, 'My convert does not want to identify himself with that crowd, and I don't blame him; they're a rotten bunch anyway'.



To which I reply, ‘Probably. They are a chip off the old block, the missionary. And your converts will be just like them in eight years—thanks to your attitude towards the Church.’

(c) Islam, from which your seeker or convert has come, is a most individualistic religion, on its spiritual side. Although on its purely human side it does teach a broad ‘brotherhood’ of man, a solidarity of believers, yet it has no teaching at all parallel to that of the *Corpus Christi*, the tree and the branches, the mediation of the body of Christ. This fundamental doctrine of the Apostolate, of our relation to God being dependent on and conditioned by the Church, is hard for a Muslim to comprehend. He wants a private, individual relationship to God, such as he was accustomed to in Islam.

49. The whole thing does look rather hopeless, doesn’t it? It always does in the thick of the fight. You can give up, of course—or you can struggle on to the point where your faith is not in yourself, in your ability, nor in your environments, but in Him who has all authority in heaven and on earth. Then you will probably stay in the thick of the fight with your eyes open.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is preaching? Who is responsible for it? Where?
2. What is teaching? Who is responsible for it? Where?
3. What is witnessing? Who is responsible for it? How is it made?

## CHAPTER 10

# The Muslim Convert in the Church

1. Some time ago I met a man who said, 'I've been in the Church for over twenty years, and I still feel myself a stranger'. Again, some years ago, a bitter convert published a pamphlet which he called: 'What a Muslim Convert Misses in the Church'. It was full of attacks on both Church and missionary. At one time a conference was called with the object of giving disgruntled Christians a chance to say what was wrong. It ended in a sorry wrangle, utterly useless.

2. This problem of the Muslim convert in the Church has been debated off and on for years. The missionary talks about the selfish, cold Church that does not welcome his convert; and the Church says the missionary is bringing in extraneous elements, not really Christian. And the convert himself snipes in both directions.

3. Now you are probably saying: We know this problem exists, and is urgent, but how does it fit into this book? That is a fair question. A senior missionary asked specially to have a chapter on this subject included, on the supposition that from the very day you first meet your Muslim, who later will be your convert, your attitude towards him in his (coming) relation to the Church will affect both him and the Church.

This missionary was perfectly right.

When the Muslim in the Church is all too often like a bull in a china shop, the reason is to be sought not primarily in the Church, nor in the convert, but in the attitude of the missionary to the Muslim while he was still a seeker.

4. Now let us be painfully honest. Just what does happen, or at least usually? A seeker comes to the missionary, either by himself or with the aid of some keen national Christian. If the seeker is destitute (as is often the case) the missionary lets him earn his food by wiping dust off the legs

of the table or probably by doing a little digging in the compound garden in the shade of a tree. Or if it is a woman, she is put to work washing the white baby's soiled clothing. Of course the 'work' is easy, and the seeker spends a lot of his time with the missionary getting instruction. When the seeker is not destitute, the missionary arranges to spare time to have fellowship with him and instruct him in the truth. In either case, the seeker (or convert) very quickly gets the status of being Mr So and So's convert. Probably when the said Mr So and So is dead and buried his convert still belongs to this or that Mission.

5. What actually happens is that from the very start the Church, that is, the body of Christ, is tacitly, maybe even unconsciously, being ignored in relation to the seeker. And yet it is just at this very early stage that the thought of the Church should be most prominent in your minds.

I want to interject a statement here about the Church as we know it theoretically, and the Church as we see it here and now in its organised form. According to Reformation theology the Church is there where the Word is preached and heard, pure and unadulterated, and the Sacraments are rightly administered and received. According to that definition, no organised Church, here and now, has any guarantee for its being *the* Church. That is as it should be. We live by faith and not by sight; our knowledge is partial and we see through a glass darkly. On the other hand, any attempt to break up the present Church, and to establish that Church that *knows* it is *the* Church, is like jumping from the frying pan into the fire. It is presupposing that we already are in heaven, that we see face-to-face and know as we are known, which of course is pure illusion. As mentioned in our last chapter, *the* Church—the one in which the Word is always preached and heard in its pure and unadulterated form, and in which the Sacraments are always rightly administered and received—is always the object of faith. It both is and is not the organised Church here and now.

So when you try to relate the seeker to the Church, you have to relate him to the Church on which we *believe* and the Church which is here now, and organised. Although these two are not identical, they are one, and therefore your convert needs both.

6. I know the way of dealing with enquirers is being severely criticised in many quarters. The missionary is rebuked because he never really becomes an integral part of the Church on the spot, the Church he is supposed to be serving. It is said that he is a foreigner, and that his attitude toward the Church is pretty much the same as that of a doctor towards his patients, or of a teacher towards his pupils. While this attitude is

appropriate in hospital and school, the missionary has no right to be super-Church or extra-Church. He has no right to treat ‘the Christians’ as a doctor treats his patients, for he should be one of ‘the Christians’ himself, while it is not expected of the doctor to be a patient among patients. They then go on to say that until the missionary changes this foreignness and the spiritual aristocracy that goes with it, his converts are never going to have a good time in the Church, for they too—in a sense—are foreign.

7. Quite a number of schemes are being developed in the different missions to meet this criticism, and the integration of Church and Mission is being carried out at breakneck speed in some places. However, it is just wishful thinking to suppose that any scheme whatsoever will change the stripes of the zebra. We missionaries are foreigners, and regardless of what scheme, system or method is used, we never can (nor will) be really absorbed into the national Church—presupposing there actually is a national Church. All attempts at imitating by adopting national dress, eating with fingers, sitting on the floor, or by introducing a few superficial or spectacular changes in the order of divine service only prove more conclusively that racial, national, and geographical boundaries cannot be ignored. Why bury your head in the sand like an ostrich? Every nation—Eastern or Western—has a genius of its own. That is as it should be, otherwise there could be no national Church in any real sense of the word. And the stronger that uniqueness of a nation asserts itself, the more difficult it is for the foreigner ever to become an integral part of it. In America, for example, there are Church groups speaking every European language. It is a very small minority of immigrants who ever really feel at home in an American Church. Their children or grandchildren do—not they themselves.

8. There is nothing wrong in this fact in itself. We were all created ‘national’, not ‘international’. There is only one thing you can do about it: stare this fact in the face until you recognise it and become acquainted with it. And this applies just as much to the national Christian as to the foreign missionary. You, the national Christian, should not expect of your missionary that he or she should become an integral, vital part of your own national group, *your* Church. Only one in a thousand can do it, if that many. And because of his foreignness and natural (or unnatural) development, that feeling of spiritual aristocracy has crept in. Naturally, then, when he dumps his convert onto your Church, things are going to go wrong. The first thing you, the national Christian, ought to do, is NOT to trot your seeker off to the missionary’s house but invite him to Church to

meet the people who are to be his fellow Christians, always remembering that when the missionary has been transferred or has retired and is warming his toes in the sunshine of California, that same Church will be there, dead or alive, for better or for worse, it will be there; the missionary will not.

9. Likewise, the missionary should not deceive himself. He is not super-Church. 'The Christians' are not his patients nor his pupils. He is the foreigner. Nothing to be ashamed of, but a fact to be reckoned with. The missionary may be super-spiritual and the Church may be dead and worldly—yet the gates of hell shall not prevail against the CHURCH, that is, against the body of Christ. So the seeker should be put into contact with the Church immediately—as a very raw recruit.

10. One point more. Some folk would have us think that real unity in Christ can be reached at a higher level. That is to say, while making all necessary allowances for difference of race, nationality and customs, we should yet be able to achieve a real unity in the service or worship of God through Christ. Theoretically, yes; practically, no. To begin with, race, nationality, and customs are all tainted by sin. They all fall under the condemnation of the Gospel. The missionary can be, and very often is, looked upon as a person attacking certain racial or national characteristics or long established customs—simply because he is a foreigner. Furthermore, in practically every land where missionary work is carried on, there is at present a strong backwash from colonialism. The relationship between every foreigner and every national is in one way or another conditioned by this fact. Let both sides be as patient and long-suffering as possible, and friction may be avoided, but it would be illusory to suppose that anything more than that can be accomplished for the first two generations.

11. Now, I have gone into the practical side of it rather at length because that is the side that usually receives the most attention. Actually the *real* difficulty is NOT on this level at all. You have to go back to your conception of what it means to 'lead a man to Christ', or as others would say, to prepare him for baptism. It is here the shoe pinches.

12. Let us go back to the seeker who wants to become a Christian. When instruction starts, just what course does it take? First of all the seeker has to learn certain facts of faith, certain fundamentals. In this connection it is immaterial whether the missionary prefers to use the New Testament itself, or whether he follows the line of teaching laid down in some catechism; the fact remains that a minimum of Christian teaching has

to be assimilated by the convert. But teaching, of course, is not enough. The seeker has to be brought into personal contact with our Lord; he has to have a spiritual experience. Otherwise it is all head and no heart. The missionary therefore prays with him and teaches him and coaxes him to pray, so that he may get that experience, that personal relationship to Jesus. Whenever the time comes that the missionary is satisfied that the seeker knows his stuff and that he also ‘loves the Lord’, that is, he has the spiritual experience, the missionary presents him to the Church for baptism and dumps him on the congregation.

13. If the devil himself were to devise a means whereby converts should be hindered from becoming stable, living Christians, no better method could be worked out! Why? Because the *method* proclaims that intellectualism, perfect or imperfect, hooked up with a certain experiential spirituality, is Christianity. When you *know* so and so much, and you have had this or that spiritual experience, you are a convert and eligible for baptism. That has never on God’s green earth been Christianity! And yet the very method which is used makes thousands of people believe that it is.

14. Let us go on and see what happens when the missionary’s finished product is dumped onto the Church through baptism:

(a) Rightly or wrongly, but almost invariably, the Church gives him the cold shoulder. ‘Here comes the missionary’s pet, his Joseph. What’s he after? A wife? A job? A meal ticket? Or is he genuine? Probably not. How well did he succeed in fleecing the missionary?’ All these questions are in the mind of the congregation. And when you find out how many times missionaries have been fleeced, you cannot really wonder at this attitude of the congregation.

What is much worse is that quite probably your congregation has not had enough Christian teaching on what constitutes a Church to make it aware of the fact that it is the body of Christ.

They may have heard some talk about the three ‘selves’—that is, self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating—but that is only a pep talk from missionaries tired of having to carry the whole burden of the Churches they have founded. The great majority of Christians think of the Church as something extraneous, something which in the final analysis is not vital, as long as their own private experience of our Lord is kept at boiling point. At best, the Church is considered as the place where you get a little extra fuel to keep the pot boiling, so to speak. It is a get-together of like-minded people, for in unity there is strength. But if need be, you can

get along without it. With *that* background the congregation can cold-shoulder the missionary's convert and not have a bad conscience. 'If he wants to come, let him; that's no business of ours.' Simply because the congregation does not see anything very vital in it.

(b) The convert, on the other hand, feeling this very cold shoulder, also begins to wonder what it is all about. Why the Church? The missionary taught him what he needs to know, and the missionary succeeded in getting the seeker to have that personal experience of spirituality—and when those two things were okayed by the missionary he was proclaimed a convert and thereafter baptised. Then why the Church? What part does it play in the scheme of things? Why rub up against all those cold shoulders? When he was a Muslim his religion was his own, it was not dependent on any fellowship with others, and what the missionary taught him was pretty much along the same lines, so why bother now? He got along beautifully as a seeker before being baptised, why should baptism force him into this unfriendly crowd? It does not make sense. His attendance begins to drop off, he reads his Bible and does his praying at home, just as he used to do when he was a seeker.

(c) There follows a longer or shorter period when all the knowledge he got from the missionary becomes dimmer and dimmer, and more and more divorced from the concrete occurrences of life. And his spiritual experience does not seem to be nearly as living now as when he used to kneel alongside the missionary. The end of the story is that he usually gets into some kind of trouble or other and either openly recants or just shrugs his shoulders in disillusionment.

With infinite variations in detail, that is just what is happening in all Muslim lands.

15. The missionary who thought he was leading the seeker to Christ, simply failed to achieve his purpose. How can this be explained? Admittedly, it looks pretty bad.

First of all, remember from a purely practical point of view what was said before, namely, that the missionary is NOT an integral part of the Church on the spot. He can get along very well without it, for his roots are deep down in the body of Christ, that is, in the Church in his own country. By means of letters, books, personal contacts, missionary group gatherings and furloughs he is constantly nourished by his own home Church. This is so natural that he probably is not even aware of it, nor has he ever stopped to analyse the source of his own Christian life. Probably, because of false teaching he has received, he honestly thinks and believes that the

source of his Christian life is his own spiritual experience, his own personal, private relationship to our Lord.

16. Therefore, since the Church on the spot means nothing vital for *him*, his teaching of the convert, and his example, is such that the convert also feels the Church is of no vital importance. Add to that the fact that in any number of cases there is a feeling of tension and irritation because the Church on the spot is not measuring up to the expectations of the missionary, and you find cases where the missionary will not only ignore the Church in his teaching and conduct, but actually try to avoid putting his converts into touch with it. The actual case is that while the workers or the missionary's personal work with the individual is absolutely necessary, it cannot bring the seeker to completion in his saving relationship to God in Christ, for that completion is reached *only* in the worshipping Church.

17. Now in these last three chapters I have been hammering away at the conception of the Church, that is, the body of Christ. Why? Simply because one fact stands out: All Christian life is corporate life. All Christian life is in the *Corpus Christi*. Christian life starts there and stays there. Let us now look at those two parallel lines the missionary follows with his seeker. First of all, knowledge. He must learn certain facts of the faith. BUT—facts of faith unrelated to the corporate life of the Church are no longer facts of faith, but ordinary general knowledge. For example, the fact that Christ died on a cross is just a fact of secular history—like the fact that Caesar was stabbed by Brutus—until, in the corporate life of the church, the crucifixion becomes a fact of faith: the fact that God so loved the world that He gave His Son. In other words, the seeker may *learn* the Church's interpretation and understanding of that fact, yet apart from the corporate life of the Church, that is, apart from the Word preached and the Sacraments administered and the fellowship of the saints, that knowledge never will be other than just general knowledge; it never can become saving knowledge.

18. At this point any number of Christians, who otherwise have sound teaching, fall down flat. They know that, in Christianity, knowledge is vital and necessary because Christianity is a historical religion. Something happened here on earth, in history. And you HAVE to know what that something was. Therefore the emphasis on instruction. But what they forget, or do not know, is that this knowledge must come in the context of the corporate life of the Church. And so when they are teaching the seeker, they all unwittingly are giving him general knowledge, and not saving knowledge. And this is all they can do. Saving knowledge is in the



corporate body and life of the Church—never in the missionary’s bungalow, nor by other private means.

Here the question of the ‘knowability’ of the Word of God arises, in contradistinction to the knowability of general knowledge. In the confines of this chapter we can only postulate: The ability to ‘know’ the Word of God is a direct gift of the Holy Spirit, given with the ‘hearing’ of the Word.

19. Actually, then, the only real thing a missionary—or any individual—can do for the genuine seeker is to say: I can do nothing—and make the recruit understand *why* he can do nothing. *Make* him understand from the very word ‘go’ that either he gets into contact with the Church or he *never* can receive saving knowledge, as the gift of the Holy Spirit. But at the same time teach your Church—*make* it understand—that the life is in the body, and saving knowledge is in the *body only*, because the Holy Spirit works through the mediation of the body. The individual can do nothing, the responsibility is entirely on the Church. Not because *you* put it there, but because it, in the plan of God, rests on the body of Christ, the Church, as the Holy Spirit was given to the Church.

When your seeker and your Church both see that you really mean what you say, things will begin to look different for the Muslim convert in the Church. Do not think I mean that everything will be rosy red; I don’t. But there will be a solid basis on which to work in trying to arrive at readjustments, for all three sides will recognise the necessity of the relationship.

20. Now let us take the other parallel line—the missionary insists that the seeker must have a personal experience of our Lord before he dares recommend him for baptism. It must not be ‘all head and no heart’. At least that is how it is put. What they mean to say is that intellectualism, in itself, can never lead to Christianity or be Christianity. You need both head and heart. In paragraph 19 the argument was that head (that is, general) knowledge is not what you need, but life in the context of the Church (that is, saving knowledge). In this paragraph you are going to see also that heart knowledge is not what you need but—again—life in the body of Christ.

Long before the seeker is ever really brought into the fellowship of the Church, the missionary usually teaches him by word and example that spirituality is a *must*. But everyone has a right to ask: How can a seeker have any genuine Christian spiritual experience outside of the Church? Christ is the head of the body, and through the body all the blessings and gifts of God are mediated, then just what is that ‘personal experience’ of

the seeker who is still outside in every way? You may not like this, but truth is truth: A spirituality that is independent of the body of Christ may be genuine enough as a psychological phenomenon, but it is pseudo-spirituality in relation to Christianity. Let us not deny that as the genuine seeker begins to see Truth in the light of God's light, his emotions in all probability will be stirred. He would be a cold fish if that did not happen. It is psychologically natural. However, if he has been taught correctly, the decisive culmination of his first true Christian spiritual experience will be his partaking of the Sacrament of baptism. For through faith and by the means of baptism he becomes a member of the body of Christ.

By hearing the Word, and through the gift of knowability given by the Holy Spirit, the seeker is given faith to believe that in baptism the fact that God has claimed His own is verified and established. In baptism therefore he will see the heavens opened and the faithfulness and the love of God will be revealed to him as genuine spiritual experience. In baptism he will know that the Holy Spirit, through the agency of the Word, has been drawing him, convicting him of sin and bringing him to the Cross, and in baptism the old man is buried and all things become new, for now he is a new creation in Christ, that is, in *Corpus Christi*.

21. But the possibility of this genuine experience presupposes correct teaching. It presupposes that the seeker *knows* what baptism is, and through which agency it is mediated, that is, the Church, the body of Christ. The emphasis of Reformation theology on the necessity of faith as a prerequisite for partaking of the Sacraments is largely misunderstood in our generation. The Roman doctrine, with its hocus-pocus, logically concluded that the Sacraments were able to do what they signify, whether one had faith or not. One might illustrate the point by saying if a person swallowed a strong sleeping draught it would make him drowsy and sleepy—whether he believed that it would or not. The Reformers held that the Sacraments give what they signify only when accepted through faith. In our day that statement is supposed to indicate that only when a person already believes he is a Christian, is a child of God, is he then eligible for the next step, that is, baptism. The Reformers would say, 'No. The faith of the outsider is that he has faith to believe that through the Sacrament of baptism he will *become* a child of God, verified and established.'

22. So again we are back where we started: Get your raw recruit into contact with the Church at once. Make him understand that God's new covenant through Christ is with the CHURCH, and that if he would live at all, it can only be in the body and by means of the body. In all probability

he will not like it that way. As a Muslim, his religion is his own, and it is going to take patience and wisdom to make him understand this idea of a corporate religious life. There are obvious reasons for this. First of all, fear; fear of his own crowd, the congregation, fear of readjusting his life. Remember, in the East, people are not expected or taught to think and act on their own initiative. Whatever amount of personal thinking there is, is due to Western influence. It is therefore an understandable fear which makes him shirk from throwing in his lot with the congregation. And added to that lack of understanding, the *necessity* of it. Islam says: there is a book and a prophet; between them they show you the way to God and to heaven. So get on with it. Undoubtedly the book and the prophet did regulate man's life in relation to his environment, but there is no inner necessity in it. For example: in one country you are told to drive on the right side of the road, in another country on the left. That regulates your driving in whatever country you happen to be, but there is no real reason why you should drive on either this or that side of the road. Likewise when Islam regulates the lives of Muslims it simply legislates that this or that must be done. If Allah had wished it, something entirely different would have done just as well. But nowhere in Islam is the 'communion of the saints' a condition of Islamic life, in the sense that there is an *inner necessity* which demands it. And finally, spirituality which is non-Christian has always striven against the bondage of fellowship. All real mysticism and all real natural spirituality lives in isolation. It cannot be tied down to anything. Christian spirituality, on the other hand, is definitely tied down to water, bread and wine in the context of the Word preached and heard. Real spiritual experience of God in Christ is in the body of Christ, and mediated by the body of Christ through the Word preached and heard, together with the Sacraments administered and received.

23. Let us make this a little clearer. When the Roman Church got the wrong slant on the three elements, that is, water, bread and wine, they developed what we call a doctrine of magic, as mentioned in paragraph 21. The Reformers broke away—not from the basic position of the water, bread and wine, but from the teaching of *ex opera operato*, that is, from the teaching of magic. This can be clearly seen from the fact that in the early days of the Reformation no pastor was allowed ordinarily to administer the Sacraments without also preaching, the idea being that the Sacraments were an act proclaiming the same things which the Word preached was proclaiming. The two were necessary to each other so that the Sacraments could be received in faith, not as magic. And only in vital

dependence upon this set-up is all true Christian experience to be found. It simply means that Christian spirituality depends upon a corporate and an inter-dependent fellowship.

If your seeker revolts against *this* spirituality, he does not have a hope of ever becoming a Christian, regardless of how spiritual he may be in the missionary's house.

24. But you are not going to have trouble with your convert only. You may even have trouble with your own conscience, in that you feel it would be the quickest way of killing the spire of interest in the seeker to turn him over to the Church on the spot. I have had both foreigners and national Christians tell me that. Probably you are right. Their way of doing it is quick; yours is long-drawn-out and painful. They can kill his interest in weeks, whereas you may be years about it. If you doubt what I say, ask any senior missionary who has been interested in trying to get converts! And you will find he or she has a large cupboard full of skeletons. One sad disappointment after the other. So there you are. And the answer is, for better or for worse: There is no other way but the Church. When you read what St Paul had to write to the Corinthians, you rather guess that their morals were not as pure as could be desired. Again, when you read what he has to say to the Galatians, you know their conception of grace was about as faulty as it could be. And when you read in the first few chapters of Revelation about the state of affairs in the Churches named there—well, there you are. And yet it was just these churches that absorbed all new converts. None of the Apostles had compound Christians. Either the Church or nothing.

25. Remember one thing. Your Church, your congregation on the spot, can be fed on pep talks about spirituality, individualistic experience and a superficial moralism. It must know something about the essential nature of the Church as *Corpus Christi*, the body of Christ. The Sacraments should not be received as something semi-magical. Just as you will have to work with patience and wisdom to get your seeker to understand, so likewise you will need the same virtues to get it across to the Church.

26. Let us end this way. If the Muslim convert is ever going to be a living, stable Christian, a member of the body of Christ, *you* have need of an entirely different kind of faith. You need to believe that the Church on the spot, in spite of all its failings, *is* the body of Christ, and given fair teaching and guidance it *will* function as the body of the Church. Then you need to believe that it is your bounden duty to turn your raw recruit

over to that Church. He must know *why*, of course, but having been told why, if he still refuses, you can do nothing more for him. And finally, you have to have faith to believe that even if the Church fails once, twice or a dozen times, in the end, its failures will not be so many or so dismal or so disappointing as the failures of missionaries throughout the years.

### QUESTIONS

1. What should the relationship of the inquirer and convert be to (a) the individual worker, and (b) the Church?
2. What is meant by saying that salvation, saving knowledge is found inside the Church?
3. 'Either the Church—or nothing' (paragraph 24). Discuss.

## SECTION THREE

# JUST WHERE DOES YOUR CHRISTIAN LIVING FIT IN?

## CHAPTER 11

# Collective and Individual Responsibility—I

1. In this book we are working exclusively on the practical approach to Muslims. Already in the second chapter, on the subject of ‘Means’, the point was brought out that *you*, the Christian, are God’s means. You have a life to live, and you want it to be a Christian life. Bishop Debilius of East Germany said once: ‘It is not easy to be a Christian’. Life is extremely complicated in our generation, so much so that no one can be 100% sure that he really is living a Christian life, that is, a life that would please our Lord. There is also in our day a tendency in many quarters to over-emphasise ‘Christian living’, without really telling us what is meant by that expression. One often gets the impression that people are thinking of a sort of Boy Scout’s or Girl Guide’s moral code of doing good deeds, smiling and keeping your chin up in trouble. These are unquestionably good qualities, but Christian living is not as easy as all that.

2. Christian living is difficult to understand, as well as practise, primarily because we are living in two ages at one time. We are living in the age of what is known as ‘the natural order’, the age of fulfilment, the age of this world. But we are also living in the age of expectancy, of hope, awaiting the liberty of the sons of God (Rom. 8:18–26). Our citizenship is here on earth, but it is also in heaven. We belong also to ‘the redeemed order’.

3. You may have studied Islamic theology and history, and you may know all the answers to the Muslims’ objections to Christianity, and you may wear your fingernails down to the roots doing good deeds for Muslims, but unless you are living in two ages simultaneously, you are not living a Christian life. The Muslim will not understand this; he will probably stumble at it; he will unquestionably be offended when you explain it—and yet no other way is open to you. That is why this and the

following three chapters are so extremely important in any effort to approach the Muslim with the Gospel.

4. The person who writes or speaks along the line developed in the next four chapters will certainly have the epithet ‘Quietist’ hurled at him with considerable force by his opponents and critics. A quietist, as you probably know, is a person whose theology is built up around the idea that he cannot really do anything to better conditions in this ‘vile world’ and therefore calmly accepts the status quo, and sits back and twiddles his thumbs, waiting for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

5. These four chapters may lay themselves particularly wide open to such criticism for they purposely concentrate almost entirely on the life of the Christian inside the framework of the Church. Therefore, at the risk of overcrowding this chapter and upsetting its sequence of thought, we must at the very start, and extremely concisely, consider the position of the Christian as regards the ‘natural order’. We should never forget that the final answer to sin, corruption, and death is the Kingdom of God in its coming consummation, and that the Kingdom of God will never be consummated through man’s efforts.

6. Man belongs to the ‘natural order’. As long as he lives, he lives with fellow beings in this natural order. And in spite of sin, corruption and death this natural order belongs to God. God has not forsaken the world; He has not, so to speak, given it over to the devil. Therefore every Christian with the least bit of insight into the tension of Christianity is alert to help make the natural order as good, clean, fair and beautiful as possible—within the limitations of sinful, finite man. Christians the world over help to dethrone kings, change governments, fight wars, vote for humane laws to make life more worth living inside the natural order, not only for themselves but more especially for the underprivileged. The Christian not only feels co-responsible with all the others in his country but he also experiences an inward compulsion or urge, precisely because he is a Christian.

7. Just because of this inward urge the Christian is constantly in danger of making two grave mistakes:

(a) In his enthusiasm he forgets that he and all other fellow men are limited by their own sinful and finite state. He, therefore, goes to work building a Tower of Babel really believing it will reach to heaven. In doing so he is playing right into the hands of both Communists and Muslims, for that is precisely what they are doing. The Muslims and Communists do not believe in a redeemed order, but only that the natural order needs to be



reformed, re-educated, re-vivified, and built up, and the result will be heaven on earth. What we see then is a straightforward race of three groups, each building its own Tower of Babel! When so many otherwise reliable oriental Christians in China and India have gone over to the Communists, it is obvious what the reason is; they see the possibility of getting the communistic tower built long before the 'Christian' tower is really underway.

(b) The other grave danger is that the Christian making these efforts is always clamouring for the backing of the 'Church'. He wants official or semi-official ex-cathedra pronouncements from Churches, mission societies, or other groups, to the effect that his way is the Christian way of living. That simply cannot be done. The 'red' Dean may say one thing, Dean Inge something else, and the Archbishop still something else. But in the natural order, their words are just their own. For example, no Dean, Bishop or Archbishop would get up in Parliament and say that the Church of England's position as regards the nationalisation of steel, railroads or medicine is such and such! In the natural order every Christian must carry his own responsibility, use his own imagination, and do what he thinks is right. It is not much over a hundred years ago that certain Bishops of England fought against humanising the penal laws, because they thought it would cause a deterioration of law and order in society.

8. In short, inside the natural order—in the home, the community, the trade union, the political party, the club, the nation—the Christian will do all he can logically to make life worth living while he is waiting for the great consummation. But he must never forget his own sinful and finite state that limits his most sublime efforts, so that they can never be identified with God's work, and he must never try to push his Church or Christian organisation into a corner so that it will label his special effort as Christian in contradistinction to the efforts others may make in another direction.

9. This point was brought out clearly in the chapter on politics. What was said there about the Christian in politics can in principle be applied to the whole realm of the natural order.

10. We can now get on with the first two chapters in this group, namely, what in our Christian living is our collective responsibility and what is our individual responsibility?

Now, we are talking about the Church. Please remember that. You—quite apart from the natural order, that is, quite apart from affiliation with family, political party, social group, trade union, etc.—are a member of

the body of Christ. Being a member of the body of Christ always means being a member of some particular organised group of Christians, that is, the visible Church. In this connection you will find group responsibility and individual responsibility. That is what we want to think about now.

11. That which happens contemporaneously has to be taken consecutively when we want to think about it. So, although our collective and individual responsibilities are always both present together, we have to take them separately in order to discuss them. But I have tried to indicate the fact of contemporaneousness by making this and the following chapter two parts of one whole rather than two separate chapters.

12. Let us first of all get a picture of the New Testament way of life before our minds. The New Testament community was welded together by *communion*, that is, a sense of belonging and being bound to one another. The kerygma of the Apostles was such that the acceptance of it brought a person naturally not only into communion with others who had accepted the same kerygma, but also into a *community* with them. Baptism always involved entry into a community—the community of believers. The reason for this communion-community lay in its peculiar teaching. That teaching said that the Kingdom of God *had come*—not in its consummation, but as a promise, a hope, and a salvation, and therefore as a new way of life. This new Faith is called ‘The Way’ several times in the New Testament. However much believers (or shall we use the ordinary New Testament word—saints?) had to live *in* this world, they were not *of* this world, they no longer belonged to the old ‘age’, the ‘times of ignorance’, the ‘world’. They were a ‘new creation’ belonging to the new ‘age’, the age of the Kingdom of God. They were therefore awaiting the consummation, the coming of a ‘new heaven and a new earth’. This basic attitude of waiting did NOT mean quietism or defeatism. They were a peculiar people, zealous for good works (see what St Paul writes to Titus in 2:11–14).

13. There were two peculiar teachings in this community of saints, that is, believers:

(a) Relationship to God was reached only through the interwoven relationship of this community of saints, and this interwoven relationship of saints was only reached through relationship with God in Christ. This relationship was not understood as something parabolic or theoretical, but as a very living reality common to the experience of all Christian believers. That is why the picture used and accepted most widely in the Church is that of the body and the Head. Without the Head the body is not a body,

and unless you are a member of the body the Head is not your Head. This was *reality* and therefore the communion of saints became the community of saints.

(b) The second peculiar teaching of this community of saints was that, although they lived in this world and therefore individually were responsible citizens of the state in which they lived, yet in their community as saints the powers of the Kingdom of God were already functioning. Not as they will be in the consummation, but as a foretaste, an earnest, a promise. This is seen clearly in the belief that all the necessary functions of this community of saints were accepted NOT as natural gifts, but as gifts of grace, spiritual gifts, dispensed by the Holy Spirit. Whether or not these gifts coincided with natural gifts is beside the point. In the interwoven relationship of the saints each function is a spiritual gift, received and accepted from God. This interdependence, with God-given gifts of responsibility and in interwoven relationship, is called love. In the New Testament love is not merely emotion, not merely duty, but a relationship that fosters sober emotion and responsibility.

14. These two peculiarities, namely that interwoven relationship which created not only communion but community, and the dependence on the power of the Kingdom of God (which had come, and yet was to come), produced at the very start an effort to establish a ‘communistic’ society, in which all men had all things in common. Had this effort succeeded it would have been fatal for the Christian faith, for it would have lulled the saints into the illusion that they were no longer in the world, for which they are, in reality, jointly responsible. Regardless of how often the experiment has been made it always ends in failure, for a community of that kind, if it shirks its responsibility for this world, is living in a fool’s paradise.

15. Since that first communistic life broke up in failure some people suppose that this first peculiar teaching of the saints was wrong. They say that since that communistic life failed it is obvious that communion does not necessarily entail community. Nothing could be further from the truth. What actually happened was a readjustment that made community more realistic, more sober, more in keeping with the fact that this heavenly community was still *in the world*. The *collective* life—and here please note that collective has been emphasised—the collective life of the community of saints came to consist of (i) proclamation; (ii) teaching; (iii) worship; and (iv) diaconate. All four functions were gifts of grace, *charismata*, given by the Holy Spirit inside this community.

16. Now let us look closely at these four functions. We see immediately that one of them, namely proclamation, is in a class by itself. The community of saints claims that in proclamation it is speaking the Word of God. Not as though it had power over the Word of God, to speak it or be silent about it, but in an atmosphere of hope and expectancy it proclaims the once-for-all given Word, the kerygma, believing that in the 'proclamation-word' the very Word of God will become living. This it does and believes and expects and hopes because it has a special commission to do so.

17. Here is another vital point. This community of saints in its interwoven relationship of communion, as a group—that is, *collectively*—makes contact with 'the world' at this one point, namely, at proclamation. Even with regard to the teaching of seekers it can be said that through proclamation they have already been brought into a preliminary relationship to the community. The saints, collectively, as the *Corpus Christi*, as the communion-community, had no other point of contact with the 'world'. I think that historically no objection can be made to this statement. Whether we like it or not, there it is.

18. The other three functions of this interwoven relationship were, in a manner of speaking, the community's answer to God, its reaction on hearing the proclamation. Teaching, as a spiritual gift of grace, was an effort of the community to prepare children, adults and seekers better and more perfectly to hear and understand God's Word when proclaimed. The liturgical service—worship, praise, singing and praying—was the saints' adoration and thanksgiving for the Word of God proclaimed and accepted in faith. The diaconate—that is, the deliberate premeditated, organised service in the practical things of life on earth for the 'least of these', the brethren of Christ, and therefore their own brethren—was the concrete obedience to the Word of God proclaimed. Although the ordered life and worship of the Church had great influence on people outside, yet obviously none of these things was directed towards the world.

19. Let us go a little deeper into the question of the diaconate, for confusion is apt to arise at this point. In the Greek New Testament there are five words used to denote service or a servant. One of these is only used once, another four times, and a third only to indicate a certain type of minor official. Two words remain: *doulos* and *diakonos*.

20. The word *doulos* is the one used most. It comes from a word meaning 'to bind'. A *doulos* is then a bond-servant. The antithesis of the word is *kurios*, that is, lord. A lord is an owner. And when it is a human

being he owns, then this man is his *doulos*. For example, where Jesus in the parables speaks of lord and servants, it is the word *doulos* He uses.

The word has this deep and strong meaning that, quite apart from what the servant at any given moment is doing, he is always so related to the one who owns him that his lord rules over him completely. Therefore when the disciples speak of themselves as the servants of Jesus Christ or of God, this word is almost invariably used because it expresses their peculiar relationship to God, rather than the service with which they are for the present occupied.

21. This word is first of all used in the New Testament for slave, pure and simple. They are to serve in their bonds to their God (Eph. 6:6). If the lord unjustly gives them a beating, they must accept that also (I Pet. 2:18–20). If the owner is a Christian, the slave is to try even harder to serve him well and not try to escape the responsibility attached to his slavery (I Tim. 6:1–2). The one who is free should not let himself be bound (as he is bound to Christ), and the one who is bound should not use his Christianity to become free (as he is free in Christ: I Cor. 7:20–22). They were hard men, those Apostles. For although St Paul qualifies his statement about slavery by saying that if the opportunity arose a slave should not scorn to take his freedom, still, none of the Apostles would allow Christianity to be used as an excuse either for social upheaval or social stabilisation. Strangely enough the universality of Christianity showed itself in this very thing, that at that time the slave and the slave-owner both could accept it without their social relationship being necessarily dissolved or disturbed.

22. Now the question may be asked: Is there any derivation of the word *doulos* used in the New Testament conveying the same meaning as our modern term ‘Christian service’? At the time when the disciples quarrelled as to who should be the greatest among them, Jesus called them to Him and spoke to them about it. In St Matthew the word ‘slave’ is used; ‘whosoever would be first among you shall be your bondservant’—that is, ‘slave’. In the other two Gospel accounts the word ‘servant’ is used. But according to St Matthew the meaning is that he is to consider himself the bondservant of the brethren, one the brethren rules over. Here it is worth noting that in all three Gospel accounts Jesus starts His warning by pointing out conditions *outside their own circle* in order to indicate by contrast what they should be like within the community. ‘The kings of the Gentiles are lords over them . . . but let it not be so with you, but he who is greater let him become like a servant . . .’ (Luke 22:25–26).

Therefore, Jesus is here solely concerned with establishing an inner relationship amongst the disciples; there is no talk at all of work among non-Christians.

23. Then Paul uses the word in Galatians 5 where he says that they are made free but that they are not to use their freedom as an occasion for the flesh, but through love to serve one another. This is a play with words: free yet bound. But there it is again: the inner relationship.

24. In its different forms this word is used about 166 times in the New Testament. Only in one place is it used to express a Christian's relation to a non-Christian. In I Corinthians 9 Paul says that though he is free he has made himself a bondservant of all, so as to win the more. Even if he had stopped here, his whole life and work would prove what the words meant, but he continues and explains wherein the service consists, namely for the Jews he has become a Jew, for those without the law as one without law, and for the weak, weak. He has become all for all, that he might save some. Compare this with our Lord's saying, that the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

25. St Paul feels himself compelled to make himself familiar with the conditions of others in the 'natural order' so as rightly to be able to touch them with the Evangel. Instead of trying to change the natural order, he submits himself to their circumstances to give them the Evangel just where they are.

In short, the word *doulos* is nowhere used in the New Testament to express a bond between the Christian and the non-Christian in any form of ethical or cultural service.

26. Then comes the word *diakonos*, from which the English word 'deacon' is derived. When the distribution in the first communal congregation became disorderly, the Apostles said that they could not leave their own work to serve at the tables. Therefore some men were appointed to this service. The word is often used in this way to mean servants or helpers.

Although the word 'deacon', like the word 'bishop', has been taking on new meaning in some sections of the Church, yet the idea of having certain people appointed in the congregation to serve the interests of its members started in the New Testament Church, and has been carried on in various ways ever since. Our point is that this service was exclusively *inside* the Church community. It is quite impossible to show that the Apostles or the first Christians felt it was their responsibility to organise or appoint servants or helpers for the pagans outside.

27. Then comes the form of the word that indicates readiness to serve. In Hebrews 6 it is written that God is not unrighteous that He should forget that they had ministered to the saints. This word comes a few times also in the Epistles to the Corinthians, always emphatically reciprocative to each other, to the saints. One congregation is also ready to help another that needs help.

28. Then there is still another way in which this word *diakonos* is used. Jesus says that He has not come to accept service, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom. The proclamation of the Evangel and the witnessing to the truth are also spoken of as service. St Paul speaks about the service of reconciliation.

In short, there are (rightly enough) many exhortations in the New Testament to organised Church service, but emphatically inside the Christian community. It is only when the word is used for the preaching of the Gospel that there is any mention of the non-Christians.

Try in any way you like, you cannot get round this historical fact that organised Christian service in the New Testament Church was for the Church. The statement does not contradict or exclude the teaching of the Church that every Christian individually should consider his vocation a call from God, and that his work should therefore be an expression of his Christian faith.

29. There are those both at home and on the mission field who maintain that the New Testament picture has nothing to say to us today; we live in a world entirely different from the one they lived in. Therefore we have to solve our own problems in our own way just as they solved theirs. These people are—whether they like it or not—new prophets and new apostles; they are founders of a new church. The Church to which we belong knows itself to be tied down to the witness and the attestation of those prophets and Apostles who have come to us in the canon of Holy Scripture. We are therefore free to choose only what these particular prophets and Apostles bear witness to and attest.

30. Now if we have the idea of this compact communion-community in our mind's eye, we can easily understand two very important thoughts:

(a) When the kerygma is proclaimed it draws and calls men out of the old order; this it does because the content of the kerygma is such that any genuine acceptance of it automatically puts him who has accepted it into a new community. This change would be simple and straightforward if entrance into the new community was correlate with an exodus from the old community of the natural order. This, however, is not so and tension

therefore arises. The very existence of this community, called the Church, is a witness to the fact that although the Kingdom of God *has come*, yet it also *will come*. Based on the contents of the kerygma no other explanation of the community is possible. It can be clearly seen that proclamation and the existence of this communion-community are clearly related to each other.

(b) The moment a man belongs both to the natural order and to the redeemed order—the new community, that is, the Church—a tension arises. The ‘American way of life’ is no longer for the American the ‘Christian way of life’; the social democracy of free European states is no longer identical with Christianity for the European. The much-advertised ‘spiritual’ way of life of the Indian is no longer confused with Christian spirituality by the Indian. These—as well as all others—belong to the natural order. They indicate, therefore, man’s efforts to give life a worthwhile significance. So while the Christian as a responsible member of the natural order does all he can to help right wrongs, yet he knows that not one of these man-made efforts is the final answer. He knows it because the new community, the Church to which he is related, is constantly proclaiming the Kingdom of God as the final and absolute answer. So his efforts in the natural order do not have the significance that those same efforts have coming from a non-Christian. In other words all social service in the natural order done by Christians is simply an interim effort, while his basic attitude towards life is hope and expectation. His hope is to God: his expectation is ‘a new heaven and a new earth’, in which no sin or unclean thing will be found.

31. Now let us take a look at Missions to Muslims. (What others are doing does not interest us here.) What do we see?

(a) First of all an attitude and atmosphere of accomplishment. While it is right for us within the Church to praise God for what *He* has done through the ages, yet that does not change the fact that *we* have set out to do too many things. We have put Christians, Muslims and Hindus to work carrying out *our* programmes, and then we congratulate ourselves on *our* achievements, as though they were the work of God. The attitude of hope and expectation previously has been practically non-existent, or found among fanatics and some sects who caricature these Christian virtues out of all recognition. When hope and expectation of the coming Kingdom are gone, Christian living is no longer genuinely Christian. Then the Muslim sees in the Christian only what he sees in himself and all others.



(b) We also see that the contact with the Muslim world is not primarily at the point of proclamation, but overwhelmingly at the point of social service. Therefore Missions today are tied up in unholy alliances with governments, non-Christian humanitarian organisations and non-Christian individual donors of money and help. (Think only of the government subsidies and of the number of non-Christians on the staffs of Mission institutions!)

(c) Then there is also a tremendous emphasis on the development of Christian leadership, although the New Testament community knew nothing of any 'leader' but the Holy Spirit who gave gifts of grace to individuals, so that they could be honest-to-goodness servants of the Christian community. Our Lord said the world would know we were His followers because we love one another (John 13:35) and serve one another (John 13:14). I am sure you will admit that the Muslim does not see this phase of Christian living to any appreciable extent.

32. However, do not make the mistake of thinking that the gulf that now exists between the Christian Church as such and the communion-community of the Apostolic age is there through wilful choice of something else, something new. On the contrary, it has come about through infiltration. Infiltration was one of the devil's tricks long before the Nazis, the Japanese, and the Communists caught onto it. A number of factors are involved. I can only mention one here: Humanism. Two others, capitalism and state welfare work, will be mentioned in the following chapter.

33. Let us not look down our noses at the humanist. Lots of people are inclined to do so when hard-pressed for an explanation of how the non-Christian humanitarian's effort in fighting disease, disaster, and poverty really is different from the efforts of Missionary societies. Humanism (the philosophy of the non-Christian humanitarian) does—in contradistinction from crass materialism and the ungodly squabble for power we see on all sides—help to make life on this globe worth living. The humanist has faith in a noble idea, and he willingly works, suffers, and makes sacrifices for it. There is much to commend Humanism in the natural order, but in its outward form there is so much in the teaching and vocabulary of Humanism that can be confused with outward forms of Christianity that it can and does become a real danger to the Church.

34. We should therefore take a closer look at it. There are three main points common to all humanistic teaching, namely, (a) the sacredness of mankind; (b) goodness in mankind; and (c) the freedom of mankind. Here follows a short resumé of each:

(a) The sacredness of mankind. Even in the days of Stoicism you find the sentence: Mankind is sacred to mankind. The Greeks, of course, understood that proposition in a very limited sense, applicable only to the elite. The humanist of that day could be, and often was, a slave owner. In our day the sacredness of mankind is understood as being universal. When personality is considered universally sacred the criterion is not an outward one, but something of eternal value which challenges men to accept and obey its dictates. For example, there is no doubt that in medicine the slogan 'life is sacred' was, until our generation at least, accepted by all. The doctor was always on the side of 'life', regardless of how damaged, poor or useless it appeared to be. In other words, for the humanist the fact that 'life is sacred' always means he must do something about it. Just as the doctor is on the side of life, so the humanist is also ready to fight and work for 'life', regardless of how impractical it may seem.

(b) The second point is goodness in mankind. Humanism, like Christianity, makes no pretence of having a legalistic code. There is something deeper, more permanent, something unpremeditated. For example, a man whose actions are egoistic, with no regard nor respect for others, can never be a humanist. Man's conscience is bound to a lofty ideal, and he is duty-bound to relate his actions to his conscience. Humanism does not dictate the ideal, for it postulates a potency in mankind which spontaneously shows men the right ideal. In short, Humanism teaches that man is duty-bound to that which is 'good', and that he intuitively knows what is good.

(c) Finally, there is the teaching of the freedom of mankind. This should not be understood as libertinism or capriciousness, nor yet a theory of 'live and let live'. Humanism teaches that man has responsibility, and having responsibility he naturally must be free to accept that responsibility. Humanism therefore struggles against every kind of bondage: physical, political, economical and social.

All this, of course, is the *intention* of Humanism, not always its practice; for humanists, like all others, often fall short of their goal.

35. Naturally a man who believes in the sacredness of personality (to use a modern phrase), who believes mankind knows goodness and has a conscience that binds him to it, and who believes that it is every man's right to be free, in order to carry his full responsibility, will want to do something about it. And there certainly is scope enough in the world for men of *that* faith! Therefore we have the great organisations like the Red

Cross, the Nuffield, the Rockefeller and the Ford Foundations, and hundreds of smaller ones, in which thousands of humanists are working for the betterment of human life.

36. Who will deny that on almost every Mission field there is a great confusion between Christianity and Humanism? The reason obviously being that the actual teaching of Christianity has been eclipsed and falsified in our Western Churches, to an appalling extent, by the teaching of the Humanists. Although we claim to be children of the Reformation, we are in fact, only too often followers of Erasmus, the Reformation Humanist.

37. The one fundamental and vital difference between all Humanism and Christianity is this: Humanism is basically man's relationship to man; Christianity is basically man's interwoven relationship to God. This means that in the final analysis the humanists set up man as against God. They say: man—man; the Christians say: man—God.

38. Now let us see how this works out in our actual living. There are very definite ways in which this difference can be seen (providing we have eyes to see with):

(a) Humanism works on the assumption of accomplishment; whereas Christianity works on the assumption of expectation.

This point is extremely important. The humanist, following his own teaching, must believe that he is accomplishing something which in the final analysis is of real importance. He is accomplishing the uplift and betterment of mankind, and there is nothing else that can be done or expected. This thought, dressed in pseudo-Christian garb, is expressed this way: the Church is slowly but surely causing the uplift and betterment of mankind which will result eventually in the Kingdom of God on earth. The community of saints in the New Testament worked on an entirely different basis. The New Messianic Age had come with the coming of Christ. It had NOT come as a consummation, but as a promise, a hope, a salvation. It will come in its consummation when Christ returns. Therefore that community was a 'peculiar people' zealous to do good works. In other words, the good works of this community had NOT the character of the absolute, the final and only thing possible, nor were they ever regarded as means of achieving that final hope. They worked because they had an expectation of the final, the absolute, from God. They worked because they were co-responsible under the Judgment of God, not because they hoped their works had the character of finality or would help to achieve the finality of God's Kingdom. They worked because they were constrained to help the needy, here and now.

(b) Because of this attitude of expectation as against accomplishment, the community in the New Testament differentiated sharply between itself and the 'world'. Collectively its contact with the world was either at the point of proclamation or the results of this activity, bearing persecution or teaching seekers. This was severely logical. For them the real, the absolute, the final thing was awaited in its consummation. Therefore they as a community could only do one thing for 'the world' that held any absolute meaning, and that was to tell 'the nations' of this promise, this hope, this salvation. The humanist, on the basis of his belief, knows no differentiation. No caste, race, culture, or creed means anything to him in his effort to accomplish the uplift and betterment of mankind.

(c) Among Humanists the development of leadership is essential. The elite, the intelligentsia, those who really understand, are nature's chosen leaders to organise and help others in the effort to bring about the uplift and betterment of mankind. In the New Testament community, leadership in this sense is condemned. It would be an anomaly. There the powers of the coming Age, the coming Kingdom, are already at work. It is the Holy Spirit that dispenses gifts of grace, that makes individual efficient servants. The cry is NOT for better leadership in the Church—that would have been construed as blasphemy, as sin against the Holy Spirit—but for a more serious and radical surrender of the idea of leadership as belonging to 'the nations'! And the servant-cum-leader ideal, found so often in political propaganda as eyewash, and not infrequently copied in religious literature, is utterly impossible after our Lord Himself said that he who sits at the table is greater than he who serves, but amongst you the servant is greater (but not *so* great that he in due time earns the right to sit at the table!). In other words, service (being told what to do, and getting on with it) is not a stepping-stone to leadership; it is in itself greatness, in this interwoven relationship.

39. Finally, let me say that if Humanism were a sect or a religion with more or less definite forms, it would be easier to deal with it. But it, like Pietism and Rationalism, is an infiltration, a pervasion, a permeation. It is therefore both subtle and dangerous.

40. Let us sum up. You are living in a Muslim country. Inside the natural order you should, as the Christian you are, work together with Muslims and Christians to make that country a better place to live in. But you, as a Christian, are also a member of the body of Christ, the Church. Collectively, as a group, the Church's contact with your country is at the point of proclamation. It has to tell the people that all our efforts to make

the nation a better place to live in are human, fallible, finite and, in the final analysis, doomed. Simultaneously the Church as a group will worship together, fill the teaching office, and organise the social service necessary at any given time and place to conscientiously take care of its own flock.

41. That is the collective responsibility of the Church.

Whether you are a Pakistani, a Moroccan or a foreigner, try, if you dare, to *live* the Christian life under this collective responsibility and explain it to your seekers—and see what happens! Your life and your words together will be a perfect polemic against Islam, both the modern and the conservative kind.

42. In the next chapter we will take the individual responsibility of the several members of the Church.

### QUESTIONS

1. Distinguish between the natural and the redeemed order.
2. In the heading of paragraph 38 (a) explain the difference between the terms ‘accomplishment’ and ‘expectation’ in relation to Humanism and Christianity.
3. What is the collective responsibility of Christians to their country?

## CHAPTER 12

# Collective and Individual Responsibility—II

1. In our last chapter we discussed the fact that in the New Testament the overall picture of the Church was a community of saints with an interwoven relationship between each other and God in Christ. Then, the power of the Kingdom of God, the consummation of which was awaited, was already operative in this community through gifts of grace given by the Holy Spirit. These gifts of grace came to be divided into four functions, three of which were exclusively inside this interwoven relationship. The fourth one, namely proclamation, although also inside the community, was in reality the community's point of contact with 'the nations', or with 'the world'. The community had a special commission to herald the good news into all the world.

2. If Protestant Christianity followed this New Testament set-up in its Muslim environment we would see these small communion-communities (the 'little flock' of the New Testament) living its corporate life of 'other-worldliness', waiting for and expecting the consummation, and proclaiming the good news of the Gospel in its Muslim environment. At the same time, through the gifts of grace, it would be responsible for the legitimate needs of its own members. Wherever poverty made it impossible for it to carry out its responsibilities for those who belong, other groups (for example, Mission societies or other churches) would help financially. St Paul did not hesitate to accept money from one Church to help another.

3. Supposing this were actually a fact, what would it mean to a Muslim? From the proclamation as well as from the life of the community he would understand that no Christian pretends to bring in a theocratic state, or the Kingdom of God, as that is God's act, in God's own time. He would also learn and see that being 'a brother in Christ' is something more than a pious phrase; it is a reality. And he would know that if he

were to hear and accept the warning of the Gospel ‘Repent and believe’ he would be joining a communion-community, where he would have the feeling of being bound to the others and therefore a feeling of security, as far as such security is at all possible.

I challenge anyone to show that anything that has been done by all our Western organisations could even begin to compete with this simple set-up of the New Testament, as a vital and understandable witness in our Muslim environments.

4. However, so far we have been talking about the collective, the group work and life of the Christian Community. Now we must take up the question of the individual person in this group, for when the concrete fact of the saint-community has been created, a tension necessarily arises for the saints of this community. For while their real, corporate life is hidden in Christ, and therefore is NOT of this world, yet they are individually still very much in this world, and in that sense, *of* this world. This doubleness of the saint-community reflects the nature of its Creator, its Master. The Incarnation meant that Christ was and was not man; that He was and was not of this world. For He was something more than man, something more than being of this world.

5. And just as the Church has had to strive to retain knowledge of the tension, the ‘doubleness’ of Christ—on the one hand rejecting every effort to make Christ not ‘of this world’, and on the other, to make Him only of this world—so, with much less success, it has striven to keep this same tension in the body of Christ. Church history shows us what happened. In Europe, after Constantine’s conversion, the introduction of Christianity at the highest levels resulted in the imposition of the new religion on all subjects, although it was probably not considered an imposition. Even at the time of the Reformation both sides thought it was the duty of a good Christian ruler to punish heresy inside his borders. The Reformers taught that the Church had no power other than that inherent in the Word preached; but at the same time they expected the State to prevent any teaching of heresy, and of course they taught the State how to differentiate between truth and heresy. Thus Church and State became one, differing only from the Roman set-up in that the functions were divided between priest and civil officer. All this happened, of course, on the historical background that all in the country were baptised Christians, that is, that the boundaries of the nation and the Church were identical. Likewise when the Pilgrim Fathers could no longer tolerate the tyranny of the State in matters of religion, they left England for the wild shores of America, there to set

up freedom of worship—for Puritans. Had they succeeded, the boundaries of the State and those of religion (this time Puritanism) would have been just as identical in America as those in Europe. It was only when Roger Williams built his little colony on Rhode Island that the State again became secular.

6. We must therefore realise that whatever the conditions are in Europe and America, they are historical developments, belonging to *those* countries. The Christian Community can never hope to make those conditions as they now are into an ideal that should be transplanted to the Christian Community in its Muslim environment. Here we have conditions which closely resemble the original New Testament situation. Christians—both foreign and national—have been unspeakably slow in realising this fact.

7. In the meantime you and I and untold numbers of other saints, who belong to the interwoven relationship of that community which is awaiting and expecting God's final answer to sin, are living in this Muslim environment. We belong also to a family, a tribe, a nation, a labour union, a club, a cultural society, a political party, in which there are Muslims all around us. Naturally the question then arises: In this individual, personal relationship, what points of contact do the saints have with the world? One of these points of contact, namely witnessing, we discussed in the chapter 'Preaching, Teaching and Witnessing'. There we emphasised the fact that witnessing was not (like preaching and teaching) a gift of grace, but a universal obligation for all in the Christian community. Witnessing is first of all the act of 'belonging'; the act of 'living' inside the concrete fact, that is, the community that has been created through the agency of proclamation. The witness of one's life is vital when it shows itself as being identified with the otherness of the saint-community, in partaking of the sacraments, in joining in its worship, in accepting responsibility for every phase of intracommunion service. This is the primary and necessary witness of our 'life'—as individuals. Thereupon follows the witnessing by word of mouth, the confessing of the faith, which once for all was delivered to the saints. This witness is given not only to the positive question: Are you a believer? It is also given (and perhaps more often) in your answer to questions that arise in every sphere of life. For example (see chapter 4 on Politics), the man who refuses to join a political party that carries a religious tag, and explains why, is testifying indirectly (or directly) to the otherness, the uniqueness of the faith delivered once for all. Likewise the man who refuses to accept either an optimistic or a pessimistic view of mankind, and tells why, is witnessing about the faith of the saint-community



in the revelation of Christ as the ultimate answer to the finiteness and evil of mankind. Thus in every sphere of life the amir and the faqir, the wise and the foolish, the good and the indifferent, that is, every individual saint, is contacting the world at this particular point of witnessing. And no organisation, no official Church, no pronouncement by any group of clergymen, can relieve any single person of this responsibility.

8. The second point of contact the individual saint has with the world is expressed clearly in the New Testament with these words: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'.

9. At the beginning of the previous chapter I touched on the relationship of the Christian to all those within the natural order. When Christians throughout the centuries have fought against tyranny, against the exploitation of child labour, have worked for the abolition of slavery, and the control of rapacious capitalists, when they in a thousand and one ways have fought, worked and sacrificed to make life more livable for different kinds and sorts of people quite regardless of their colour, caste, or creed, I think you will find that in the majority of cases they found their motive for doing so in the command that our Lord gave us to love our neighbour as ourselves.

10. However, in so far as these efforts are Christian (and not merely humanistic) they are the efforts of individuals; that is, they are not an organised group-effort of the Church. These efforts do not and cannot have Church backing. All loose talk in Protestant circles about the duty of the Church to outlaw war, to fight all kinds of social injustice, to agitate for better laws, to provide help and relief for needy non-Christians, to do this, that, and a thousand other things, is simply nonsense. In Roman circles, in so far as the Church is thought of as a theocratic state, it can be and is a civic organisation, helping (or working against) other civic organisations. But in this sense there is no Protestant Church, nor is there any New Testament Church, and therefore it cannot have dominion over secular education, the press, the administration, the arts, jurisprudence, politics or any other aspect of civic, that is, secular life.

11. Nothing could be clearer than the fact that this command to love your neighbour demands individual responsibility. This individual responsibility is of a twofold nature. First of all you, the individual saint, are responsible to do something about it, whatever it is, in the situation in which you find yourself. And secondly you are responsible for what you do about it. You may join a civic group or a group of Christians that agitates for better laws; you may join a club for the spread of culture; you

may get together with others in a struggle against ignorance and disease; you may start a badminton or tennis organisation to help develop sport and gymnastics. Whatever it is, you, the individual, are doing what you think is right in the situation in which you find yourself. In a Muslim land these organisations may be full of Muslims and others. You are there amongst them, however, as an individual Christian on your own responsibility.

No one can codify the law of love. Get that straight.

12. However, even though we acknowledge that in some cases the individual Christian might be justified in believing that he honestly was making an effort to love his neighbour by joining in with non-Christians to help make life more livable for others, yet there can be no doubt whatsoever that primarily the law of love was meant for the individual Christian in his purely personal relationship to the needy on his doorstep. Let us look at the command in its original setting.

A theologian wants to see if our Lord knows what He is talking about, so he puts the question: What shall I do to inherit eternal life? The correct answer is epitomised in this double command to love God and your neighbour. This way of saying it was not new, not startling. The theologian does not argue about that answer. Theoretically he knows perfectly well that he should live in an 'I-thou' relationship both to God and to his neighbour. No man can love either God or his neighbour by proxy, for love is an 'I-thou' relationship. The theologian was, happily for him, never tempted (like we are) to let some very good humanistic welfare organisation break up this relationship between 'I' and 'thou'. He only wanted a definition of 'thou' in so far as it relates to man. 'Who is my neighbour?'

13. English speaking people (and as a result, many of those who have their translations of the New Testament done primarily by English speaking people) have lost the force of the Greek word *plesion* that has been translated as 'neighbour'. Neighbour means a nigh-dweller, one who lives permanently next door, or across the street; and this is just what the Greek word does NOT say. *Plesion* is a Greek adverb of 'place', meaning 'near, close at hand'. By some remarkable twist, this adverb had come to be used as an adjective, indicating someone near at hand, here and now. There is no permanency of location indicated at all. The Greek has two other words definitely denoting the nigh-dweller, the neighbour. In *plesion* it is simply a question of juxtaposition. On the continent, in the French, German and Scandinavian languages, the word has been translated as 'next': Thou shalt love the one next to you, the one at your elbow. This command is definitely not the social ethics of good neighbourliness.

14. When our Lord told the theologian that the correct answer to his question was: Love God and the man at your elbow, the theologian at once put the real, troublesome question: How do you define the concept of ‘the one at your elbow’? It was this question that our Lord answered, when telling His world-famous story of the good Samaritan.

15. The very choice of words and the setting itself, shows us with all necessary clarity how individualistic the idea is:

For example, the Greek word *sunkuria*, that is translated ‘by chance’, occurs only at this one place in the whole New Testament. Is it not remarkable that our Lord, who knew nothing of chance happenings, who said that even the hairs of our head are all numbered and not a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of His Father, should say ‘by chance’, even if it is only a story? Then again: Why did our Lord take precisely the case of a man who had fallen amongst robbers? Why not the poor, the diseased, the depressed? Was it not to present an unlooked-for situation, a situation one would hardly count on beforehand? It happened *by chance*. One individual is thrown into juxtaposition with another individual, and in that position he is to fulfil a command given by God.

16. What Christ evidently meant us to understand was that no rules, no regulations, no planned work can define for us the concept: ‘the one at your elbow’, but only life itself in all its entanglements can dictate to us who he is. Further, the parable teaches us that the command to love cannot be a source from which one can evolve principles, ethics, or lines of direction. The only principle we can learn here is that life itself, in the living of it, will show us who the man at our elbow is. The theologian wanted a rule, a principle, a line of direction, a guarantee against the capriciousness of life. But Jesus says, No! If you have the right attitude towards God, then any given situation in which you happen to find yourself will show you what to do. Not having fixed rules to guide one in all the vicissitudes of life is being like a ship without a rudder; but that is precisely what Christ understood life to be, and therefore the command is to love the person at hand, the person who by chance happens to be at your elbow, and who needs you.

17. By letting the Samaritan be the hero of the story, our Lord was saying just what the good and pious Jews did not want to hear. In the time of Christ there was amongst the Jews what we in our time call a caste system, which excluded some people from near intercourse with the rest. Certain laws and customs were kept by some and not by others, and the one who kept these laws and customs would not visit one who did not

keep them. He would not even touch him. Anyone who knows a little about the caste system and untouchability in India can understand the problem that existed. It was not the command to love, as such, that made the difficulties, but all the other religious regulations, which conditioned the conception 'neighbour'. Because life was bound in by so many regulations, there were always cases where one could be in doubt. The theologian was therefore eager to hear the more definite regulations. One could imagine a Hindu, seeing an untouchable in the same situation as the man who had fallen among robbers, reasoning thus: 'Poor fellow! He needs help. If only one of his own caste who could do something for him were here, as I may not touch him!' The Hindu does not live life directly, reacting according to the situation in which he finds himself, but he lives a life conditioned by certain religious regulations. He is obedient to certain regulations of religion—instead of being obedient to the demand that lies in every concrete situation.

18. Since no Christian is absolved from corporate responsibility, then why all this emphasis on the individual responsibility in this contact of the saints with the world? The answer is straightforward. It is exactly at this point that all the wise and good humanists of the world (and ever so many inside the Church too!) stumble at the teaching of our Lord. Why?

19. First of all because our Lord relates practically all of His ethical teaching to God, not to local conditions anywhere on earth. The same is true of the teaching of the Old Testament. There is undoubtedly a code of ethics in the Old Testament, but the motivation is: 'Be ye holy because I am holy'. And in the New Testament: 'Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect'. This absolutism in ethics shows us clearly the tension in which the saint-community is living. Each and every saint has his own work to do. His calling, his vocation, his job: call it what you like. It may be preaching, or teaching, it may be medical work, it may be carpentry, it may be any legitimate piece of work. The doing of it becomes part and parcel of himself. He makes plans and carries them out, he gets 'lost' in his work. One man builds up a Church, gathers in a large congregation, preaches sermons folks like to hear. He is completely absorbed in it. Another loses himself in working in a hospital. Another becomes so occupied with educational plans that he is deaf to everything else. The work flourishes; the ego fattens. That is all very natural—but narrow loyalties, narrow aims and projects, important as they may be, and necessary as they may be in the present structure of society, are always a potential danger. Competition, jealousy and carelessness regarding the man at your elbow

invariably develops. Our Church becomes more so ‘ours’ in jealousy and competition with the other Church; our school competes for first place in the honours against the other school; our hospital is jealous of its good reputation as against government hospitals. We all thrive on success stories, and yet they are always built up on competition, and disregard of our neighbour, that is, the competitor. In other words, our society is built up on life pitted against life. And do not deceive yourself. The same is true of all who live in this world, regardless of whether they belong to the saint-community or not. Governments and laws can only regulate this competition and this disregard for others so that it becomes ‘fair play’ in the eyes of the world.

20. The saint-community is, however, always restless. It knows that fair play inside the natural order of things is really only a necessary evil, on which the ego fattens if you happen to be on the winning side, and by which you are crushed if you happen to be on the losing side.

21. But the law of love teaches us something entirely different. It says life should never be pitted against life. It says that ultimately even ‘fair’ competition, ‘fair’ disregard of others, and all narrow loyalties, are bad substitutes. Which means again that ultimately no society exists or ever did exist in which the law of love could be carried out to perfection or even to near-perfection. For even if one person had the desire and will to do so, the need for self-defence against the other person’s aggressiveness would vitiate every effort he made. This is only another way of saying that man cannot by any effort of his own bring in the Kingdom of God.

22. In other words, look at it as you like, the law of love is aimed as a deathblow at your individual egotism, your own self-centredness. In this connection love says two things: (i) Love means a personal relationship; and (ii) Love is an ‘I–thou’ relationship. If we could only get these two things into our heads, we would be able to see more clearly how radically different the Christian’s attitude to the man at his elbow should be.

### **LOVE MEANS A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP**

Love is a caricature if practised by proxy. You cannot pay another man to love and worship God for you. Neither can you pay another man to love and help the man at your elbow, your neighbour, for you. Love says you must stretch out your hand and help the needy man at your elbow.

23. Suppose our Lord had told His story as follows:

A certain priest went down to Jericho and when he saw the misery and need of the town, he paid no attention to it. In the same way a Levite came also; when he got to the town he saw it and passed by. But a Samaritan who was on a journey came to Jericho, and when he saw the misery and need he was moved with compassion. And he went and sold some of his possessions and built a home for the miserable and poor. After that he gave his life to the needy, in that he nursed them and helped them. But when he drew the attention of others in Samaria to the needs of this foreign people, there were many who wished to help. Some came to Jericho to take up certain posts in the home, and others sent their money to help in the work. See, this is the way in which love extends so that a whole class of society gets better living conditions. Go thou and do likewise.

24. Somehow we cannot imagine our Lord telling the story in this way, because it has a humanistic approach and not a Christian one. In this shape it fattens the ego of the philanthropist and his friends. Each and every saint is constantly challenged in his daily life by situations that demand a choice: Will you, or will you not, love the person at your elbow as you love yourself? If he accepts the challenge, he will—he is forced to do something about it. No matter how weak, how imperfect, how impractical it is, something will be done about it. Disregard of the person at your elbow, however fair it may seem to be to society at large, is simply disobedience in relation to the Lord of your saint-community. The responsibility is yours, individually, here and now for the person you meet by chance, who needs you.

### **LOVE IS AN 'I-THOU' RELATIONSHIP**

You cannot love by proxy. If that is true, and obviously it is, then it follows you cannot love (in the New Testament sense) where you cannot do it yourself. Let me use an illustration. In England in the days of slavery there were Christians who felt that those negro slaves they saw all around them were the 'man at their elbow'. These Christians could not reconcile their conception of Christianity with this condition of slavery. They therefore set their own slaves free and started an agitation for the education of public opinion that ended in the freeing of slaves in England. Non-Christians as well as Christians joined in this effort.

26. Now—these Christians were in a concrete situation, they had their own slaves and they had the slaves of other Britons as 'the man at their elbow'. When they did what they did, we are justified in saying that their

action was their conception of loving their neighbours. Let us suppose now that these same people formed an organisation, collected money and sent others to America to fight the slave trade there. That action could never rightfully be construed as loving one's neighbour. It could only be considered as unwarranted propaganda, and undue interference in another country's affairs. They have left the concrete situation in which they found themselves, and have gone over to propagating an idea. The 'I-thou' relationship of their own British situation simply does not exist for them as far as the American situation is concerned.

27. I would like to have you see what Professor Kraemer wrote in the 'National Christian Council Review' for June–July 1953:

Religiously and culturally speaking the countries of South East Asia are in a bewildering state. The Indian continent is, as to religion, dominated either by Hinduism or by Islam; Burma, Ceylon and Thailand by Buddhism; Indonesia by Islam. They represent not only systems of religious thinking, which determine the outlook on life and the world, but at the same time are deeply entrenched in social customs and have shaped their cultural expressions. It cannot be said that up to now there has ever been a real confrontation between the Christian Faith and these religious worlds. This seemingly too generalising judgement remains true, even when we give full weight to what, mainly by gifted and well-informed missionaries, has been written in the field of the Muslim controversy and the Christian approach to Hinduism. With few exceptions it must be said that Christian missions have more evaded than sought a real confrontation with Hinduism. Centuries of missionary experience have made us aware of the fact that these Eastern religions are, in their real, essential structure, very difficult to come to grips with.

We can understand now, better than in the past, that the real confrontation (in which it becomes evident that, on the basis of the Christian Faith, the way in which the ultimate spiritual and religious certainties are expressed in these religions can be met) is not a work that can be done by foreigners and outsiders. Not because in itself it is impossible that they are able to do a thorough piece of work, but because the real work has to be done by members of the Christian churches, which are inescapably rooted in the life and atmosphere of these countries. Only so can it become an existential struggle. The contributions of people from the outside, in spite of their revealing and elucidating value, inevitably make an intellectual impression. They seldom or ever constitute to the mind of the Hindu, etc., a real encounter between the Christian Church as a living fact and these religious apprehensions of life. That must happen between the Christian Church in the country and the religious world which dominates there. It cannot be done vicariously by others.

'The Christian Church as a living fact' is both the collective group, proclaiming the Gospel and serving each other, and the individuals on this group in their witness and their love for their neighbour, the man at their

elbow. The Christians of the West are guilty of a lot of sloppy romanticism and unstable emotionalism in much Mission activity. The stern facts are that, until the Church on the spot, in its Muslim environments, learns that its own members must obey the law of love—and likewise the Western paid agents who think they are doing it—they are really carrying on an undelectable propaganda for Christianity, which may make what Kraemer calls an ‘intellectual impression’, but can never be genuinely Christian from the point of view of the law of love.

28. We must also keep before our minds the fact that the law of love is neither the diaconate of the Church, of which we spoke in the previous chapter, nor the idealised service of philanthropy. In our day the idea of ‘service’ has been so falsified through idealisation that we need to differentiate between two very different things, both of which go under the same name. Service is primarily the work of a servant, done at another’s command. There is nothing startling or spectacular or unusual about this kind of service. He who waits at tables, at the beck and call of all, is just ‘a menial’. The diaconate in the Church is just this kind of service. The ‘least among you’. The deaconess runs here today and there tomorrow, serving in one way here, in another way there. The deacon (in the New Testament sense) does the same. Thus it is with every other gift of grace inside the Church. Each one is a servant, serving the saint-community, and as a rule in one place. There is therefore continuity in the servant-service, it is being at the beck and call of the same people all the time, and the service is taken more or less for granted.

29. The idealised service is ‘benefactor’ service. The benefactor ‘serves’ when and how and whom it pleases him to serve. This and not that. Here and not there. Now and not later. The benefactor ‘serves’ in medical, welfare, uplift, relief, and educational programs. Those who lord it over them are called their benefactors, our Lord said. This idealisation of service is foreign to all New Testament teaching. So shall it not be among you.

30. Our Lord put his story of the Samaritan in an entirely different category. He does not call it ‘service’ at all. It is *love*. An entirely different thing.

31. There is one point that needs to be mentioned here in passing, but which will come out in more detail in a later chapter. Because of the absolutism of the ethics of our Lord, no Christian moral codex can be developed. In other words, you accept not only the responsibility of doing something for that needy person at your elbow, but also the responsibility



for what that something is going to be. No Bible, no pope, no Church laws, no group of clergymen, can give you detailed and infallible instructions. And therefore no-one but yourself can be responsible for the ‘something’ you are going to do. For example, no Bible, no pope, and no Church can tell you whether you are fulfilling (of course always imperfectly, but even so) the law of love by being a pacifist or an ardent patriot, ready to fight for your country. You have to take a stand and be responsible for it yourself. One person may argue that the woman next door is his ‘neighbour’ and needs protection from the foe; the other may argue that we should love our enemies, and therefore the foe needs protection from our bullets. Neither can any Bible, pope or mission society back you up, and assure you that what you are doing is right. You are on your own entirely.

32. Some would, I suppose, like to know how the Church has been able to confuse things so completely as it obviously has done.

33. In the last chapter we saw how Humanism, with its emphasis on the man-to-man relationship, got infiltrated in the Church so that many Christians forgot that our motivating relationship is God-to-man. Now let us look at two other developments in Western Christendom.

34. First, *Capitalism*. It is a comparative newcomer, having as its basis the idea that it is justifiable and expedient to earn money with money rather than with labour. Prior to the Reformation great trading companies were formed in Europe. But it was not before discovery in the technical field overwhelmed Europe that social changes because of Capitalism were introduced. The great problem of a century ago was to make certain discoveries commercially valuable. Railways, steamships, telegraph and telephone (to mention only a few) were of no commercial value unless vast amounts of capital were invested. Limited companies sprang up and people with much or little money invested what they had. This was the beginning of institutionalism. Investors, giving their money into the hands of a few men, a board of directors, were in no wise concerned with the inner workings of the company, nor with its treatment of labour. Their only concern was that their money should be secure and bring in reasonable dividends. It was up to the directors to see that the percentage of returns was high enough to compete with rivals. The entire structure of society thereby underwent a change. In the age before Capitalism small businessmen and manufacturers stood in a personal relationship (whether good or bad) to their employees. The master craftsman was a guild member, and had his own apprentices whom he taught. No board of directors got between the two interested parties. With the coming of Capitalism the actual employer,

the stockholder, knows nothing of the employees as there is an institution, namely the limited company, between them. The personal relationship between the real employer and employee is extinct.

35. The employer, that is, the man whose money is invested in stocks and shares, has no personal ethical relationship with his employees. He hardly thinks of their existence when drawing dividends. Between him and his employees is the managing board, and the members of it are paid to carry the difficulties and troubles that come from the employees.

36. No one will deny that with the coming of Capitalism certain social values were scrapped, *inter alia*, the responsibility of contact. Being used to thinking in terms of Capitalism, nothing is easier and more fatal for present day saints than to apply it to their own Christian living. The thought is this: Money will buy shares for you in the work of the Church. By organising the Church like Capital is organised, our efforts can really become global. That may be true, but our efforts (like Capitalism) lose the personal contact and the personal responsibility. Thereby the Church becomes a great organisation for propaganda and civic welfare work. Its true character is either completely hidden or lost altogether.

And yet who will deny that the idea of Capitalism has not been carried over into the Church?

37. Secondly, when Capitalism was put under state control, the Welfare State developed. It is, of course, not philanthropic; it has learned that it pays to be concerned about the welfare of its subjects. Haphazard philanthropy for the unfortunate classes was not enough. Welfare work of all kinds is systematised and directed by the state from taxes levied on the more fortunate people. Now specialists in sociology are trained and put to work. The sick, the poor, the unemployed, and the criminals are looked after by these specialists, and by payment of a tax the well-situated are freed from the trouble and bother of any personal relationship with these unfortunate elements. With the unemployment dole, insurance and old-age pension, the state has even succeeded in breaking up the personal relationship in families. If the father is out of work the son expects him to go on the dole, and if the mother is a widow the daughter expects her to get a pension from the state. This is certainly a change of attitude from the days when to be sent to the 'work house' was almost as disgraceful for the family as being sent to prison. The state gets in between the two parties. It levies taxes on the well-situated in order to help the unfortunate. The well-situated person is paying for hospitals, insane asylums, orphanages, gaols, unemployment benefits, insurance and pensions, without ever having the

bother of any personal contact with the unfortunate who are being helped, for since he is already paying his share towards this social help, why should he be troubled by any personal relationship with the unfortunate?

38. Please do not think that I am arguing for or against the welfare state idea in the worldly natural order. My question is this: Can such an idea thrive inside the saint-community? Can the welfare state idea supplant the law of love for Christians? Has the Church the same goal as the welfare state or philanthropic organisations? Obviously not! To carry over into the Church the mentality of the welfare state would be catastrophic for the unique character of the Church, and of its members in the world.

39. Everywhere one hears the cry that the Church has grown cold in love, although strong in propaganda. And the answer one usually hears is: More welfare and uplift organisations, more machinery to carry out stupendous plans for relief, more committees and boards to coordinate the efforts of different groups. But what man misses and longs for is just that outstretched hand, that personal touch, that love which is not by proxy, but the Christian himself doing something about it here and now. Not because he wants to preach to his neighbour and is trying to make a favourable impression (that would be propaganda, not proclamation); not because he wants to show him how good Christians are (that is hypocrisy); not because he wants to show him the love of God (that is seen in Christ). There is only one motive: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; and that entails this personal, individual responsibility: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40. What it all boils down to is this: The Word in itself is God's Word, and it accomplishes what God wills, when left to itself alone. Any effort on our part to make the preached word more effective than it is in itself, vitiates it. When we try to effectuate the Word, proclamation becomes propaganda and conversion proselytism. So the Church as a collective group has no other course open to it but proclaiming the Word in its non-Christian environment and then leaving it at that, trusting God to effectuate His Word when and where it pleases Him.

41. On the other hand, Christian love in obedience to God's command is shown by individuals in response to the need by which they are confronted in the natural order, and it has no ulterior motives whatsoever. It should never get tied up with the Church's effort to proclaim the Gospel, and it should never be attempted by proxy. Severe criticism of missions by non-Christians has always centred at this point, and rightly so. The command to love your 'neighbour' can never be carried out so that it is at the

same time also a means to get him interested in or converted to your religion.

42. Just what have these two chapters on collective and individual responsibility to do with your practical approach to the Muslims? First of all, you can see that, on the whole, the issues have been evaded by Missions, as Dr Kraemer says, and therefore the Muslim simply cannot see that which you purport to believe and proclaim. Furthermore, proclamation has been such that the issues are seldom clearly put. When you realise this, you at least will not go about telling of how hardhearted, sensual and materialistic the Muslim is. Your attitude to him will be: He has not even had a chance of a real confrontation with the Christian faith.

### QUESTIONS

1. How was the life of the New Testament community expressed in relation to (i) its internal affairs; and (ii) the world outside?
2. How is the response of Christian love in obedience to God's command connected with the Church's duty to proclaim the Gospel?
3. How do systems such as Capitalism and the organisations of the Welfare State affect the presentation of the Gospel to Muslims?

## CHAPTER 13

# Good Deeds in Relation to Evangelism

1. When Luther was struggling mightily in the early days of the Reformation he maintained stoutly that he was not attacking any man's manner of life. His opposition was to certain false teachings that were being taught in the Church. Luther might have aimed his big guns at Tetzel personally and spent his ammunition exposing Tetzel's immoral life, he being the father of two illegitimate children. Instead Luther attacked the false teaching regarding Indulgences. Tetzel was later exposed by the Romans themselves and disgraced. But did that have any effect on the Roman Church as such? Hardly, but Luther's attacks on Indulgences did. Fortunately for us, Luther knew *where* to strike!

2. With the coming of 17th century Pietism, the emphasis has changed, so now the danger is that 'the good life' has more or less eclipsed the central theme of Christianity. Even Muslims will judge Christianity and its truth by this standard although, regarding Islam, they say that if there were not one true Muslim on the face of the earth, Islam would still be the true religion, sent from God. They probably judge Christianity by a standard different from their own because Christians themselves insistently and unceasingly talk of 'the good life'.

3. What worries me is not this over-emphasis on the good life, but the nebulous and shallow *teaching* that is given as to what the good life really is. Christian living is not so easy to understand as the majority of Christians seem to take for granted. Do you know that it is hardly 200 years since it was considered one's Christian duty to testify against witches (who were burnt or hanged), even though one ran the risk of the witch's curse bringing disaster and death to one's family? Further, let me quote a paragraph from an American text book on history. Roger Williams, a minister of the Salem Church, taught:

Separation of church and state, tolerance of all religious beliefs. Repeal of all laws requiring attendance on religious worship (McMaster, p. 49).

To us, in our century, the justice of each of these principles is self-evident. But in the 17th century there was no country in the world where it was safe to declare them. For doing so in some parts of Europe, a man would most certainly have been burned at the stake. For doing so in England, he would have been put in the pillory, or had his ears cut off, or been sent to gaol.

4. You may say: ‘Horrors! That cannot be true!’ Yet it is. Those people took their religion seriously, and that was their conception of Christian living. History is full of illustrations that show how we, in our day and generation, differ from those of other centuries. So what? Nothing—except that we should remember that in all probability Christians 200 years hence will say: ‘Horrors!’ to our way of living the Christian life. We cannot therefore take it for granted that we have the very last word in Christian living.

5. In your practical approach to the Muslim, both regarding your own personal life and the Church’s teaching regarding the Christian life, you need to be extremely careful. If you are a ‘living epistle read by all men’, you have to be doubly certain that what the Muslim reads in you corresponds to what he may read in the New Testament.

6. St Paul exhorts us to do all to the glory of God. Whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do, all should be done to the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31). The whole of the Christian life has a newness about it, that changes even such ordinary daily things as eating and drinking into something other than they were before. The fact that old things have passed away and all things have become new in the new creation in Christ is vital in every discussion about Christian living.

7. Our Christian life, as expressed in our deeds, has three very clearly defined relationships. They are as follows:

- (a) Conduct related directly to law.
- (b) Conduct related directly to love.
- (c) Conduct related directly to the new age.

Because we have newness of life, because we are a new creation in Christ, we want to live these three relationships to the glory of God. These three relationships are actually a single unit in our life. It is only because

we want to think about them that we separate them. Let me illustrate. Our physical body functions as a whole, but in order really to understand the body each separate organ is studied by itself, and then in relation to the whole. In like manner, if we are really to understand Christian living, we are forced to study its several parts and the relationship between them. That does *not* mean that one part can be separated from the other, or even that in our daily living we consciously separate them in any set of circumstances. I know what the function of my heart is, also what my lungs are doing, yet ordinarily I do not stop to think of them separately, for they work together. Likewise also in Christian living. The whole person lives in all three relationships all the time.

8. There are two introductory remarks I want to make, as they will help you to keep your mind on the subject of this chapter, namely: good deeds in relation to evangelisation.

First, Christian living, like all living, consists of both ‘being’ and ‘doing’. St Paul in Galatians 5 says: ‘If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit’. It is evidently possible to live by the Spirit and yet because of carelessness, ignorance or false teaching not to walk by the Spirit. You may even be born of the Spirit and yet in your doing be quite wrong.

9. The words ‘good works’ or ‘good deeds’ are found frequently in the Gospels; but they never mean the same as ‘abiding in Christ’. Fortunately, it is the abiding in Christ, or the living by the Spirit, that is the eternal, unchangeable reality. The ‘doing’ is that which each new generation of Christians has to work out for itself. That is what we are trying to do in these chapters, in relation to our Muslim environment.

10. The second introductory remark is this. You have heard it said that certain individuals were drawn to Christ because they saw the good deeds of this or that Christian. God, then, did not draw these persons through the agency of the Word proclaimed, but through the life of some of His people. No Protestant theologian worthy of the name could ever want to contradict or rule out such a possibility. We know of nothing in the whole range of created things, and we know of no revelational statement or fact, that could justify our saying that God is not free to use any means. He chooses to draw men to Christ. God is unrestricted in His freedom. He is Lord. God is GOD. To deny this unrestricted freedom of God would be equivalent to saying that there are no Divine possibilities other than proclamation as done by man. Which again would mean that God is no longer God.

11. What God in His omnipotent freedom may choose to do is NOT in any way related to what He has commissioned His people to do. Unless you wish to go definitely off the rails, you must differentiate and distinguish between what God has told His church to do, and what God Himself, according to the pleasure of His own free will, chooses to do. Surely God used Pharaoh, Cyrus and Pilate—not to speak of Judas Iscariot—for carrying out His own purpose just as certainly as He did John the Baptist, Paul and Augustine. Likewise, God may—and does—use our disobedience to further His own plans, but the Church is nevertheless always faced with the crisis of obedience or disobedience to an explicit command. For example, one might very easily produce instances where missionaries have argued against the actual proclamation of the Word, alleging that the ‘silent witness’ of Christian lives had been used by God to draw men to Christ, and therefore the silent witness method must be right. The answer to such argument is twofold:

- (a) Refusing to preach the Gospel is a flagrant disobedience to God’s great commission to His people.
- (b) If there is definite proof of conversion under the circumstances just mentioned then that only means that God in His unrestricted freedom has chosen to use the disobedience of His servants to further His own purpose.

12. This thought may startle some of you, but surely you can see that if God were restricted to our obedience in the carrying out of His will He really would not get very far. However, the fact still remains that our disobedience is still disobedience regardless of how God makes use of it. Pharaoh is still Pharaoh and Judas is still Judas.

13. Whenever you see that a Muslim has been drawn by God the Father to Christ, you may well rejoice without quibbling about the means He in His unrestricted freedom used. But when you are trying to carry out the commission God gave His people and to get the Gospel across to Muslims, you are faced with a specific, clear command to proclaim, to herald, to preach the Gospel message—you are therefore always in a position of crisis. You either obey or disobey. There is no third alternative.

14. Now we can get back to our subject. You want to evangelise the Muslims. In this connection you want to know just how the ‘doing’, that is, the ‘good works’ of your Christian life, fit in. Let us therefore begin with the first of the abovementioned relationships, namely:



### CONDUCT RELATED TO LAW

What we mean by law here is simply that which St Paul says that the Jews have in their code and the heathen have written in their hearts (Rom. 2:14–15). What it amounts to is this:

There is in the natural order a certain minimum standard of ethical conduct that is required of people in every nation under the sun. Sometimes the law is written, sometimes unwritten. Standards and interpretations vary at different times and in different countries. Obviously some of the New Testament Christians fell below the minimum standard and had to be rebuked. When Paul tells Titus (3:1ff.) to remind the Christians of that time that they should be subject to government, obey the one in authority and be ready to do good, he is exhorting them to be law-abiding citizens. Likewise when Peter tells the Christians that they should have honest relationships with those outside the Church (I Pet. 2:1ff.), he is also thinking of their ethical conduct in relation to the ordinary standards of the country.

15. Likewise at the time of the Reformation, when the struggle centred mainly around justification by faith alone, the Ten Commandments were not left out, for in them the Reformers seemingly saw an epitomised form of the law needed in the natural order, just as the Jews accepted them as a short form of the law for their theocratic State.

16. However, the new element in keeping the law in the natural order was that they were not doing it for the sake of obtaining righteousness before God, but that in so doing they were fulfilling a duty incumbent on all men, Christians and others, and thus avoiding the responsibility of becoming a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel. But do not let us forget for one moment that, while the newness of life had pervaded this whole aspect of Christian living, yet the thing in itself was still the same. The law was still the law, written or unwritten. It was the minimum standard of ethical conduct. It had to be kept by the Christians.

17. Now here is the point where any number of Christians go off the tracks and plunge into the ditch. It happens constantly in contact with Muslims. From the very start Christianity appealed to people on the shady side of life. Those who had failed, those who had made a sorry mess of things. Those who, unimpressed by the religious people of their day, had gotten on the wrong side of the respectable classes—all of these could see they were stuck in a quagmire. The religious, the respectable, the good people, on the other hand, found it more difficult to think of themselves as sheep that had gone astray. Our Lord Himself brought out this point in

many of His sayings: ‘The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’; ‘They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick’; ‘I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’ (compare also His answer to John the Baptist in prison, Luke 7:22).

18. What the world often saw was therefore a splendid moral transformation. This transformation charmed the Church so that it forgot the central message of Christianity, namely that *all*—good and bad—like sheep have gone astray, that *all*—good and bad—are reckoned under sin, that God might let grace abound toward all. In other words, Christianity tells us that God in Christ is saving mankind from utter destruction. Now what happens when the Christian proclaimer presents Christianity as ‘ethical regeneration’ (an expression which is about as unbiblical as any term can be)? The result is subtle. Again and again you hear the respectable Hindu or Muslim say, ‘Take your Christianity to the pariahs, the outcasts, the misfits, the sinners—they need it. It will help them.’ They will even give you money to help these unfortunates. But for themselves? No, thank you. They do not need it. And the missionary is often dazed, wondering just what to say to make the Muslim understand that he needs the Gospel as well as the outcasts do, even though morally he is not on the wrong side of the fence.

19. And when the missionary does go to the misfit and outcast, and instead of giving him the hope of the glorious liberty of the sons of God, he presents his so-called gospel of ethical regeneration, it is nothing but a tiresome, horizontal, religious moralism, bound in on all sides by earth. It is as dead as a doornail.

20. If all this is true, and it certainly is, then what does it mean in relation to your Christian living? It means this: while your own living should be up to the mark because you are a new creature hidden in Christ, yet, after all, it is your relationship to the law. Its only value as far as your preaching is concerned lies in the fact that you are not a hindrance in your own work.

21. The second category is:

### **CONDUCT RELATED DIRECTLY TO LOVE**

The law demands uprightness, fairness, justice in your relationship to all men. Christ demands that you as His disciple should also relate your conduct to love. In other words you should do good far above the

demands of the law. Our Lord carries this demand to its logical conclusion and says you should love your neighbour as yourself. In our last chapter we discussed this subject in detail, and saw that, although in the present natural order no man can do this because sin and finite limitation cause such conflicting loyalties that no man can even come near to fulfilling the law of love, yet that fact does not mean that we have an excuse for not relating our conduct to love.

22. Muslims will tell you again and again that the Christians are so good, and do so many good works. Then the question is, are you going to bask in the warmth of that (false) praise and primly talk about ‘the power of the Spirit working in you’, or are you going to be realistic and tell the Muslim the sober truth, namely that you, like him, are in such a predicament that, even if you wanted to, you could not possibly fulfil the demands of that law of love? It is really only on that background you can talk of salvation, certainly not on the background of your accomplishments, even when they are said to be the power of God working in you.

23. Do not misunderstand me. If you are a Christian the power of the Spirit is working in you. But you know this by faith, not by sight. And until the Muslim has your faith, you cannot expect him to know (or see) any working of the Holy Spirit. In other words, regardless of how genuinely you try to be obedient to the law of love, it has no value as a link in your effort to approach the Muslim with the Gospel. Its value (so far as you are concerned) lies in this: that the more genuinely you try to be obedient to the law of love the more genuinely humble you will be, for you are constantly aware of failures and limited capabilities.

24. Now we have come to the most difficult aspect of the whole question. The third category is:

### **CONDUCT IN DIRECT RELATION TO THE NEW AGE**

Our difficulty begins with our Lord Himself. He was, as the Creed says: perfect God and perfect man. Not, as in mystical demigods and deified humans, a blend of the two. ‘United’ is the word used. Perfect union, but never mixture. In Christ, Godhead is always Godhead, manhood is always manhood. Only thus can we believe that God came near in Christ, and yet remained the absolute, the unknown God, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

25. But—Paradox and tension is the result. For this doubleness in unity tends to upset all ordinary human relationships. If we could accept

Christ like the Muslims do, as a prophet, or like some Hindus do, as an avatar, the tension would be relieved. God would remain in heaven, and we could continue in dead isolation on earth, undisturbed in both our moral and immoral actions. But this fact of faith—doubleness in unity—changes everything we have to say about Christian living, just as everything Christ Himself was, said and did, has to be seen in the light of the union of Godhead and manhood, as found in Him.

26. Let me give you an example. In John 6, when our Lord had exhorted the people not to labour for the food that perishes, they asked Him what they should do in order to work the works of God. You know our Lord's remarkable answer: 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent' (vv. 28–29). Before that, in the 5th chapter our Lord says (v. 24), 'He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life'. And later in the same chapter it says that those who have done good receive everlasting life. Obviously then, doing good, in the primary Christian sense of the word, is to expose yourself to the Word, and having heard it, to accept it. Said in another way, the word 'good' in this primary sense has really no direct connection with our moral or ethical conduct at all. It is our conduct, our attitude towards the Lord who brings in the new age, that makes us either good or evil. That is why Luther said good deeds do not make a good man. A man may easily do any number of good humanitarian, idealistic deeds and still be essentially evil, in that he has refused to expose himself to the Word or, having exposed himself, has rejected it.

27. But to be good in this primary sense, that is, to hear and believe, means that old things have passed away, and all things have become new. The Church is a new creation in Christ, a redeemed order. Yet this new creation in Christ is still living as a vital part of the natural order. It is a purchased people, a royal priesthood, a nation with its citizenship in heaven; it is also a scattered people on earth, belonging to all nations and tribes and tongues, and of this earth earthy.

28. Now let us look at our Lord. So many Christians pass very lightly over the fact that contemporary religious leaders again and again attacked Him on the score of His conduct. He was called a glutton and a wine-bibber. He was rebuked for being a friend of publicans and sinners. He was accused more than once of breaking the Sabbath. He was said to be disrespectful to religious authorities. He was called a blasphemer. This list could be extended, but that should be enough to remind you that the tension in our Lord's life as perfect God and perfect man led to serious

results also in the matter of conduct. All of these apparent irregularities of conduct were polemical acts related to the new age, and only those who have eyes of faith can see their meaning and glorify God. Others (including Muslims) stumble.

29. Let me say parenthetically, that if you present Christ as the most wonderful paragon of virtue and not ‘as a sign which shall be spoken against’ (Luke 2:34), you will be doing the Muslim a disservice because his reaction will invariably be either, (i) a comparison with Muhammed (in which Christ—according to the Muslim mentality—comes out a poor second); or (ii) a sharp and spiteful criticism of Christ’s conduct, just where it is related most poignantly to the new age (which the Muslim simply does not understand).

30. Every situation that is related to the new age obviously causes tension. Therefore the paradoxical position in which you find yourself. Therefore you may live your life in relation to the law as blameless as St Paul, in relation to love as honestly as you can, and yet when they kill you they will think they do God a service (John 16: 2).

31. Here, then, is the crux of the whole matter. In order to better understand it and how it is related to your preaching to the Muslims, I want to link it up with a couple of passages in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:13–16 says:

*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

Matthew 6:1–4 says:

*Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.*

32. Obviously Matthew 6:1–4 taken together with the teaching in the parable of the good Samaritan are God-ward conduct, that is, the doing

of them is something between you and God alone. If you wish them to continue to have that character they have to be done by stealth. Then they are done to God's glory. There is nothing arbitrary about this statement of our Lord. One is forced to the final conclusion that no man can aim at and consciously achieve good works of such a kind as to compel other people to give God the glory. If such good works are attempted, attention will of necessity be concentrated on the man. And the more he plans and aims and tries to achieve works of such a character, the more certainly will he himself be in the centre of the picture with a halo around his head. He is following in the very footsteps of the Pharisee, not just superficially, but in the fundamental conception of religion. Pharisaism was simply this: by good deeds and a publicly known pious life to glorify God.

33. Our Lord cut right through this pharisaical conception of things and said: No you do not. If you really know what you are about, if the newness of life is yours, then you will really want to do all (including your good deeds) to the glory of God. In that case there is only one right way and that is to do them in secret. Then you are glorifying God. You are not trying to get others to give God the glory. You yourself are doing it, as what you do, you really and truly are doing for God. This is the newness that comes with the new creation in Christ. Therein you will differ from the humanitarian and the idealist. They both work in the open. Their conduct is not God-ward but man-ward.

34. When Christ said these things to the Pharisees it was dynamite, pure and simple. They hated Him, cursed Him, and finally killed Him. If you will repeat Christ's words today to both Christians and Muslims many will in all probability show in every way possible that they agree with the Pharisee and not with our Lord.

35. You want to reach the Muslims. All right. You will have to take your stand once for all on this point. Either you accept the pharisaical standpoint, that by good deeds, by your loving behaviour you can get others to give God the glory (and then you will do good openly to be seen of men), or else you accept our Lord's standpoint, that 'good' in this sense is NOT absolute, and by doing these deeds openly you succeed only in drawing men's attention to yourself, to your saintliness and your achievements, whereas if you do them secretly you yourself are doing what you are doing to the glory of God.

36. As was said in the beginning, all Christian living is permeated with a newness in Christ. Although this newness need not necessarily be

obvious in connection with your conduct as far as the law is concerned—for non-Christians may certainly also be good law-abiding citizens in no way manifestly different from you—yet in your conduct in relation to love, questioning will arise. Others will find something lacking in your conduct. Why? Because they expect you to do openly what you are doing by stealth. Both Muslims and Christians want to see your good deeds; they want to say: ‘Bravo! Here is a good man, a really religious man, a saint!’ And having recognised you as one of the ‘good people’ they are satisfied and want to go on in their own manner of life undisturbed by you, your saintliness and your God. This misunderstanding must arise, for outside of Christ men cannot grasp the idea that your conduct to men in relation to the law of love is really a God-ward relationship, and concerns only you and God in one direction, and you and the man needing you in the other direction. It never includes the spectator.

37. Once you get the idea clearly into your head that the claim the world makes to see your good deeds is baseless, and must be resisted, it is comparatively easy to understand the other side of the picture, the man-ward side.

38. Now please go back to the two parallel passages quoted above: Matthew 6:1–4 is God-ward; Matthew 5:13–16 is man-ward, as verse 16 says, ‘let your light so shine before men’. Obviously, then, the meaning of these two passages is not one and the same. If it were, it would involve a contradiction, for while one is done secretly to God, the other is done openly, although also for God, because all that we do is done to the glory of God.

39. In studying this passage in relation to other Scriptures the first thing you notice is the relation between your light and your good works, that is, it must be understood that your light and your works are not identical; the two words do not mean the same thing. It must not be read so as to give the impression that your good works are the light that you should let shine. The exhortation is: Let your *light* shine. You are not to put your light under a bushel but consciously to let it shine. Your works must then be seen in the light of this light that you consciously let shine.

40. Now if the works and the light are not identical but two separate things, we have to find out what the conception *light* really contains. Although we are spoken of as light earlier in the chapter, the LIGHT is, in its essential meaning, the revelation of God. The psalmist says (Ps. 119) that the word of God is a lamp unto his feet and light unto his path. The Apostle John says (John 1) that the light shineth in darkness; and the

darkness comprehendeth it not. No Christian can argue against the conclusion that essentially your light is God's light, His revelation to mankind.

41. Since Jesus is the perfect and final revelation of God, then He is the Light as He Himself also said:

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12).

But Christ cannot literally be held forth since He is not now in this world. The Church has, however, the apostolic *Word* about Him, the witness about Him, to put forward. This is not in opposition to what Christ taught about Himself and His disciples. The light—as it is now—is that word about Christ, that witness, that Evangel, which the Church lets shine, and which God, when it pleases Him, uses to draw men to Christ. And the good works of the Church must be seen and understood in the light of that Word, that Evangel which it proclaims and publicises. That is natural, as can be seen from everyday life. For example, a man who becomes angry with another man and kills him is called a murderer; but a soldier who in time of war succeeds in killing a dozen men by himself is called a hero and is honoured. Why? Because his deed is understood in the light of his patriotism. And only the man who shares his view of patriotism can accept his deeds as the deeds of a hero. Or take another illustration: When one comes into the harbour of New York, one sees the statue of Liberty. She holds a large light in a hand that is stretched up toward heaven. In the night that light which she holds throws a light down over her, so that she is seen in the light of the light she holds. That is a symbol of the Church ('... in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as light in the world; holding forth the word of life', Phil. 2:15–16).

42. The Light, then, is not some good deeds that you can do, but that Word, that Evangel, which the Church has about Jesus Christ as the Light of the world, the Revelation of God.

43. I am sure that if the Church in Pakistan (or anywhere else) seriously accepted this standpoint, and really allowed its light to shine instead of covering it with the 'bushel' of alms and philanthropic efforts, it would soon realise that light is in constant opposition to darkness, and that darkness tries to overcome it, or hide away from it. This can be seen clearly by reading Matthew 5, verses 10, 11 and 12, together with verse 16:



Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

44. Why should it not be: that they may see your good works and persecute also you? That is not written, but it would be the natural and logical conclusion, for when Jesus points out that the prophets were persecuted because they let their light shine, and He calls them blessed who suffer for His sake, then it would be quite reasonable if the sentence read: 'So let your light shine before men that they may persecute also you'. Time and time again Jesus says that humanity, the world, will persecute and hate Him and His disciples. The disciple is not greater than his Master. When they have called the Master Beelzebub how much more so the disciples.

45. I wish I could emphasise this point here so that you never could forget it. The Light is not an exhibition of our good works: it is not an exhibition of the pattern of redeemed humanity. It is not an exhibition at all. It is the principle of light in opposition to darkness. St John said of our Lord that He came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). St Paul said we struggle against the powers of darkness (Eph. 6:12). In other words, just as surely as our Lord, because He was the Light, 'set for the falling and rising up of many in Israel and for a sign which should be spoken against' (Luke 2:34), so also His body, the Church, when it lets its light shine, is involved in the supernatural struggle of Light against darkness, of Truth against falsehood, of good against evil, of Christ against the devil.

46. All of the above exegesis would seem quite natural, and could of course be supported by innumerable passages in both the Old and New Testaments, but here in this setting there is a catch which upsets many, for the 16th verse goes on to say: that they may glorify your Father which is in heaven. How can men, humanity, who have always persecuted and killed those who bear witness to God's revelation, glorify God? Or when the world lives in rebellion to God, how then should it be able to judge of a work whether it is good and well-pleasing to God, and give God the glory? The works of Christ were well-pleasing to God, but men nailed Him upon a cross because they thought He blasphemed God. Precisely because humanity lies in the lap of sin, in death, in rebellion against God, it is unable to see in any way whether a work is 'good' and glorify God.

47. In this particular verse, therefore, when Jesus, instead of pointing out that persecution is the necessary result of letting your light shine, says that men will glorify God, it must of necessity be understood to mean that those men who see your good works in the light of that Light which you let shine will glorify God. St John says that Jesus ‘was in the world . . . and the world knew him not . . . But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.’ So let your light shine before men, that as many as receive it, may see your good works in the light of that Light and glorify your Father which is in heaven. A Muslim who sees your good works, as here understood in the light of Islam, cannot and will not glorify your Father which is in heaven. If you doubt it, try it.

48. Now you have probably reached the point where you are impatiently waiting for me to say just what those good deeds are in relation to the new age. There are no categories. I can only say in a general sort of way, that the picture of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 may in a secondary sense be applied to the Church. That does not mean that it necessarily applies in all details to every local church in every place and at all times. It does, however, apply to the universal Church. Remember that in the final analysis our Lord glorified God on the CROSS. Humanly speaking, without the eyes of faith, it was defeat, it was obvious weakness, it was a joke. As I have tried to point out, essentially there is a paradox, a tension, a clash, a contradiction, wherever the Gospel of the new age is preached. Take, for example, the ethical aspects of proclamation. It is intolerable in the eyes of the world that you and I, that is, the Church, should arrogate to ourselves the position of heralds of God’s message to rebels. Are we angels or prophets or what? Compare the episode in Nazareth when the people said:

*Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? (Matt. 13:55–56).*

Many a Muslim has laughed spitefully in the face of the Christian herald on this score. And yet the truth as it is in Christ is intolerant. It WILL be proclaimed. Again, the Muslim says: ‘If your Christianity is truth, why not fight for it? Why not die on the battlefield for it? What is this weakness of turning the other cheek, of not resisting evil? Why this feminine attitude of life? Rattle your sword in its scabbard and people will respect you.’

49. Our Lord said: ‘Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead’. My father and my mother whom I should honour, shall I desert them and follow your Lord? ‘If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.’ But that demand breaks up all our human relationships. ‘I am come to send fire on the earth . . . For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.’ But that is intolerable. It is a living death. ‘He that would be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me.’ But even the authorities will stop me. ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ But I would be despised by all men, I would become the laughing-stock of the community. ‘But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.’ But what of all the enemies I would make? ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.’

50. St Paul says:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake, which is the Church, whereof I was made a minister.

And also:

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor 12:9–10).

That is, in a secondary sense, the same picture as you have in Isaiah 53.

51. Said in one sentence: Christian living in relation to the new age is this: joyfully to bear your cross as a result of your belonging to the Church that preaches the CROSS.

52. Now let me sum up. You belong to the new age as you are a new creature hidden in Christ. In this new age you wish, as a new creature in Christ, to approach the Muslim with the Gospel. Your deeds, then, as far as law is concerned will be blameless, so that your conduct will not hinder your work: your deeds as far as love is concerned will be done in secret that men may see Christ and not you; your deeds as far as the new age is concerned will be that you faithfully let the Light of the Gospel shine so

that the works of the devil may be destroyed by Christ, and while letting your Light shine you bear joyfully whatever cross you have to bear.

### QUESTIONS

1. In what way are good deeds related to the effectiveness of the proclamation of the Gospel?
2. How would you continue a conversation with a Muslim who congratulates you on the good work done by Missions in schools and hospitals?
3. Why do you think it is written that good works cannot be consciously done that will compel others to glorify God?

## CHAPTER 14

# Prayer in Relation to Evangelism

1. If by now you have grown accustomed to the fact that you are God's point of contact with the Muslim, and that there is no substitute for you yourself possible, you will naturally realise that everything you are and do is somehow related to your work of evangelising the Muslim. You will then want to know just what value every phase of your Christian living has. This is as it should be.

2. However, as I have said before, as soon as we begin discussing Christian living we are in a danger zone, for unless we are exceedingly careful we are apt to confuse that which is common to all religious people with what is specifically Christian in character. And today, when we want to talk about prayer, we must be doubly careful, for prayer is the most common of all the characteristics of religious people the world over. Before going on, let us stop for a moment and make sure we all know what we are talking about. There are quite a few words in the Greek New Testament that are translated as 'prayer' in English. Although some of the words may vary slightly in meaning, essentially they all add up to mean: to ask for, to beseech, to want something, to entreat, supplicate. One word is undoubtedly used only for prayer to God, but the others are used regularly in asking something of other people in ordinary conversation, as well as of God. The point is that in the New Testament prayer is always asking for something. It is always a petition. Now if you will look in your dictionary you will find that prayer is first defined as supplication, but that it also has a second meaning, namely the offering of adoration, confession, supplication, thanksgiving, etc. In other words, prayer can be used almost as a synonym for divine service or worship.

3. When words have various meanings they always complicate and confuse our thinking and, as a result, our actions. However, as we are

not concerned with the philosophy or theology of prayer here, but only want to know whether or not our 'prayer life' can be used as a link in our approach to Muslims, we need not more than touch on the idea of prayer in its second, broader meaning. Certainly it is meet and right when the saints gather together to worship and adore God and give thanks for His many blessings, that they also confess their 'manifold sins and transgressions' and admit that 'there is no health in us'. Therefore prayer (supplication) for forgiveness and help follow naturally. It is also the classical tradition in corporate worship to pray for 'all conditions of men everywhere'. Whether these supplications are made with the help of liturgy or extemporaneously is also a matter of custom. The difficulty is that this phase of our worship should be as profoundly sincere as all the rest of it. And yet it is a well-known fact that prayer in corporate worship has been the headache of every denomination. When it is left to the individual pastor it very quickly can, and often does, degenerate into: 'they love to stand praying in the Church to be seen of men'; and when prayer is incorporated into the ritual or liturgy it can just as quickly degenerate into lifeless babble.

4. There is probably no one way of solving this difficulty in corporate worship. For all who have eyes to see, it is a constant reminder that prayer essentially belongs in the secret chamber, as it is at once the most lively indication we have of man's utterly fallen state, and of God's unconditional grace.

5. However, I suppose that we will all agree that corporate Christian worship of God has no secondary motive or aim, that is, we do not worship God with the idea that it also can be used as a witness for Muslims. That would be blasphemous. The Muslim may be influenced for or against Christianity by being present at our divine service, but we do not worship God with one eye to him. We can therefore safely say that prayer, as far as corporate worship is concerned, does not in any way link up with your effort to contact the Muslim.

6. What we want to discuss today is whether or not the fact that you pray, that is, that you approach God with petitions and intercessions, can be used in any way, directly or indirectly, as an instrument of witness. Both nationals and foreigners are groping for an answer to this question. One reason for this uneasiness is that the Muslim constantly reminds you that, while he prays five times a day, you pray only once a week. You will hear many a Christian defend himself and his fellow-Christians against this charge by telling the Muslim about his own and others' 'prayer life',

as the expression is, and also by trying to find some way of showing the Muslim that good Christians are just as keen on prayer as good Muslims. Others will attack the prayer life of the Muslim, and thereby try to show him the superiority of their own. Some of these efforts are obviously faulty, for example, the pastor who had his church bells rung twice daily, morning and evening, as a call to prayer, 'so that the Muslims would realise that we pray at least twice a day if not five times'.

7. Muslims are undoubtedly interested in the prayer life of Christians. They enjoy hearing about the 'praying Hydes'; they swear by the doctor who will lift his hands in prayer before he begins an operation; they respect the Christian who will have family prayers on the train while they are looking on, etc. Because of this appreciation Christians are prone to fall into the error of thinking that if only the Muslim knows about our prayer life it will be a point of contact that will soften him up, and make a more sympathetic hearing of the Gospel possible.

8. Let me remind you that our Lord has told us that our prayer was not to be like that of those outside (Matt. 6:7). There is something different, something unique about Christian prayer, which the heathen and the Pharisees cannot understand or appreciate until or unless they are drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit.

It can be, of course, but it is not necessarily the contents of the prayer. In many things the entreaties and intercessions of the non-Christians are the same as those of the Christians. Why should it not be so? We are all living in the same world and need the same things, physically and spiritually. In this connection let us study the liturgical prayers of the Muslim for a moment.

9. Five times a day he is called to prayer, for as Surah IV-4 says, prayer is prescribed and timed. There is no such thing as coming late: either you pray at the prescribed time or you leave off until the next time. Before each prayer certain prescribed ablutions must be gone through. These vary according to what you have been doing since the last prayer. Then again the entire prayer-service has to be gone through in Arabic. Although some modern Muslims will deny this, the great bulk of Muslims the world over hold that the prayer-service is acceptable to God only in Arabic, regardless of whether the person praying understands what he is saying or not. You have probably watched a Muslim at prayer. There are 10 different postures he must take, which include standing, bowing, kneeling and prostration. Each of these postures must be just right, and the words he repeats must be the correct ones for each posture.

The prayer, taken altogether, is as follows (from Hughes's *Dictionary of Islam*, pp. 466–8):

‘God is great!’  
 ‘Holiness to Thee, O God!  
 And praise be to Thee!  
 Great is Thy name!  
 Great is Thy greatness!  
 There is no deity but Thee!’  
 ‘I seek refuge from God from cursed Satan.’  
 ‘In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful.’

### Sura 1

‘Praise be to God, Lord of all worlds!  
 The compassionate, the merciful!  
 King of the day of reckoning!  
 Thee only do we worship, and to Thee only do we cry for help.  
 Guide Thou us in the straight path,  
 The path of those to whom Thou hast been gracious:  
 With whom Thou art not angry,  
 And who go not astray.—Amen.’

### Sura 112

‘Say: He is God alone:  
 God the Eternal!  
 He begetteth not,  
 And is not begotten;  
 And there is none like unto Him.’  
 ‘God is great!’  
 ‘I extol the holiness of my Lord, the Great!’  
 ‘I extol the holiness of my Lord, the Great!’  
 ‘I extol the holiness of my Lord, the Great!’.  
 ‘God hears him who praises Him.’  
 ‘O Lord, Thou art praised.’  
 ‘God is great!’  
 ‘I extol the holiness of my Lord, the most High!’  
 ‘I extol the holiness of my Lord, the most High!’  
 ‘I extol the holiness of my Lord, the most High!’  
 ‘God is great!’  
 ‘God is great!’  
 ‘I extol the holiness of my Lord, the most High!’  
 ‘I extol the holiness of my Lord, the most High!’  
 ‘I extol the holiness of my Lord, the most High!’  
 ‘God is great!’



‘The adorations of the tongue are for God, and also the adorations of the body, and alms-giving!’

‘Peace be on thee, O Prophet, with the mercy of God and His blessing!’

‘Peace be upon us and upon God’s righteous servants!’

‘I testify that there is no deity but God; and I testify that Muhammed is the servant of God, and the messenger of God!’

‘O God, have mercy on Muhammed and on his descendants, as Thou didst have mercy on Abraham and on his descendants. Thou art to be praised, and Thou art great. O God, bless Muhammed and his descendants, as Thou didst bless Abraham and his descendants!’

‘Thou art to be praised, and Thou art great!’

‘O God, our Lord, give us the blessings of this life, and also the blessings of life everlasting. Save us from the torments of fire.’

All of this ends with what is called the ‘Salam’, when the man praying turns his head first to the right and then to the left, and says to the angels there:

‘The peace and mercy of God be with you.’

10. Now take a good look at the prayer you have just read. Perhaps you are surprised to see that, as far as the contents are concerned, apart from what relates to Muhammed, there is not much in it to which a Christian could not agree. But even if these portions were eliminated we could not join with the Muslim in his prayers.

11. Why? With some minor variations to the number of *rak’ats* said, the above is the complete prayer. Saying it through once is called a *rak’at*. It is obligatory to say it twice in the morning, four times at noon, four times in the afternoon, three times in the evening and four times again at bedtime. In other words the man who does his duty repeats that one prayer seventeen times daily! You will see that in this prayer one sentence comes nine times, namely, ‘I extol the holiness of my Lord, the Great’. That means that the Muslim, who does no more than his duty, repeats that sentence 17 x 9 times, that is, 153 times daily. The Muslim who does his duty repeats this prayer four times before going to bed; the more zealous, the more spiritual Muslim is allowed, according to the different categories of prayers, to repeat this same prayer fifteen times more (that is, nineteen times in all) before retiring!

12. This prayer-service, deadening as it is for the human intellect, is one of the most prominent features in Islam, and every Muslim knows he ought to be repeating this prayer at intervals all through the day and far into the night. This for him is real spirituality. Therefore before he knows

the Christians better he scoffs at our one-day-a-week prayer. But when he gets acquainted with our morning prayers and evening prayers, our staff prayers and patients' prayers, our students' prayers and servants' prayers, our family prayers and private prayers, our midweek prayers and special days of prayer, then he understands us and sympathises with us, and grudgingly or gladly admits that we are also spiritual. Of course, ours is not on a level with his, for while all of his is streamlined and regularised, ours is often haphazard with no prescribed words or times; but anyhow, he understands, and thinks he has found a link between himself and the Christian.

13. Here the point is that, while some repeat their prayers systematically and others haphazardly, yet in the final analysis much praying is supposed to be indicative of spirituality. The super-spiritual Muslim may, according to the rules, repeat that set prayer 75 times daily; the good Muslim 20 times or more; the ordinary Muslim who only does his duty, 17 times; the slack, unspiritual Muslim only 6 or 8 times daily; and the bad Muslim only on feast days. Is it not true that you probably would say that the Christian who only prays once a day is not as spiritual as the one who prays three times a day? And that the man who is a prominent prayer at all the prayer meetings is more spiritual than the man who never shows up?

14. What is wrong with this universal urge towards an endless chain of prayers? Why did Christ give us the Lord's Prayer as a beautiful model of conciseness? Why did He tell us to avoid much speaking that gets us involved in vain repetitions? The derivation of the word 'vain repetitions' in the New Testament is doubtful, but it probably means so much constant repetition that it becomes parrot-wise gibberish. You know what it is. The kind of thing you so often hear when an Anglican works through his liturgy at a supersonic speed, or the pietists, in the prayer get-togethers, who turn on the tap of prayer and pour out thoughtless worn-out phrases peculiar to their own religious jargon. Likewise the Muslim prayer must be vain repetition, for who is able to repeat any prayer 17 times a day without it becoming routine, thoughtless babble? In the final analysis, what is the difference between all this and the Tibetan prayer wheel? The one rolls his prayers on his tongue, the other on a wheel, otherwise they are all alike.

15. When our Lord comes out so strongly against this 'much speaking' in prayer it is because He had a different conception (i) of God; and (ii) of man. The universal religiosity of man expresses itself *inter alia* in the idea that the supreme Being can be glorified or moved to action by

means of quantity in prayers. It also supposes that man is capable of quantity that does not destroy quality. Both are wrong.

(a) First let us take a look at Christ's conception of God. Christ's revelation of the Fatherhood of God is not a revelation that humanises God. He remains, in every sense of the word, GOD, Who dwells in a light unapproachable, as St Paul says; and at the same time He is your Father, your Origin. He knows what you need long before you ask; and He will not give you a stone for bread, or a snake for fish. Look at the birds and the flowers. They all serve the purpose for which they were created, and not a bird is killed, not a flower dies, without God's will. Why then do you approach Him as though a great volume of prayer is needed to move Him or to secure from Him what you need? Pray by all means; it is necessary and natural, but remember to Whom you are praying.

(b) Then comes our Lord's conception of man. Man supposes that he can increase quantity without destroying quality. If we let God be GOD, as Luther said, we may through Christ approach Him boldly, yet with fear and trembling and in profound sincerity and earnestness. Just how far is man capable of this attitude when he increases quantity? If I say the Lord's Prayer morning and evening every day throughout my adult life, is that vain repetition? It certainly can be; it need not be; under certain circumstances it is very apt to be (witness the Lord's Prayer as usually said by groups). Anyhow, our Lord makes the fact clear that 'much speaking' in prayer is identical with gibberish, that is, vain repetitions. Take it any way you like: the Tibetan prayer wheel, the high church or Roman liturgy, the low church prayer meeting: man is simply incapable of increased production without its becoming thoughtless gibberish and babble. And yet it is just this increase in production that universal religiosity calls for and sponsors. But our Lord said, No!

16. Obviously, then, an endless chain of prayer meetings or liturgical prayers will appeal to the Muslim as something more or less like his own; but as far as Christ is concerned it puts the Muslim off the track entirely. Here, as all along the line, Christianity is unique. If Christ is unique, everything that belongs to Christ is unique. So if the Muslim says 'No' to Christ, he will (if properly understood) say 'No' to everything that belongs to Christ. So if your Muslim friend says 'Yes' to your prayer life, but 'No' to your Christ, if he gets the feeling that at least at this point you and he agree, you have every reason to suspect that something has gone wrong somewhere in your Christian life. Perhaps, all unknowingly, you have lost the genuine Christian concept of prayer and are being religious,

just as millions of non-Christians are. The temptation to do this is always present and always a danger.

17. On the other hand, if the Muslim attacks you for your low production of prayers, you have a grand opportunity to tell him of the Fatherhood of God as revealed in and through our Lord.

18. In this same connection our Lord attacks the praying people of His time because of the publicness of their prayers. Let me point out at once—to avoid a serious misunderstanding—that Christ never once attacked the public worship in the temple or in the synagogue. That men should worship God in the congregation of the saints is a thought as old as Judaism itself. The publicness of the congregational worship, where the individual is one of a group, was not enough for the Pharisees. Many people who only know Pharisaism from the New Testament have the idea that it was a despicable, arrogantly religious movement amongst a small element of fanatical Jews. The contrary is true. Pharisaism was the real backbone, the stable element, in Jewish life in the time of our Lord, and for generations before. The Pharisees were the respectable, conscientious ‘church members’ of that time. The great masses looked up to them, were taught by them, and followed them. These were the people who were not ashamed to confess their faith; they gloried in testifying of their faith, by publicly doing good deeds, by standing up in ‘church’ and on the street corners to pray, and by fasting with public attention drawn to it. They were glorifying God on the one hand and being good examples for the common people on the other hand.

19. Remember in Judaism, Jahveh (Jehovah) was the Almighty Potentate, the King of Kings, the Lord Sabaoth (which means the King of armies). The Jews were in a special sense His subjects, His people. He was glorified and honoured when His subjects publicly showed forth submission and adoration. For them, the Messiah who was to come was King-Messiah, as he was usually called in Jewish literature. In other words, fundamentally, the relationship between God and His creation (especially the Jews) was that of a King and His subjects.

20. We need only go back as far as Akbar the Great to see a good picture of the mighty oriental despot. People who wanted to petition that great Potentate had to crawl up to his throne on their knees, while great concords of people looked on and marvelled at the greatness of their ruler. Or, a more modern picture: witness the pageant of beauty, strength, discipline and submission in a great parade, where the king takes the salute. All of this reflects the glory, greatness and power of the exalted king.

21. The Pharisees logically fitted in their conception of prayer with their conception of God. Their prayer was a kind of voluntary parade-service. The Muslims who have the same idea of God have done exactly the same. From start to finish, the Muslim prayer service is in every way a parade-service. He is permitted, if necessary, to say his prayers by himself, yet he is promised a greater reward if he says them in the company of other believers and in public. I have even heard a Muslim argue that there was no sense whatsoever in prayer unless it was seen by others, for God was only glorified when this act of adoration and submission was seen by others.

22. Admittedly a Christian would not make a statement like the above, yet many obviously try in some way or other to make prayer a link or a factor or a point of contact in their approach to the Muslim. Somehow or other, it must mean something to him to know that we have 'communion with God'. Admittedly no one seems to have any thought-out theory or doctrine about it; but, in practice, the usual thing is that it is profitable that the Christian's prayer life has an element of publicness in it, quite apart from his worship in the body of the saints.

23. Our Lord hit hard at this point—so hard that it still hurts us all. The reason is the same as mentioned before. His conception (i) of God; and (ii) of man was radically different from that of all others. About God He says in effect: God is King and Creator, even the devils know that, but as far as you are concerned He is also your FATHER. No king-father (even though he be a mighty and exalted potentate) is satisfied with a parade-salute relationship to his son. No king's son ever got away with it by simply bowing before the king in his audience chamber. Our Father is in heaven, His name is holy, His kingdom comes, His will is done—but He is still your FATHER. You are His SON. There is a difference in being the son of a king and the subject of a king, and this shows itself in their intimate relationship. The son has, on the one hand, a more strenuous time of it for more is expected of him; but on the other hand, as a son of God he has also a more blessed time, for he, through the body of Christ, has that private and personal relationship to the King that fosters hope, joy and confidence. It is easy to push that personal relationship to God away by attending strictly to the parade-service, and leaving it at that.

Now—it would be rather nice if we could stop there, but we cannot for our Master did not. While He was showing us God, He was at the same time giving us a very true picture of ourselves.

It is apparent from everything our Lord said and did, that He took an extremely dim view of the fallen nature of man. Fallen man is so corrupt

that when people kill each other they will deceive themselves into thinking they are doing God a service. Church History has shown us that this judgment of our Lord on human nature is true also of the Christians. Both in the Orient and in the Occident, Christians have killed each other, thinking they were serving God in so doing. So let us avoid the doublecross deception; let us not deceive ourselves into believing that because we are 'born again' we have some guarantee against deceiving ourselves. The heart is deceitful above all things—yours, mine and the Muslim's. Do not forget it.

24. This deceitfulness shows itself also in prayer. If a person had the idea that the relationship between man and God was only that of subject and king, then theoretically, supposing all else were as it should be, publicness in prayer would or could be proper. The purpose of revelation would then be to show man that his conception of God was wrong, and when man accepted that correction his relation to God in prayer would automatically change. Such a procedure would presuppose that mankind is only suffering from ignorance. Our Lord, however, did NOT proceed in that way. He not only showed us the Fatherhood of God; but he attacked the actual practice of the best 'churchman' of his time on the human level. He said that, even if their idea of God had been right, their prayer-life was still hypocrisy, for they were not, in the final analysis, really interested in showing forth the glory of God, but in establishing their own righteousness and piety in the presence of both God and man. It might be illustrated in this way. The soldier is on parade and the king is taking the salute. But the soldier's mother, wife or sweetheart is in the crowd and she has her eye on him. His uniform is spick-and-span, his marching is perfect, he does all that can be expected of him brilliantly. But why? Because he knows that woman is there in the crowd, and he wants to impress her. He therefore goes through the parade so perfectly that also the king is well-pleased. The soldier is actually play-acting to both sides. He is play-acting as far as the king is concerned for his intention is to try to impress that woman, and he is play-acting as far as the woman is concerned for although all his movements purport to be glorifying the king, actually he is only trying to establish himself in her thoughts.

25. Our Lord said, Do not be like the play-actors who love to stand up in the 'churches', in the mosques, and on the street corners and say prayers to be seen of men. The deceitfulness of our hearts shows itself in this, that if you expose the play-acting in the public prayers of both Muslims and Christians, they will flare up just as the Pharisees did. They

will not admit that they are parading in public to satisfy their own craving for acknowledgement, praise and glory. They will insist that they are doing it for the glory of God and for the good of their contemporaries. They will not countenance the idea that they, like the soldier on parade, whose barrel-chest is blown up to bursting point, are parading for their own glory and satisfaction. I have heard many Christians say how it awed them to see a Muslim saying his prayers on a busy street corner: and I have heard many Muslims praise certain Christians who pray so beautifully and spiritually. Why not? Both are in the same boat. And our Lord, with one word, exposes them both: Play-acting (that is, hypocrisy).

26. Here many Christians argue with 'ifs' and 'buts'. However, as we saw in the first section, human nature is such that constant repetition of anything quickly tends to become gibberish, likewise human nature is such that publicness invariably tends towards self-centredness. Therefore our Lord simply said: It cannot be done, prayer is not parade. Go in and close your door, and pray in secret.

27. There is only one conclusion we can draw. If the Christian—national or foreign—is really aware of the uniqueness of Christian prayer he must abhor the thought that his prayer-life in any shape or form could or should be used as an instrument of witness to the Muslim. If he takes our Lord seriously and leaves out all the 'ifs' and 'buts', his lack of public prayer life is going to irritate and disturb the Muslim who knows him, and it is going to give him—the Christian—a wonderful opportunity for getting Christ across, even though it may cost him dearly in doing so, for he is not getting a pleasant Christ across whom the Muslim can appreciate, but the Christ of the New Testament, who unequivocally condemns his religiosity.

28. Now there is only one vital point left. Prayer, as was said at the start, is beseeching, requesting, supplicating, asking for something. The main body of the Lord's Prayer is nothing but seven requests. Beautiful and complete as our Lord's Prayer is, no one can successfully deny that its main purpose was to apply the brakes on what was commonly known as prayer. The context in Luke 11 as well as Matthew 6 plainly shows this. This Lord's Prayer wants us to presuppose a God who does give us good things, and knows what we need long before we ask. 'Is God less good than a human father?' asks our Lord. The answer is clearly, No: for the Lord's prayer starts: 'Our Father'.

29. In order to get at the real idea of prayer, I would like you to compare our Lord's Prayer with the 23rd Psalm. This Psalm is the most complete

and beautiful pictorial parable of the perfect relationship between God and man that has ever been penned. In the Gospel of St John, our Lord takes this picture and applies it to Himself and His disciples. He is the Good Shepherd Who gives His life for His sheep. He goes before them when they go out to pasture; He calls them by name and they recognise His voice. Their times are completely in His hands. In other words, our Lord Himself allows and recognises the validity of the 23rd Psalm and yet He taught us to pray in quite a different attitude, since this perfect relationship is so seldom attained. Now let us look at the two:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Give us day by day our daily bread.

... he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

And lead us not into temptation.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

... deliver us from evil.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.

30. Is it not true that in our periods of comfort and prosperity we experience the restful glow of the 23rd Psalm, whereas in the rough and tumble of life, when the storm clouds gather, we pray the Lord's Prayer—in substance, if not the actual words? When the first disciples walked through the wheat fields with their Master on a cool, invigorating morning, and He pointed to the birds and the flowers to show God takes care of His own, it was not too difficult to believe. But when the boat was filling up with angry waves and seemed about to sink—then the birds and flowers were forgotten and the disciples in a frenzy of fear cried out and prayed: Do you want us all to perish? Arise and save us! Our Lord did save them; but He said: O ye of little faith! Is it not true that when the cold, wet waves of life buffet us about we cry like the father who brought his demon-possessed son to our Lord: I believe, help Thou mine unbelief?

31. While the 23rd Psalm gives us a beatific glimpse of what will be—or, in solemn moments of our life, is—the Lord's Prayer gives us faith, hope and confidence here and now in the midst of our unbelief, our ignorance, our sin, and our finiteness. The Psalmist himself did not live on the constant level of the 23rd Psalm, as many of his other hymns show us.



Also he could pray, ‘My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?’ (Psalm 22). What I am trying to get at is this: Prayer in the narrow biblical sense of supplication is NOT indicative of rich spirituality that should make others gape in surprise; in so far as it is genuine, it is the paradoxical cry of belief coming through the thick clouds of unbelief.

32. I have heard people protest and say: but our Lord prayed and He was without sin. That is true. Our Lord’s praying could not have had the element of sin in it that our praying has; but it unquestionably had the element of human finiteness and weakness in it that made it just as genuinely human as any prayer we utter. The Sunday School picture one sees of our Lord kneeling appropriately by a rock with His hands correctly folded, His hair neatly combed and His halo shining brightly, is absurd, grotesque, blasphemous. Sweat as great drops of blood fell from His face. He agonised in prayer. Sin apart, He was facing just the same as we are—only more so—the costly identification of Himself with the will and purpose of the Father. I have never seen or heard of a Muslim who saw anything but weakness in our Lord’s time of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

33. ‘Watch and pray’ is the red light that stops us at every corner in the New Testament. Why? The answer is simple. The red light is there to warn us and to remind us that our sinful, weak, ignorant, finite human nature is not capable of any real, sustained, genuine spirituality that lives exclusively inside the atmosphere of the 23rd Psalm.

34. Now—if and when a man accepts Christ, he accepts a conception of God and of himself, that makes him keenly aware of the fact that he has to pray because on the one hand God is his Father and he is the son, and on the other hand because, although aware of this relationship, he never really attains unto it perfectly or permanently. Therefore every time he bends his knees in prayer he becomes conscious, NOT of a glowing spirituality that is to the glory of God, and an example for others to see, but of a painful knowledge of his own finiteness, his lack of perfect faith, his humanity and his sinfulness. His faith is not the perfect faith of the sheep in the 23rd Psalm but the interim, struggling, paradoxical faith that expresses itself in the Lord’s Prayer or the cry of the distressed father: ‘I believe; help Thou my unbelief’.

35. Here, then, is obviously no urge toward thoughtless gibberish and certainly no urge for play-acting in public; the very nature of genuine, unique Christian prayer prohibits it. If the Muslim wants to know about

your prayer-life, tell him plainly (but kindly, of course) that it is none of his business, and then explain why. It may be that the Holy Spirit will use your words to open his eyes, so that he may see Christ; if not, be sure you will have made yourself a new ‘enemy’, for without necessarily having mentioned Islam at all, all you will have said will be giving the lie to one of the five great pillars of Islam, namely the Salat or Namaz. That is as it should be. He rejects Christ, therefore he should be made to face up to the fact that in reality he rejects everything that belongs to Christ.

36. Nothing is so deadening, so hopeless and so false as the Muslims’ constant argument that they accept and acknowledge Christ, excepting in the matter of Divine sonship. But if you are going to succeed in showing the Muslims their error regarding Christ, the whole of your Christian living, including your prayer life, must in the very nature of the case be polemical, that is, it must be an argument against the Muslims’ conception of Christ. If your prayer life is true, genuine and informed it simply cannot be anything but polemical in its relation to the Muslims, when you have NOT demonstrated it but explained it to them.

### QUESTIONS

1. Discuss whether prayer should be used as an instrument of Christian witness.
2. To what extent is the difference between Christian and Muslim prayer formed by the different beliefs about the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Allah?
3. (a) Comment on the Lord’s Prayer as ‘the prayer of one who seeks to serve God here on earth’.  
 (b) What is the effect of the Muslim’s prayer in his daily life?

## SECTION FOUR

# WHAT ABOUT THE QUESTION OF UNIVERSALITY?



## CHAPTER 15

# Is Christianity Universal?

1. In this and the following chapter we will discuss the question of the universality of the two religions which both claim to be universal. Universal should be understood to mean: applicable to all men, because true in an absolute sense. Obviously, then, only one of the two can be universal. Why does the Muslim think Islam is universal? And why does the Christian think Christianity is universal? You have probably all been brought up with the idea that Christianity is for everybody, everywhere, as the song says it:

Brown and yellow, black and white  
All are precious in His sight.

2. Taking the universality of Christianity for granted may be all right wherever no one questions it, but many a Christian has been shocked when the Muslim begins arguing about it.

3. I will give you a very common Muslim point of view. Muhammed Ali, in his *The Religion of Islam* (p. 225) says:

Jesus Christ was the last of these national prophets; and though the message of Christianity has now been conveyed to all nations of the world, yet that was never Christ's own idea. He was perfectly sure that he was 'not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 15:24); so sure indeed that he did not hesitate to call those who were not Israelites 'dogs' in comparison with 'the children' who were the Israelites (Matt. 15:26), and the bread of the children could not be cast to the dogs. Nevertheless, the idea of casting the heavenly bread of Jesus to the same non-Israelite 'dogs' entered the head of one of his disciples, after 'the children' had shown no desire to accept that bread.

4. This passage from Matthew 15 is, of course, the one easiest to find, and is therefore the one most often used by Muslims in their polemics. There are, however, others you will come across:

- (a) In Matthew 1:21 the angel is represented as saying to Joseph concerning Jesus: He shall save HIS people (the Jews) from THEIR sins. Purely tribal.
- (b) In Matthew 10 where Jesus sends out the twelve to preach, you hear him saying that they were NOT to go to the Gentiles, nor to the Samaritans (a half-heathenish tribe) but ONLY to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
- (c) In John 12 some Greeks want to see Jesus. We do not know if they succeeded or not. Nothing seems to have come of it.

If the Muslims find others and show them to you do not be surprised.

5. Now, however you may answer the Muslim about the separate episodes, one fact remains clear and indisputable: Our Lord did stay definitely inside the frame of Jewry in His work and preaching. An indirect proof of this statement may be found in the attitude of His disciples after His ascension. Think this over. In Acts 1 our Lord, just before leaving them, gives His disciples the commission to be His witnesses unto the farthest ends of the earth. In our way of thinking, that command is as clear as words can make it. But in Acts 10, when St Peter went to Cornelius's house, it took special vision and command from God to move him outside Jewry. And when he had gone there, the pillars of the Church in Jerusalem questioned him for having overstepped the bounds. They all knew of the command to witness to the ends of the earth but, in their way of thinking, that did NOT include non-Jews. If our Lord had preached for and worked with Gentiles as well as Jews, all the details of opposition recorded around the Cornelius episode would never have been written. It could not have happened.

6. Better read Muslims know all these facts from Christian writers, and they never hesitate to use them in their attack on Christianity. Your question is: what are you going to do about it? If the Muslim succeeds in shutting your mouth about the validity of the claim of Christianity to be universal, he has stopped you even before you get started.

7. I find that in most cases, both Pakistani and foreign, the Christian has received little or no teaching on the subject. On the contrary, the universality of Christianity is taken for granted, and the emphasis is put on your personal responsibility to propagate the universal religion universally. The argument in your case has in all probability been either moral or philosophical.

8. The moral argument is illustrated this way: If you were seriously ill and some remedy was found to save your life, then you would be duty-bound to pass on the good news of that remedy to all others. I have heard a two-edged argument from Muslims in answer to this: (i) the fact that it was a good remedy for you does not necessarily mean it is good for everybody; and (ii) the fact that you found that remedy does not exclude the possibility that someone else had found another, and even better, remedy. Actually this moral argument comes from an age when Christians, in the light of worldly-wise philosophies, were rather ashamed to admit that there was a 'Thus saith the Lord' that motivated their actions. If you have been playing around with this superficial, rationalistic argument, my advice to you is: Drop it like a hot brick. It is no good. It proves nothing as far as the universality of Christianity is concerned, and it makes your ego the centre of attention and attraction.

9. The philosophical argument is that since God is one God, and Jesus Christ is His only begotten Son, it naturally follows that there can only be one religion and it is therefore universal. St Peter's words are used (rather, misused): 'There is no other name given under heaven whereby men must be saved'. What happens when the Muslim hears this line of thought? (i) First of all, he refuses to accept the uniqueness of Christ. Therefore your argument means nothing to him. This point will come up again in the following chapter; and (ii) he will ask you if Abraham, Moses, David and all the other prophets are lost, since none of them believed on the name of Christ. The Muslim who knows the New Testament (and there are many of them) will tell you that St Paul says Abraham was saved by faith. He simply took God at His word and that act was accounted righteousness for him. Abraham knew nothing of Christ, and yet he is the father of all who have faith. In other words, it is not Christ but faith in God that is universally accepted. So says the Muslim.

10. Arguments of this kind are two-edged swords that cut to pieces the faith of unwary or uninformed Christians. The difficulty, as far as the Christian is concerned, is that he unwittingly has drifted off into philosophical arguments, instead of making sure that his every thought is taken captive by Christ. There is one fact that cannot be over-emphasised: anything and everything we know about God MUST be through Christ. Before Him, after Him or apart from Him we know nothing—nothing whatsoever. Let me assure you that philosophically the Muslim will present a better case for his Islam than you can for your Christianity. There are very good reasons for this state of affairs, as later chapters will show. Do

not let that worry you. God's foolishness is wiser than the wisdom of the philosophers. Only be sure it is God's foolishness (not your own) you are presenting!

11. Before we get on to the positive side of the matter let us clear up a couple of points where Christians—only through sheer carelessness—get all muddled up:

(a) The Jewish Christians were definitely isolationists up to the time of the episode in Cornelius's house. Admit that: it is history, pure and simple. Apparently the reason why the disciples did not understand the full implication of our Lord's commission to them to witness unto the ends of the earth was that, in their mind, the Commission meant that they must also preach to the Jews of the dispersion. At the time of Christ there were Jews spread out in small colonies all over the face of the then known earth. There were more Jews living outside of their homeland than inside. It was quite reasonable to presume that also they should hear the good news. In other words, the disciples who heard the command of Jesus could easily have understood it to mean 'for Jews only', especially, as we have said before, since Christ Himself stayed inside Jewry.

There is nothing at all remarkable about this. Remember our Lord did not give the whole and complete truth to His disciples. Look again, for example, at the first chapter in Acts. The disciples connect the coming of the Spirit with the restoration of the kingdom. Not, mind you, with the 'kingdom of heaven' as we think of it, but with the Jewish theocracy. Jesus did NOT answer their questioning. He purposely left them in ignorance. Jesus in His teaching counted definitely on the work of the Holy Spirit. In John 16:12 He says there were many things they ought to know, but they could not yet bear them. Later, when the Holy Spirit had come, He would guide them in the way of Truth. Our Lord's attitude was: Do not cross your bridges until you get to them. And when you get there the Holy Spirit will guide you across. When the time came—in the Cornelius episode—for them to cross the gulf between themselves and the world at large, the Holy Spirit was there and did help them. After Cornelius had received the Holy Spirit, our Lord's command was seen in a new light. They knew then that Christianity was really and truly universal.

(b) Another thing Muslim writers (imitating certain Christian heretical authors) love to say is that St Paul, who never saw our Lord in the flesh, and whose ideas about Judaism were very loose, bridged the gulf between the Jews and the Gentiles. He changed the local prophet with his simple, beautiful message of trust in God to a complicated, universal demigod.



St Paul is called the apostle to the Gentiles, and it was he, they say, who carried a gospel of his own making to the heathen.

But—

St Paul did NOT bridge that gulf, as we have already seen. That had already been done by the very man who had been with our Lord from the start. It was done only after a vision had forced the truth into his mind that no man is unclean in relation to others, whatever his nationality or religion. Furthermore, the heads of the Church had debated his move and approved it. So when St Paul arrived on the scene, the gulf had been bridged, and the Church fathers in Jerusalem were able to accept St Paul and give him the right hand of fellowship and their blessing as he went out to the Gentiles with the very message the others were giving to the Jews. Said in another way: it was not a group of broad-minded hellenistic converts that adopted an innovation on moral or philosophical grounds, but the narrow, strict, Jewish group, who had their teaching from the very mouth of our Lord, who were instrumental in bringing about this vital and revolutionary change.

12. With your background you may not see much sense in putting so much stress on this point. It is however of utmost importance, (i) because it is historically true; and (ii) because it takes the question out of the sphere of morals and philosophy, and puts it back into Jewish history where it belongs.

13. We can now proceed to put the question as the Church must put it. If Christ means Christianity to be universal why did He confine Himself to the Jews? The Church has a right to ask and expect an answer to that question. So has the Muslim. The answer starts way back in Genesis 12 with God's promise to Abraham. There God tells Abraham that all the nations of the earth should be blessed through him. Again in the seventh chapter the promise is renewed in that God said He would make Abraham the father of many peoples.

14. When our Lord was talking to the Samaritan woman in John 4 He made the assertion that salvation is of the Jews. And there is no doubt whatsoever that the first Church tied up this promise of God to Abraham in Genesis with the coming of Jesus Christ. Actually all Jews were expecting the fulfilment of that promise as well as those mentioned later in their history.

15. In the New Testament you will find this promise brought in, in two ways. First specifically of Christ Himself, as in Acts 3:25 and thereafter, the true olive tree was the house of Israel on which wild olive

branches are grafted. Those two do not contradict each other, they are supplementary or complementary. Certainly the ‘blessing’ is Christ, but this blessing was channelled through 2000 years of Jewish history. Without this channelling in history Christ could simply never have been Christ. The very name Jesus Christ means the anointed Saviour, and throws you back at once into Jewish history, if you want to understand it. The Jews alone, in all the world, could understand the significance of Christ when He came and they alone in all the world were in a position to make Him universally available. Therefore the history of a small nation, insignificant and unimportant in itself, became the object of more concentrated study than any other nation on earth.

16. Not so very many years ago liberal theologians, and not a few missionaries, threw out the Old Testament as an antiquated and useless book full of myths. The theologians claimed that the moral beauty of Christ and the sublimity of His ethical precepts were such that He needed no background, and they plucked Christ out of history by the roots and transplanted Him into every kind of modern ground. The missionaries, influenced by these theologians, tried to substitute the scriptures of Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. for the Old Testament as background material for Christ. As all are now aware, the result was catastrophic. The New Testament Christ was lost, and the one they retained became a weak, hesitant voice in the wilderness, crying out precepts of a beautiful but impractical and impossible idealism. Thousands of people all over the world accepted Christ as an ideal, an example, a hero and a great teacher—and all of them remained in their own particular brand of darkness, spiritually; and in their own ethical failure, morally. In other words, history in very recent times has clearly shown that Christ is not Christ in the Christian sense, when He is not channelled in Jewish history.

17. Now you should be able to see that if you are going to explain Christianity as universal your very first step is to maintain, as our Lord Himself did that:

### **Salvation is of the Jews.**

It should not be too difficult to point out how God brought the Jewish nation into line and prepared it to receive the Anointed One, the Christ, when the time was at hand.

18. The next step is to see how Christ, when He did come, was lifted out of the channel of Jewry to become the universal blessing that God promised to all the nations of the earth, through Abraham.

19. The whole question of revelation is being taken up fully in a later chapter. However, we must touch on it here also in order to understand our subject today.

Revelation is (and must be) historical. When God says 'Let there be . . .', and that which was not comes into being, then, as far as we are concerned, it is always inside history. It is true that we often, in a slipshod manner, speak of the Book as revelation, just as we call a biography: 'The Life of So and So'. The biography is, of course, not that man's life, but only a record of it. Likewise the Book, historically speaking, is not the revelation, but the record of revelation. It is exclusively through the Book that revelation becomes revelation for us, and therefore we call the Book revelation.

20. Now the point here is this, just as sure as revelation is to be found inside history, it must be localised and channelled at one particular point somewhere in history. If you go off into the sand dunes of natural religion, where God is seen in everything, you will find He is revealed in nothing. We may or may not see God in history or in nature, but we cannot say that God reveals Himself in history, as such, or in nature. If this statement seems strange to you, read carefully the first chapter of Romans. That which the heathen should know of God through history and nature is His eternal power and Godhead. The two words can only mean one thing: that God is outside the range of our natural thinking. Who can comprehend what eternal Power and Godhead are? Their sin was that when they knew Him as God, that is, as unknowable, outside their natural intellectual abilities, they refused to accept that position and through natural religion found gods in nature and history. And the result was, as we can read, horrible. But if you cling to the biblical (and not the philosophical) conception of revelation you will find that there are certain quite definite events, episodes, and occasions inside history which, because they are accepted as revelational, become the touchstone by which all history is judged.

21. Revelational events, episodes and occasions were localised and channelled through Abraham and his people. Almost from the very start of Old Testament history one thought goes through it all like a red thread, mainly, choice and separation. God chose Abraham and separated him from his own people. Then Isaac was chosen and separated, and thereafter in a very dramatic manner, Jacob. In Romans 9 Paul places great emphasis on this point that God, according to His own purpose and will, chooses and separates men and nations for carrying out His plans. David stands out

clearly as another chosen and separated man. Later the ten tribes are discarded and disappear, and only two were retained. The tribe of Judah was the 'Lion', again chosen of God and kept separated from the overwhelming forces of heathenism. Finally, after the Babylonian exile we can follow the house of Israel until John the Baptist is chosen and called out to prepare the way for Christ Himself.

22. The point we want to make here is that even inside God's chosen people revelational acts, events and occasions were constantly channelled. Jewish history as a whole is not the bearer of revelation, for there is constant localisation and channelling also here. It could not be otherwise if we are to have revelation in history, without history itself becoming revelation.

Let me illustrate my point in this way. The British built some wonderful irrigation systems in India. The water is channelled and localised by means of head works, canals, viaducts, tunnels and channels. The water is carefully kept inside the system until it reaches the fields where it is then allowed to flow out freely and cover all the ground bringing great blessing to the whole countryside. The universal watering of the countryside is only possible because the water has been localised, restricted, channelled. Without the irrigation system, no water.

Now to retain the metaphor, at what point in biblical history does the water, the blessing, flow freely out into the fields? We saw in the beginning that it is NOT at the point where Christ was introduced into the picture. Christ, as the Revelation of God, the blessing promised to all, worked in the same way as His Father in heaven. He chose and separated unto Himself certain men who had been with Him from the beginning, who had seen, heard, understood, and believed. These men became His apostles. Not the whole nation of Jews, not even the whole body of believers, was chosen. These men—the Apostles—were the final gates through which the blessing was to flow out into the world.

23. Apart from this ACT of our Lord in choosing and separating unto Himself these men, as His authoritative Apostolate (which in itself constitutes a very clear proof of the fact that Christ was planning along the lines found in the Old Testament), there are many indications in the Gospels that Christ's teaching was such that with the later enlightenment of the Holy Spirit no mistake could be made regarding His universal intention. The Gospel of St John abounds in statements of this kind, but also the synoptics have them. See for example Matthew 8 where Christ says that many shall come from the east and the west and sit down

with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Likewise His final commission to the disciples (with any wording you prefer) is always of a universal character.

In other words, serious students of the New Testament documents cannot doubt that our Lord Himself was aware of His own universal significance.

24. I am perfectly aware of the fact that the use of the word ‘apostle’ in the New Testament does not have cast-iron rigidity. It is used loosely as well as in the official sense. This is as might be expected, for in the final analysis it is a very common Greek word indicating one who has been sent. There is therefore no reason to feel uneasy because it is used in both ways. History teaches us that in the early Church and right on down, the historical basis of the truth of the Christian religion was the Apostolate, a group of men chosen by our Lord to be His official spokesmen and interpreters. Thus when the Nicene Creed was written the Church was conceived of as being one holy, catholic, apostolic Church. This was not an innovation at the time but a part of the faith of the universal Church from the very start.

25. But what are we confessing when we say we believe in one holy, catholic, apostolic Church? Undoubtedly there are many overzealous Protestants who are afraid of that word, because of the Roman Catholic use of it. But whatever the Roman Catholics may or may not teach regarding their apostolate, the fact still remains that historically the true Church is apostolic. That simply means the Apostles were the final floodgates through which the blessing pours out into the world, and any attempt to tap the water supply independent of the Apostles is surely doomed to failure. We cannot therefore discard the universal teaching of the Church about the Apostolate because certain people misuse it, or ignore it.

As far as we are concerned the Apostolate means three things:

(a) It is ONLY through the Apostles that the world knows of Christ. He is undoubtedly mentioned a couple of times by outside historians, but destroy the apostolic witness to Christ in history, and Christ is lost.

(b) It is ONLY on the authority of the Apostles that we have the true understanding of and interpretation of all revelational facts inside history. Take away the Apostolic interpretation of revelational facts, and Christ—even if He were known in isolation from His background—would become a weak voice with an uncertain sound, drowned out by the blare of the ever present trumpets of the wise men of the world.

(c) It is ONLY through the agency of the Apostles that the world at large and every individual person can attain to a true (saving) knowledge of God. For there is no other way of gaining such knowledge of God except in and through Christ.

26. If you know something of Church History you will realise that practically all that I have said in this chapter is pre-Reformation teaching. The Reformation itself did NOT alter anything in this doctrine of the universality of Christ as based on the Apostolate. What happened was this. The purely mechanical aspect of the continuation of the Apostolate was rejected. The Church itself (understood as the whole body of Christ and not the priesthood within the Church) became the bearer of the Apostolate. Even if any one Church did have its priestly genealogy in perfect order right from the hands of the Apostles themselves, that would not constitute a guarantee that that Church really was a worthy successor to the spirit and faith of the Apostles. The point is that the pastor is in the apostolic succession, not exclusively because of the laying on of hands, but because he is ordained in and by the Church in the spirit, faith and obedience of the Apostles.

27. However, in post-Reformation times innovations have been introduced into large sections of the Christian Church whereby men try to short cut the historical and get knowledge of God in different ways.

28. The three most common are intuition, mysticism and pietism. Think how often the word 'feel' is used discussing matters pertaining to Christianity. 'I feel this must be the right interpretation of this or that passage.' 'I felt that God wanted me to do this or that.' 'I felt that God was sending me to the mission field.' Now intuition may be a good and useful thing in our daily lives, but it is not the channel through which knowledge of God and His will comes to us. And when you are facing the Muslim, if you cannot say something stronger than 'I feel . . .', you might as well go home.

Mysticism is, of course, an age-old, monotonous trick of fallen man in all religions. You simply bypass everything historical and learn to know 'ultimate reality' without the help of your senses or your thinking. But a true mystic in Christianity can never believe in the universality of Christ, for as the mystic in every religion bypasses history, so also he bypasses history.

Pietism says: I have experienced the love of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, therefore I know it is true. And what is true for me may also

become true for you. But when the Muslim (or anyone else) answers: ‘Oh but I already have a rich spiritual experience of God. I have no need for preaching’—then what? Either you must call him a liar (which is not wise to do) or else you shut your mouth.

29. In other words, if you want to make the Muslim understand that the Christian faith is universal in every way, you can only hope to do so by trying to show him that only as God’s revelational acts were localised and channelled from the call of Abraham to the call of the Apostles of Christ could the meaning of those revelational acts convey to all men, in all countries and in all ages, a true knowledge of God, of man, and of God’s relationship to man. And only with that knowledge present is there a possibility for faith in every tribe and every nation on the face of God’s green earth.

30. Finally, I want to anticipate the next chapter with just one remark. If you stop with our Lord in your argument about the universality of Christianity, the Muslim is very likely to maintain that Muhammed is a further and final link in the chain of history. If, however, the Apostolate is the point at which the channelled revelation breaks out into the world, it automatically excludes Muhammed or any other prophet coming after the Apostolate.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why did God channel His revelation through the Jewish people?
2. What is the significance of the position of the Apostles in the progress of God’s revelation of Himself?
3. A Muslim makes the claim that Jesus is a national prophet. Outline your reply.

## CHAPTER 16

# Is Islam Universal?

1. You probably feel that you need a clear answer to the question, ‘Is Islam universal?’ because you run up against so many contradictory points of view among Muslims themselves. If you expect something clear cut, like St Peter’s statement (Acts 4:12) that ‘there is no other name given under heaven than the name of Jesus whereby men must be saved’—you are going to be disappointed. Neither the Quran nor the Muslim will ever give you such a statement. All you can hope for is an understanding of why the Quran does not give such a statement, and why the Muslims contradict each other and (often enough) themselves when talking about the universality of their religion. From a purely theological point of view the question of universality hinges on the question of truth. Anything that is true in an absolute sense is also necessarily, universally true. However, just as we in the last chapter took up the question of the universality of Christianity historically so we here must do the same with the Islamic claim to universality.

2. There is one fact that you must keep in mind: Islam is, here and now, the religion of about 1/6th of mankind. You need only look at a map showing the religions of the world to see how widespread it is. In other words, Islam has succeeded in some ways at least in adapting itself to tribes and nations in practically all parts of the earth. This is important to remember, for it will come up again later on.

3. The difficulty is that there are really two Islams in Islam. The one started with Adam; the other with Muhammed. Let us call the first Islam, the one that started with Adam, the original Islam; and the second one, the one Muhammed brought, we might call Arabian Islam. Somewhere along the line a switch-over has been attempted. It is this switch-over on which the modernists are working feverishly. We may therefore be justified in dividing the subject into three sections; original Islam, Arabian Islam, and the modernistic Islam.



## ORIGINAL ISLAM

4. I have often speculated on the reason for Muhammed not becoming a Christian (or a Jew). Some writers deplore the heretical state of the Church and say that if the Church had only been shipshape Muhammed would certainly have accepted Christ. Perhaps the Church was more heretical at that time than usual, but purity of doctrine and the pentecostal fire of keenness is no guarantee for gaining converts. Muhammed had no quarrel with either Christians or Jews in the beginning. He revered them. He believed they had the true religion. He told them to stick to their own Books.

Furthermore, in his first burst of religious teaching he really said nothing the Syrian monks and the Jewish rabbis did not say. He did not say all that they said, but what he did say was what they said. Then why did he not join forces with the one or the other and become a Christian or a Jew?

5. If we could ever find the correct answer to that question we would know a lot about his idea of the universality of Islam. As it is, we can only guess.

6. It would appear that during the years in which Muhammed was groping for light, and before the angel Gabriel first contacted him, two parallel thoughts had taken hold of his mind. The first thought is very well expressed in a book, written by a Muslim, called *Towards Understanding Islam*.<sup>1</sup> The author says:

The fundamental principle of all the religions was the same, that is, belief in only one God, the certainty of reward and punishment hereafter and a life of all good, peaceful, moderate and sensible actions.

7. Muhammed in his early years would probably have approved of this statement. We in this century see nothing new or startling in the idea that fundamentally all the religions are the same. We even have the proverb: 'All roads lead to Rome', meaning that all religions lead to God. However, neither the Christians nor the Jews hold this doctrine, but Tor Andrae, in his book on Muhammed, thinks he picked it up from the Manichaens, a sect that started in the 3rd century in Iran, and spread very considerably before the coming of Muhammed. Be that as it may, the fact remains that wherever he got it, he had it.

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<sup>1</sup> Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, translated by Abdul Ghani, Tarjumanul Quran, Lahore, p. 47.

8. It is interesting in this connection to note what he says about Abraham. Sura 3:66 says that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a Hanif, a Muslim. Just what the word 'Hanif' means is not known, but it is invariably used over against idolaters. It is therefore taken to mean a man who in one way or another had got a deeper insight into things of the spirit, and therefore believed in the unity of God, life after death, and the need of sober living, for one had to answer for one's deeds.

9. You will remember that when St Paul argues that faith is superior to the works of the law he says that Abraham was acceptable to God because of faith long before Moses brought the law. Muhammed had evidently been thinking along the same lines at one time in his career. Call the religion whatever you like—if it teaches faith in the unity of God, in life after death and in the Judgment Day, and if it admonishes people to live soberly, it is in principle the true faith, that is, Islam, submission to God. This particular faith started with Adam and in spite of the many efforts of Iblis, Satan, to destroy it, it spread throughout the world. Muhammed called this original, natural faith Islam, and every adherent of it a Muslim, regardless of what these people called themselves.

10. The other thought that ran parallel with, and in a sense complements, the above was this: in order that this original, natural faith in God should not perish from the face of the earth, God has sent Warners, prophets, to every nation. They were especially called of God to teach people the truth about the unity of God and life after death, and to warn them to flee from the wrath to come. Although there was a difference of degree in these Warners, some being greater than others, yet they were all in the same category, all were to be believed. There is no difference between them for they were all chosen of God, they all taught the truth about the unity of God, and they all warned people of the great Judgment Day that was about to come. Some Muslims put the figure of these Warners as high as 124,000. That at least goes to show that they were not conceived of as being only inside the framework of Jewry.

11. If you accept the contention that Muhammed, before he became a prophet, was preoccupied with thoughts as outlined above (and I hardly think anyone can seriously doubt it), then we obviously have the answer to the question of why Muhammed never became a Christian or a Jew. There was simply no need for it. He, as he was, as an independent Arab, could be just as genuine an adherent of the original, natural religion as any Christian, Jew or Zoroastrian. Some people wonder why Muhammed rejected Christ. He did not. What he knew of Him he could easily fit into

his own picture of true religion. There was no need for this or that particular label, as these labels were only accidents of time and place. Adam, Noah, and Abraham were genuine adherents of the faith, and yet they carried no labels, even as prophets; why then should Muhammed? Under the section 'Arabian Islam' you will see that when Muhammed's conception of religion developed into an independent religion and was labelled 'Islam', Muhammed then considered his arrival on the scene a definite advance in the prophetic line. All the threads of prophetic religion were gathered up and completed in him. But that was many years later.

12. Then there is the second point. If God sent a Warner to every nation, why did the Arabs not have one? Why was it necessary for Arabs to seek the truth among other people? Why was there no warning, no teaching given to the Arabs in their own language? In his many stories of the Warnings sent to various people, Muhammed did include two men, Hud and Zalil, who were supposed to have preached the true faith in the Arabian Peninsula in past ages (see Suras 7, 9, 11, etc.), but the people who heard them were disobedient and were destroyed so that no trace of true religion was left among the Arabs. In other words, I doubt whether anyone can deny that, prior to his own call to the prophethood, Muhammed's idea was that all religions which contained certain basic facts were in reality one and the same, and the universality of that one real religion was dependent on the ubiquity of prophets. What I am trying to say is this: Muhammed thought that true religion was universal because God had sent His prophets all over the world to preach the true religion to all nations. This true religion came with different names in different places, in diverse languages, and accompanied by a great variety of rituals and symbols. True religion was therefore universal. In some nations the truth had been lost, and now Warners had to be sent; in other nations no Warner had yet appeared—still, as a whole, true religion had been and was being preached universally.

13. A man with such ideas would naturally be more occupied with the hope of an Arabian Warner to come, than he would with thoughts of accepting the label of one of the non-Arabian prophets.

14. Now do not take the foregoing as a build-up for the rather superficial psychological argument that Muhammed by means of autosuggestion believed himself to be the prophet the Arabs so badly needed. His entire conduct after the first shock of being called cries aloud against any such theory. Here we are just getting at the fact that when Muhammed faced the angel Gabriel he simply could not have thought he was being called to be

the prophet of a *new* religion that was destined to replace all others and become the one universal religion. The testimony of the Quran is too clear to allow of any such contention. Again and again Muhammed says he is only a Warner, just like all the other Warners who had gone before him.

15. The same is true of the Quran. In Sura 12 you read: ‘An Arabic Quran have we sent it down, that ye might understand it’. The irony of the situation is that now children all over the world are learning parrot-wise to recite the Quran in Arabic, without understanding a word of it. But at the time when that verse was written Muhammed’s idea must have been that now true religion, the original, natural religion of Adam, Noah, Abraham and hundreds of other prophets, had also reached the Arabs in their own tongue. Now they no longer had any excuse for remaining in the sin of idolatry. Now they must accept Islam, the religion that already was known even from the days of Adam, all through the world.

16. If you had any contact at all with Muslims the chances are that you have already met this kind of argument. It looks as though the Muslim is only pleading for enough open-mindedness in the Christian to see that this line of thought does make good sense, and therefore he should recognise Islam as a legitimate expression of that one true and natural religion that belongs to the one God. He will call you Ahl-i-Kitab (People of a Book); he will associate with you on his own level and eat with you. He will marry a Christian woman without trying to convert her to Islam. He will tell you that on the Last Day Jesus will intercede for you just as Muhammed will intercede for him. And—he will crave your cooperation as a brother in the true faith, to fight against that worldwide evil thing, Communism.

17. But look at it for a moment. When he says, figuratively speaking, that Islam and Christianity are both great branches on the tree of true religion he is not only saying something about Islam, but also about Christianity. He is telling you that your Lord is NOT the Son of God. He is NOT the Saviour of the world. He is NOT in any absolute sense, the Way and the Truth and the Life. He is telling you that there is nothing whatsoever unique about Jesus of Nazareth. Christ is one of the six great prophets, one of the 313 who brought books, one of the 124,000 whom God has sent into all the world to preach true religion, or, if you like, Islam. It is well worthwhile here to go back to the chapter on Intolerance and re-read it. The intolerance of Christians, their ‘narrow-mindedness’ on this point, has always been a stumbling block for Muslims. Their claim of absolute uniqueness for Christ and absolute universality for Christianity

makes Muslims furious. There is, however, no way of avoiding this attitude. Any man who is true to Christ can never accept this Muslim idea of true religion. Once it would have hardly been necessary to write in this way. Today, however, because of the fear of Communism, there is a definite trend noticeable in which Christians are prepared to ally themselves with Muslims since both have much to lose if Communism gets the upper hand. This trend is very noticeable in much of the propagandist literature given out by the American Information Service in Karachi. It was obvious on the occasion of the opening of the new mosque in Washington, that is, especially in the 'sermon' of the Christian minister who preached there. And it is clear in the 'Voice of America' on the radio.

18. Not only is this attitude on the part of Christians a betrayal of Christ, but it shows that many Christians do not have a true conception of the real concrete Islam of today. For this original Islam, that started with Adam, is in reality now only a pleasant theory, something that can be found in the Quran, but which has been superseded by an entirely different conception of things.

### **ARABIAN ISLAM**

19. Actually it is hard, if not impossible, to say how long or how seriously Muhammed allowed himself to be influenced by his own theory of a universally true religion, of which his Arabian Islam was just a branch.

20. To begin with, let us look at that idea of a Warner being sent to every nation. Although it is in the Quran, it simply does not fit in with the facts. Muhammed was acquainted with Arabian, Egyptian, Syrian and Abyssinian Christians. He also knew of Roman, Persian, and Byzantine Christians. The fact is, then, that he knew of at least seven nations spread out on all sides of Arabia, who had one and the same 'prophet', that is, our Lord. Then again, he knew that with very few exceptions, all the prophets had come in the house of Israel, and that the Jews at Medina would never admit to even the possibility of a prophet arising outside of Jewry. Naturally neither Jews nor Christians would accept his conception of religion and his prophet-for-every-nation theory. He therefore began his polemics against both these communities. Note: not against their prophets nor against their books, but against the people who, in Muhammed's opinion, falsify and corrupt the teaching of the books.

21. Chronologically it is, of course, impossible to be sure of anything in the Quran, but apparently the next step was an abrogation theory. That is to say, all that was necessary for mankind to know and remember had been incorporated in the Quran. The Quran is called an instruction for all mankind, and a warning for all creatures. And finally you find Muhammed designating himself as the seal of the prophets, that is, he is the last prophet God will send to mankind. What became of the prophet-for-every-nation theory in the meantime, no one knows. The Muslims get around this question by saying that until Muhammed came there was a prophet for every nation, but that when he came there was no longer any need for more prophets. We will come back to this point later in the chapter.

22. It naturally follows that if Muhammed is the last of the prophets, and the Quran is the final book to be sent down from heaven, then both are to be accepted as universal, at least universality is indicated.

23. There is another interesting thing that happened in the course of Islam's development. First, Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but a Hanif, a Muslim, a man who had reached a deep knowledge of the unity of God, and as such is used as an example of true universal Islam. Now when St Paul uses Abraham as the shining example of faith, he calls him the father of all who have faith. In other words his application of the illustration is purely spiritual. Muhammed did the same in the beginning. But, for some unknown reason, later on he insisted on a physical line of descent. Ishmael and his mother are then dramatised. The Ka'aba was built (or rather rebuilt) by Abraham. The holy well Zamzam gives water now as to Ishmael of old, and every year the big feast of sacrifice reminds all followers of the prophet that Muhammed was a physical descendant of the great Hanif, Abraham.

24. The question one naturally asks is, if all prophets of all nations are of one category, if no difference exists between them, if they all are called and sent of God, then why all this sudden enthusiasm about being in the direct line of descent from Abraham? It is easy to ask the question. It is hard to find the answer.

25. One thing we have to remember: no single thought or doctrine or teaching ever developed in isolation. Much of what we now find difficult to trace would have been extremely easy if we knew the exact chronology of Muhammed's utterances, and were able to relate them to the correct episodes or to other thoughts developing parallel with these.

26. Let us take an example that is relevant to our subject. Whatever the religious content of the message of Islam may be, its fundamental nature is

politico-theocratic. It was so from the very start. That is natural enough. All the prophets of Jewry that Muhammed mentions were national leaders, not at all prophets in our sense of the word. Just when Muhammed came to the conclusion that being a prophet not only meant being a Warner, but also the leader of forces which were to enforce the message, is hard to say. So much we do know, that adherents of the new religion not only accepted Muhammed as their prophet, but also as their political leader, whom they swore they would obey.

27. Now when a religion is conceived of as being a theocratic state by nature, that is, when the prophets or the hierarchy or the leaders of religion want a nation to be built on the basis of the religion they advocate, then both internal and external politics are introduced, as well as the use of diplomacy and military force. Working or fighting for the state then becomes divine service, for the state is working or fighting for God. War then becomes jihad, the holy War.

Do not forget that not a little of the history of the development of Islam reminds us forcefully of what happened in the Roman Church. Even today the Vatican is a temporal power with representatives of all nations at its court just like any other nation. The fact that the actual worldly power of the Roman Church is nil, as far as military force is concerned, does not vitiate the fact that the Romans still believe the pope should be in possession of both the temporal and the spiritual sword.

28. There is still another side to the picture of Islam. Muhammed got the whole of Arabia (more or less) gathered together under his religio-political banner. When he died, Abu Bakr and Omar saved the new nation from falling to pieces and at once set out on wars of conquest. In that day and generation there was nothing new or unusual in a nation trying its luck at conquest. Practically all the larger nations were constantly waging war, either to take or retake territory. The point is that a theocratic state would naturally have an added impulse to spur the armies on. They were fighting in the way of God, fighting for the glory of God and Islam. If they fell on the battle field they had the assurance that they would go directly to paradise, no questions asked, and if they won on the battle-field and lived, theirs was a fair share of the loot and booty. Then, as always, there were plenty of people who were prepared to accept the new religion if that meant getting a share of the spoils and not having to suffer under the humiliating conditions of surrender laid down by the conqueror. In fact in the reign of Omar so many non-Arabs joined forces with the Arabs and became Muslims that he had to change

the law regarding spoils, so that only Arab Muslims were entitled to a share.

29. What I am trying to get at is this. The fact of the universality of Arabian Islam was established because of the successful conquests of the theocratic Arab state, regardless of what theories may or may not be found in the Quran.

I am sure in the meantime that Kraemer is absolutely right when he says that Islam 'has indelibly ingrained in its system the conviction that the world's rightful destiny is to become the domain of Islamic empire' (*International Review of Missions*, April, 1953, p. 145). In other words, although there definitely is a basis in the Quran for arguing the belief in one true, universal, natural religion that started with Adam and has been spread and maintained through the agency of prophets, still the dominating fact in the universality of Islam is NOT that belief in the original Islam, but the military successes of the Arabic politico-theocratic state of Islam.

30. We might conclude in this way: that whatever thoughts about religion Muhammed may have had that eventful day in the cave of Hira when he is supposed to have been contacted by Gabriel, the historical fact is that Arabian Islam developed into a tremendous religio-political, religio-economic, religio-social system, built up on the basis of a theocratic state, which, as soon as it was able to do so, sent out armies in wars of conquest. Because these wars were successful Arabian Islam became universal. No one will deny that Abu Bakr and Omar, followed by many others, did what the prophet himself would have done, had he lived. They were not deviating from the line of thought and action laid down by Muhammed.

## **MODERN ISLAM**

31. Anybody who has even a superficial knowledge of Islam knows that it is now definitely in a period of crisis, and that this crisis has been brought on, not by some eruptive power within itself, but by the impact of Western contact. Many Muslim writers are feverishly trying to re-interpret Islam so that it may remain intact and regain its position as a world power in spite of its evident lack of elasticity. These writers are constantly hammering away at the supposed fact that Islam is a world religion.

32. It is not our responsibility to judge how much of what these men say and write is sincere, although in many cases that which is written for home consumption in the vernacular press has an entirely different tone from that which is written for world consumption in English. What we



want to know is how these Muslim writers are trying to get the idea across that Islam in the 20th century really is a world religion.

33. I have noticed three direct lines of approach to the subject, none of which is in any real sense Quranic, although each is fully supported by Quranic verses as proof-texts. The decisive factor, that which is ‘indelibly ingrained in its system’, the conviction that Islam is totalitarian—that it should become completely universal as a world empire—does not sound good in our day so it is quietly avoided, while it is stoutly maintained: (i) that holy war, jihad, fighting ‘in the way of God’ is not and never has been conquest, but only and always self-defence. Any student of history knows that it does not take a brilliant lawyer to make aggression look like self-defence. We also know of many cases in history where events have been engineered so that the aggressor may take on the role of the aggrieved, fighting in self-defence only, or fighting for the sake of justice and righteousness; and (ii) the old Arabic formula dividing the world into Dar-ul-Islam (House of Islam) and Dar-ul-harb (House of War), is re-interpreted to mean the Dar-ul-Islam considers only that part of the world as Dar-ul-harb which has designs on the freedom or independence of Islam. The rest of the world, which is neither Dar-ul-Islam nor Dar-ul-harb, can live in peace, resting assured that Islam has no intention of and no Quranic sanction for attacking it or trying to force it either to recognise the Islamic empire as supreme ruler or to become Muslims (see Muhammed Ali’s chapter on jihad—especially pp. 574 ff.—in his *The Religion of Islam*, also Amir Ali’s chapter on ‘The Church Militant of Islam’, pp. 214 ff. in his *The Spirit of Islam*).

34. Remember this is the modern point of view, but is far from what the great bulk of Muslims in the world think. The war cry, ‘Allah-o-Akbar’, and the possibility of loot, can stir the hearts of Muslims today just as it did when the great Ottoman Empire was being built. We have had recent proofs of this in India and Pakistan.

35. The modern Muslims, however, having thus quickly disposed of that which is ‘indelibly ingrained’ in the Islamic system, go on to show just why Islam should be recognised as the world religion. The three direct lines of approach are:

- (a) utilitarianism.
- (b) international prophet.
- (c) universal brotherhood.

Let us take them in that order, although all three usually are found more or less prominently in most writers.

### Utilitarianism

36. If you read a book like Dr. Zaki Ali's *Islam in the World* you will have a good example of what I mean by the utilitarian approach. The underlying thesis of the book is that the fundamental doctrines, laws, rules and regulations of Islam are of such a nature that, if applied to world conditions, no better solution for internal and external troubles could be found. Islam is universal simply because its doctrines are universally applicable, and better than anything the world has ever known.

37. To begin with, Islam is 'simple in its ritual and effective in its piety'. Nothing could be more effective than the month of fasting for self-purification, for 'when a rich man fasts he learns to appreciate the sufferings of the hungry and he learns to provide for the wants of the needy'. 'Alms-giving', according to *The Spirit of Islam*, 'is to create an equalisation fund of human relations for the advantage of the disinherited classes . . . It is characteristic of Islam as a doctrine, that it maintains a beautiful harmony between religion and life; it . . . satisfies equally the material as well as the spiritual claims of man . . . With the advent of Islam woman became more honoured and better treated than before.' Polygamy was known and practiced in Europe at least up to 1533 when John of Leyden, the Anabaptist, married seventeen wives. And the West, even after the first World War, was discussing the advisability of allowing polygamous marriages. So the question is, whether or not Islam was not right under certain conditions to allow polygamy. Islam did not encourage slavery but 'provided in every feasible way for its abolition . . .' On the other hand the Church never did anything for freeing slaves.

All the above is taken from his chapter on 'Islamic Social Order'. And it ends with this very illuminating reference (p. 36):

A great modern Muslim authority affirms that 'a universal social reform could be established by means of eight specific unities all of which are realisable in the Islamic system. These are the unity of the Ummah, or community, of mankind, of religious unity, legislative unity by impartial justice of language and of international policy'. The Islamic social order is neither rigid nor static and its focus of effort is the betterment and ennoblement of human life and character on this earth.

Obviously, the thought at the back of all this is that, from a purely pragmatic point of view, Islam is the religion best suited to be universal.

38. Again, in another chapter Zaki Ali compares Islam as a political system with Soviet communism and Anglo-Saxon democracy, showing how much more appropriate Islam is to fill the needs of all national and international politics. Finally, in his last chapter, he shows how Islam in the World is now already helping men everywhere in their spiritual as well as physical and material needs and troubles.

39. This book is just one among many that are issuing from the Muslim Press, based on the pragmatic philosophy: it works, therefore it is right: accept it. The only thing one can say in answer to this style of propaganda for the universality of Islam is: In actual matter of fact, it does not work and never has. It is, even on a pragmatic basis, wishful thinking based on optimistic misinterpretation of carefully chosen Quranic verses. The writers very rightly would like to see a transformation of this kind in the Islamic world, but Kraemer is again right when he says: ‘There is no inner power in the Islamic countries themselves which produces sufficient moral directive and determination to effect this transformation’.

40. In other words, the universality of Islam based on pragmatism or utilitarianism is nothing but an empty postulate. And it is high time that people, who really know everyday Islam, should speak up and give the lie to all this wishful thinking, dream-books that can easily fascinate ill-informed and unwary outsiders.

### **The International Prophet**

41. There are other Muslim writers who know that non-Muslims are only too well aware of the actual conditions in all Muslim countries. They also know that whatever there may be of rejuvenation in Islam has been caused by impulses received from the outside, not from Islam itself. They therefore base their heaviest arguments for the Universality of Islam NOT on the practical results which Islam brings, but on the prophet himself. These writers are usually students of Christian theology and Church history, and this effort at making Muhammed universal as a prophet is the best imitation they could make of Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour of mankind.

42. Their argument is usually something like this. When the world was young and small tribes were scattered and isolated, God sent prophets to each of them as needed. These prophets may rightly be called national prophets. It was their job to teach people the pure and genuine religion of Adam, Noah, Abraham, and all the other prophets, and to warn them of the

consequences if they disobeyed. Beside this they were to prepare men's minds, as far as it was humanly possible in their generation, for the coming of the great, final international prophet. Some of these had books of revelation sent down from heaven. Others did not. When this work was finished, they disappeared, and the books they brought were again taken up to heaven, so that no trace of them was left on earth. The true Muslim believes in 'prophets'—it is part of his confession of faith—and he believes in 'books'. He therefore reveres and honours all prophets, whether he knows their names or not, for they were all mighty men of God, in their own day and generation.

43. However, as the world grew older it grew smaller. Communication and travel became extensive. The needs of nations therefore became more unified. Also, mankind had been raised by these national prophets to a point where they were able to comprehend the meaning of an international prophet with an international message. Then, in the fulness of time, God sent that prophet Muhammed of Arabia, a country also geographically central in the earth. On Muhammed was sent down the final book, the Quran, in which all the necessary and eternal teaching of all the other prophets was included. The Quran is therefore the final teaching from God and valid for all mankind everywhere.

44. There are, however, certain people who have completely misunderstood their own national prophets. The Jews, for example, cling to a few of the old revealed books as though they had eternal validity, although these clearly speak of a great and final prophet to come, like unto Moses. The Christians, on the other hand, fell into the sin so common in that generation of deifying their prophet, although he himself made no claim to be other than a national prophet like all other national prophets. The idea of deification brought with it the idea of universality.

45. It is therefore the duty of every true Muslim to help Jews and Christians now to see the errors of their forebears and to accept the final international world prophet and his teaching. In doing so they are not belittling any of the national prophets, for each of these has foretold that the international prophet would come, and he would bring the final perfect revelation for all mankind. That is, if they would only accept the teaching of their own national prophet, they would, in obedience to him, turn to the perfect man, the international prophet, Muhammed.

46. So much for the thought behind the idea of the international prophet. Now what are you going to say to that? You can easily see what it is: a mixture of the 'Original Islam' of Muhammed's first days, and the

‘Arabian Islam’, of his latter days. This theory sidesteps the fact of a contradiction between the two Islams, and it ignores completely the religio-political theocratic state that true Arabian Islam craves as essential. In other words, it crudely spiritualises the political conception of Islam, which, as a matter of fact and history, made Islam universal.

### **Universal Brotherhood**

47. Here the emphasis is wholly humanitarian. The ills of the world are due exclusively to the principle of isolation. Man is man’s greatest enemy. Greed, lust for power, hate, prejudice, suspicion, exploitation—all of these spring from one great universal characteristic in man—isolation. In this natural condition religion has often been used as a lever to increase the isolation, for religion has usually been national or group conscious, and has often been used as an excuse for waging war. Jews and Christians have been guilty, perhaps more than any other people, of keeping this spirit of isolation alive.

48. Muhammed, on the other hand, laid down both by precept and example the new law: that there is no distinction of race, caste, colour, position, language or privileges among the children of Adam. Muhammed made no distinction between himself and his poorest slave. It was a negro who first was given the job of calling to prayers. Mankind is one great universal brotherhood with unbounded liberty of spirit, as taught by the prophet. If only nations everywhere and individuals in nations would genuinely accept the fact of brotherhood of man as universal, the first step would be taken towards solving the problems of our complicated and hectic age. But man will never be able to get the victory over the sins of isolation until he, with the eyes of faith, sees the truth of universal brotherhood in revelation. In other words, before universal brotherhood can become an active and decisive force in the world, it has to be accepted, by faith, as being the meaning of life on earth. This revelation came through Muhammed and was spread throughout the world in the teaching of Islam.

49. A thousand illustrations are then culled from history to show how the universal brotherhood in Islam became a matter of daily life in adherents of that religion. Examples are taken from the position of women, of children and of slaves. They are taken from wars, and from people subjected to the Islamic Empire after the conclusion of peace treaties. In fact they are taken from every department of life.

50. Since the writers of this type of propaganda advocate liberty of the spirit, meaning the 'brothers' must be absolutely free to believe what they like, they naturally cannot mention the religio-political Arab Muslim state, yet they never hide the fact that before Islam is wholly triumphant in this world a truly universal brotherhood is utterly impossible; NOT, mind you, from the side of the Muslims (they are prepared to live in peace with all mankind), but because non-Muslims simply are not able to attain to this genuine universal brotherhood. No other religion gives them the power to do so.

51. Here again you have wishful thinking. Muslim history will show you that Muslims, as an Arab state and later as an Islamic Empire, used the same deplorable diplomatic and political tricks which all other nations employed. They fought their wars on exactly the same level as all other countries. History will also show you that murder, greed for power, falsehood and all the other evils were just as rampant inside the Muslim community as outside. Further, we all know that the Muslims, each group in its own district, are a close-knit society, but it is more like a cooperative insurance company than a brotherhood. You support it for what you get out of it, not in order to help a weaker brother. Again, who has ever lived, even for a short while, among Muslims who does not know that this so-called brotherhood is exactly that which hinders people in making a free choice of religion? The brotherhood of spiritual liberty that they announce is in reality the brotherhood of bondage.

52. In summing up, one can only say that when all is said and done and all arguments are exhausted there remains one clear fact about the universality of Islam, namely that in so far as Islam today is universal, it is so because as a theocratic state it was victorious in wars of conquest. And today when Muslims again are awakening and dreaming of Islam as a world religion, no one is able to give a clear theological proof of its universality, except insofar as the theocratic state conception of Islam is retained.

53. Let me end these two chapters by saying that the claim to universality of either Islam or Christianity should never be established or rejected by a recital of the good points of one and the weaknesses of the other, for many of them may be parallel in both systems. In the final analysis the claim to universality must be based upon the claim to truth, for anything that is true in an absolute sense is also necessarily universally true.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Why did Muhammed not become a Christian or a Jew?
2. Distinguish between ‘original Islam’ and ‘Arab Islam’.
3. What would you say is the emphasis of ‘modern Islam’ in its endeavour to prove the universality of Islam?





## SECTION FIVE

IS IT 'A BATTLE OF BOOKS'?



## CHAPTER 17

# Yes and No

1. The expression, ‘a Battle of Books’, is a catchphrase used quite often to epitomise the struggle between Christianity and Islam. The idea evidently is that, in the final analysis, this struggle is reduced to a battle between the New Testament and the Quran.

Catchphrases are notoriously dangerous for they tend to oversimplify the problem in question. If you think of the struggle between Christianity and Islam as a Battle of Books, you are right in a certain sense; but if you stop there your overall conception of the problem will be very faulty, and you will not get very far in your work of proclamation.

2. In order to justify the use of this catchphrase you would have to show that both Books are on the same level, and that both sides make identical claims each for its own Book.

3. I hope to show you in this chapter, and in the following chapter on Inspiration and Revelation, that while we do make certain claims for the New Testament which are identical with the claims made by Muslims for their Quran, nevertheless the two Books are NOT, definitely not, on the same level. The place the New Testament occupies in the Church is *not* the same as the place the Quran occupies in Islam.

4. Let us first, then, try to find out just how it is a Battle of Books. The Muslim will tell you three things:

- (a) The Quran is the documentary source of Islam.
- (b) The Quran is fully and perfectly inspired.
- (c) The Quran contains the absolute Truth.

A Christian will tell you the New Testament is the documentary source of Christianity, that it is inspired and that it contains the absolute Truth.

5. Very well. Now if these two Books agreed on all major issues (as some would have us believe) we might easily reconcile minor differences and settle down happily together with our Muslim friends, calling them brethren in the faith. Nothing would please the ordinary Muslim more, for that is just what *he* wants. He thinks of us as Ahl-i-Kitab (People of a Book) and he reveres our 'Prophet' and our Injil. If we would only do the same regarding *his* Prophet and *his* Quran the story would have the usual happy ending.

6. Although we have to admit that the Church has largely shirked its responsibility in preaching the Gospel to Muslims, yet this has never been because the Church has recognised or admitted the validity and truth of the Muslim Book or has accepted its Prophet. In our day and generation, when the free world is in a life and death struggle against Communism, there are people, even some at high levels, who advocate a get together with Muslims in order to fight Communism. In making a bid for this kind of solidarity they try to throw a veil over the obvious differences and contradictions between the two Books. In World War II the Allies supported Communist Russia in its struggle against Nazi Germany. The Allies have to pay for it now. Even if some excuse could be found for the leaders of the free world in their attitude toward Russia during the war, certainly no excuse can be made for the Church if it turns to Islam for help in its struggle against Communism.

Our Lord said that the gates of hell should not prevail against the Church. If we believe that statement, the Church should have strength and faith to struggle not only against Communism, but also against Islam, because both are the enemies of Christianity.

7. Basically the Quran and the New Testament contradict each other. This statement is true in two ways. First of all, in the very fact of there being *two* Books. The New Testament, taken as a whole, leaves no opening for the possibility of another such Book; and the Quran, taken as a whole, makes it appear rather senseless for us to hang onto what it considers to be an obsolete, abrogated Book, now that the final and perfect 'revelation' has come. Secondly, there is contradiction in vital, fundamental teaching. There is no reconciling Islam's ONE God with Christianity's ONE TRIUNE God. Islam's Law can never be reconciled with Christianity's Grace. The Quranic and New Testament doctrines of Revelation sharply oppose each other. And the Quran flatly denies that Christ died on the Cross and arose again on the third day, a fact which has pivotal importance for the whole of Christianity.

8. Therefore it naturally follows that when these two books confront each other there will be a Battle of Books. We must then see just what is the position in regards to this battle.

### THE DOCUMENTARY SOURCE

Well-read Muslims will tell you that the Quran is the final, reliable source of what they know of Islam. In the daily life of the Muslims the Traditions do undoubtedly play a very important part. However, if you look at the Traditions from a scientific point of view, they are absolutely hopeless. In the beginning there were literally tens of thousands of them. Anybody who wanted to make some doctrine or practice or superstition look like something authentic in Islam, invented a Tradition in support of it. Later these Traditions were thoroughly screened and the great majority rejected by the Muslims themselves. Those that remained were placed in categories of probability. Further, different sects have different sets of Traditions. Even now it is very common for Muslim writers to reject or ignore Traditions which seem to contradict their own doctrines and practices, and use only those which support them. No Muslim would dare to treat the Quran in this way. He may try to find a new interpretation of certain verses, but he will never argue about the validity of the actual text.

Nor will a Muslim try to find support for his Book outside the Book itself. He may say that the coming of the Prophet was foretold in the Bible; but never the coming of the Quran. It carries its proof in itself.

9. In other words, apart from the Quran the Muslim knows nothing of God. The Book is his only source of knowledge.

10. Now let us look at Christianity. The Christian (who knows what he is talking about) will also say that the New Testament is the documentary source of Christianity. However, Christianity is different from Islam in the following way: while the Muslim says you cannot get behind the Quran to God directly, but that you are forced to learn of God through the Quran, the Christian says you cannot go behind the Prophets and the Apostles to Jesus Christ Himself. Or, expressed otherwise, the Muslim says you cannot know God except through the Quran, and the Christians say that you cannot know Jesus Christ except through the Prophets and Apostles. Our Lord, as far as we know, never put one word on paper in black and white. He left his impress on a small group of men, who are called Apostles. These, with the Prophets whom they called in to aid

them, have given the world their testimony to the fact of Christ and their interpretation of Him and of these facts that are connected with Him. That small group of men saw, heard and handled the Word (I John 1:1–3). We have no other source of information. We accept their testimony and their interpretation. It is because of their testimony and interpretation that we are forced back on the Old Testament to study the prophetic picture of the Messiah.

11. It is very common in some circles to appeal directly to the teaching of our Lord, or say that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. Although we must not limit the work of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless our Lord Himself said that the Holy Spirit would take of the things of Christ and show them to us. But where are the things of Christ to be found? Exclusively in a Book about Christ, and written by a small number of men. This book is the New Testament.

12. The difference is, then, that while the Muslim wants us to believe that the Quran reveals God's will for mankind, the Christian wants them to believe that the New Testament gives us the facts of Christ and their correct interpretation. While the importance of that difference will appear later, here the point I want to make is that, just as the Muslim has no short cut to God but must go through the Quran, in like manner the Christian has no short cut to Christ, but must go through the New Testament to get to Him.

13. Both sides then are bound by the written word; neither side has a direct approach; and both sides therefore call their Book the 'Word of God'.

14. I am emphasising this point here, because it often happens that while the Muslim clings tenaciously to his Book, the Christian is apt to wander off and find a thousand direct and indirect proofs for what he is saying, just as though he knew something of Christ as the Truth apart from His Book, that is, the Bible. Do not forget it *is* a Battle of Books, because in the final analysis both sides are definitely tied down to and completely dependent each on its own Book.

### INSPIRATION

15. The second point is that both sides claim that their Book is inspired. When a religion on any level is based on a Book, the reliability of that Book is necessarily an extremely vital question.

16. Foolproof reliability has been secured by the Muslim (or so he thinks) by insisting on a plenary, verbal, mechanical inspiration which makes faults or mistakes an utter impossibility. The whole question of inspiration is debated in the next chapter, but as it is of great importance it will not hurt to anticipate a little. The Quran, Muslims say, is written on preserved tablets in the seventh heaven. At the time of Muhammed it was brought down to the lowest heaven, and from there it was sent by Gabriel to Muhammed piecemeal, as it was needed. When that process was finished the original was again elevated to the highest heaven, where it is eternally. The Quran now on earth is the exact replica of that book eternal in the heavens. Even chapters and verses, which historically seem gathered in a slipshod, haphazard manner, are in the very form in which the original copy was written. There are therefore no variant readings, and none are possible. Thus the Muslim has secured foolproof reliability, and no criticism of the text is possible.

The Christians (and a few Muslims) have picked this entire presentation to pieces with the help of history and the Traditions. For example, it can be shown historically that Caliph Othman produced the first authorised version of the Quran, and had all other versions burnt. Some Muslims want us to believe that this new authorised version was after all only the old one that was already in use. That this way of putting it is not correct, can be seen from facts. First Othman had all others burned (why do so, if they were alike?) and secondly that several riots were caused by this high-handed action. People were not prepared to give up their own versions just because a Caliph said they must.

18. Then again, it is historically proven that the diacritical marks in the Arabic language were not introduced before the Quran was widely spread and in use in different countries. Diacritical marks (that is, *zer*, *zabar*, *tashdid*, etc.) can change the meaning of words, and when these marks were introduced there was widespread disagreement as to which were the correct ones in many words. There were also many fanatical people who called it human interference to add these marks and refused to do so.

From the Traditions I will mention only two stories which are interesting. One tells us that Aisha had two new revelations under her bed when Muhammed died, but in the confusion that followed she forgot them, and when she later came to look for them they were gone, probably having been eaten by some domestic animal. (*Mizânu'l Haqq*, C. G. Pfander, The Religious Tract Soc., London, 1910, p. 256, quoting the Mishkat.)

The other tradition says that Omar complained because he could remember a verse of revelation, which he now found nowhere. It was missing, and he accused certain persons of having destroyed it.

19. In spite of the fact that the Quran like everything else has had to share the uncertainties to which man is subject, the great bulk of Muslims still believe it to be the very Book, letter by letter, word by word and verse by verse, which is now eternal in the seventh heaven. A more thoroughgoing, radical theory of inspiration could hardly be thought out. And yet it is this very theory which (we shall see in our next chapter) is the weakest link in the whole train of Muslim thought.

20. When we begin to talk of Christianity, let us start by saying that every Christian has some theory of inspiration. In other words he, like the Muslims, has to believe that his book is reliable, otherwise he has nothing on which to base his faith. However, the development in Christianity followed entirely different lines from those of Islam. There was first of all the oral tradition. Catholic teaching (not Roman Catholic) was passed on by word of mouth. In passing on this oral tradition the supremely important thing for the Church was to make sure that that which was passed on was backed by Apostolic authority. In other words, the responsibility for reliability, both as to facts and interpretation, rested with that small group of men called to be Apostles.

21. We know very little of the development for the first couple of hundred years, but when history does pick up the thread again, we find three large Christian centres, and these do not have an identical Canon of Scripture. In spite of these various canons there was definitely a catholicity of teaching. The heretics of those days strove to break up this catholicity of teaching. Usually they tried to interpret the Johannine, Pauline or Petrine 'Gospel' so that one excluded the other two. The discussion was not whether this or that book or verse was inspired, nor how it was inspired, but whether a certain teaching was catholic doctrine, backed by the authority of the Apostles.

22. In discussing inspiration with a Muslim you should remember that, through all the years that the Church was forging its great cardinal doctrine, no theory or doctrine of inspiration or canon of Scripture was included in the creedal statements. Not before the 16th century did the Church say: I believe these and these particular books to be inspired and no others.

23. However true it is that inspiration theories as we know them today are relative newcomers in the Church, yet the fact that the Church for



1,600 years accepted the authority of the Apostles, simply means that it be believed that these very men were inspired and guided to write the facts of Christ and their interpretation of them in such a way that they could make men throughout the world 'wise unto salvation'.

24. So in the final analysis you have in the Church exactly the same attitude towards the New Testament as the Muslim has toward his Quran. You accept the reliability of the Apostles on the basis of a belief in their having been inspired vehicles of the truth: the Muslim accepts his Prophet in the same way. Both say: My Book is reliable because it is inspired. The result is of necessity a struggle between the two Books.

### **ABSOLUTE TRUTH**

25. Now we come to the third point, the question of absolute Truth. The word 'absolute' is here used in the theological sense of not being related relatively to anything else.

26. The Muslim claims that his Book contains, or rather, is, absolute Truth. And in his thinking he separates the future from the present. The Quran is not only able to tell him what will happen eschatologically but also what God's eternal truth is for his everyday life. In fact in our day a great number of Muslim writers put more emphasis on the truth as it concerns this world than they do on the truth as it concerns the world to come.

27. We all know that a certain type of missionary revels in talk about the houris and the other sensual pleasures of Muhammed's Paradise. I also know that not a few Muslims take this talk literally, without using their imagination, and even without reading through their own text carefully. Others interpret the picture symbolically, like the man who said: No one but a Jew could describe the new Jerusalem as it has been done in the book of Revelation, for only Jews are so inordinately fond of gold and precious stones as to make them a picture of what heaven would be like!

28. Regardless of how the Muslim accepts the picture of Paradise which his Quran paints, you will be wasting your time if you stop to argue that with him. What is really important is that the overall eschatological teaching in the Quran is clear and that it is presented as absolute Truth. There is the bodily resurrection after death, there is Judgment and reward or punishment, and there is eternal life.

29. Regarding everyday life the Quran teaches both a super-Calvinism and a Pelagianism, if I may use these two words in this connection. That

is to say, on the one hand, it is God alone who acts, so that man is dependent on Him to the uttermost; on the other hand, man is made responsible for his own final state in eternity. And this tension or paradox is certainly not removed from the teaching of Islam, regardless of how badly it is misunderstood by the masses. Fate, yes; but at the same time a law, a Shariat which puts all imaginable details of everyday life into five categories so a man may always know whether or not he is doing God's will—or whether he is sinning. Admittedly the Muslim conception of sin is not ours; but the fact still remains that the very use of the word 'sin' includes some conception of responsibility and guilt.

30. The Muslim will willingly admit that much of the absolute Truth in the Quran is constantly being misunderstood and misinterpreted and even misused by Muslims. But that, he argues, does not change the fact that what we need to know of Truth, both about this life and about the next, is found in the Quran.

31. Now what does Christianity have to say about absolute Truth? Essentially this: Jesus Christ is the TRUTH (John 14:6), the final absolute Truth. We have eschatological concepts which differ widely, and yet every Christian will admit that if we could know the Lord perfectly, these differences would disappear, for in Him is the perfect Truth.

32. What does Christianity say about this life of ours on earth? In the first Helvetic Confession (1536) you get the words that the Bible alone contains completely 'all piety and all the rule of life'. The non-Roman Catholic Church as a whole has since moved along the line that the Bible is the only infallible rule of life and faith. The Roman claim is that the hierarchy of that Church alone can give the infallible rule of life and faith. One of the primary doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church is that you believe and live as you do, on the authority of the Church. When the Reformation and post-Reformation leaders rejected this Roman Catholic claim, they certainly did NOT mean that the Bible was a rule, in the sense of a law or a set of regulations. The idea of looking at the Bible as an English officer looks at the 'King's Regulations' is not Reformation teaching. The word 'rule' was not meant in the sense of regulations or law, but in the sense of standard or criterion, that by which something else is measured or judged.

33. However, the important point here is this: Although the Muslim believes that his Book is the infallible rule (that is, regulation or law) of life and faith, and the Christian believes that his Book is the infallible rule (that is, standard or criterion) of life and faith—yet in the final analysis, each claims that there is finality of Truth in his Book.

34. It is easy to overemphasise side issues, and lose your way in a maze of futile arguments. However, as soon as you see that fundamentally, in these three respects, the Christian's Book means to him exactly what the Muslim's Book means to the Muslim, you will have to admit that a Battle of Books is unavoidable. You will have to admit that when you cling tenaciously to your own Book, you are in that very act giving the lie to every other Book. You cannot help it. If you are going to contact Muslims with the Gospel you have a Battle of Books on your hands. Only a fool enters that battle unprepared.

35. BUT—if you stop there, as so many are inclined to do, you have not even touched the main point. So far in this chapter we have only been sparring. I wonder if you noticed that under the first heading, about the documentary source, I used the name God when I spoke of Muslims, and the name Christ when I spoke of the Christians. Probably you did not even think of it, as it is so common from the Christian point of view. If a Muslim should read this chapter he would stop there at once. Why the difference? What does the author mean when he says the Muslim can reach God only through the Quran, but that the Christian can reach Christ only through the Apostles and Prophets? And he would be justified in asking, for the difference is vital.

36. Let me illustrate what I want to say in this way. If you were to quote John 1:1 to a Muslim who knew nothing at all about Christianity, how do you suppose he would interpret that verse: 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God'. Naturally he would restate it thus: In the beginning was the Quran, and the Quran was with God, and the Quran was divine, that is, uncreated. He may or may not accept that last part about the Quran being uncreated, but the idea the verse conveys to him is that you mean the Quran, a Book, when you speak of the Word.

37. The two incommensurable ideas are then: Islam says: Book from God = Revelation from God. Christianity says: Christ from God = Revelation of God.

For the Muslim the Quran is all important: for the Christian, it is not the New Testament but Christ that is all important.

38. The Quran is, as we have seen, a Book that is superimposed on history. It does not belong to history. It was *nazil*—that is, sent down from heaven, piecemeal, and does not belong inside the warp and woof of history. To illustrate this point think of how the Quran was put together in book form without a thought of chronological order, or of the historical

events to which each portion is related. History is not considered vital by a Muslim, and the record of history is immaterial. That attitude also explains why historical blunders in the Quran never shock a Muslim.

39. Christ, on the other hand, is not superimposed on history. He came out from the Father and came into the world, into history. Christ is the great, the mighty act of God in history, preceded by other mighty acts of God in history. These mighty acts of God are the standard, the criterion by which—when we understand them correctly—all history is judged. For us, therefore, as Christ is all-important, history must also be of vital importance. We have to know the historical person Jesus Christ, and we have to know the previous mighty acts of God in history. And we have to know what significance they have. Therefore a record and an interpretation of history is absolutely necessary. Without this, Christ becomes a myth, and history loses its meaning.

In this sense, that is, on this level, we say: The Book = record and interpretation. On another level we call the Book the Word of God, because He uses this record and this interpretation to create faith in Christ throughout the whole world and in every age. It is therefore in a very real sense the Word of God—but NEVER as the Muslim thinks of the Word of God. In his sense we must maintain and proclaim that Christ, and Christ alone, is the Word of God.

40. You should now be able to see that although there is a sense in which Christianity's contact with Islam is definitely a Battle of Books, yet in the final analysis it is utterly wrong to speak of a Battle of Books, as though the New Testament in Christianity had the same position as the Quran in Islam. For us the vital question is: Which is the Word of God—Christ or the Quran? In which does the unveiling of God meet us—in Christ or in the Quran?

41. In other words, when you have to occupy yourself with the Battle of Books, never let the Muslim keep you so occupied on that point that you forget the vital thing: the presentation of Christ as God's Word, that is, God's Revelation.

## QUESTIONS

1. What different position does the New Testament occupy in the Church from that of the Quran in Islam?

2. What is the Muslim teaching with reference to the inspiration of the Quran?
3. Is there anything in Islam to compare with the authority of the Apostles in Christianity?

## CHAPTER 18

# Inspiration and Revelation

1. After about thirty years of work trying to get Muslims to see the truth of Christ, I am convinced that the crux of the whole matter is NOT religious differences as they are seen in contradictory doctrines, but something much more fundamental. The centre, the core of the matter, is revelation itself. Both Christianity and Islam claim that what they know of God is not philosophy, that is, it is not what man has been capable of thinking about God, but what God Himself has revealed to thinking man. Obviously then the really basic question is this: Do Christianity and Islam agree about the very idea of revelation? From the previous chapter about the books, you will have learned (or guessed) that there is no agreement on this subject. In this chapter we will try to clarify this disagreement.

2. Let us begin with Islam. In spite of the fact that the theologies of Islam and Christianity to a large degree developed side by side and undoubtedly have influenced each other, yet basically they are entirely different. In the technical, theological vocabulary of Islam you will find no word for REVELATION as this is used by Christian theologians. English-writing Muslims may use an expression like 'Revealed Books', but in the vernaculars they would use the word *nazil*, meaning 'descended' or 'sent down'. I have never yet seen an article written by a Muslim in which he tries to explain or expound any theory of revelation, nor has any Muslim ever approached the subject in discussion with me. When you become aware of such a fact you should certainly stop, look, and listen. It means something.

3. You want to tell a Muslim that God *reveals* Himself in Christ. What word would you use? Probably a word that is used in daily language for 'shows Himself' or 'makes Himself apparent'. But the teaching of the Church is just this: that while God reveals Himself in Christ, He does not make Himself apparent, obvious or visible: He remains hidden. 'No

man can see God and live' is just as true after Christ came as before His advent.

4. Some difficulties are only language difficulties, but here we are up against a problem in concept or idea. The Muslim mind simply never operates with the concept: revelation. In Islam the entire emphasis is on inspiration. That is quite what you would expect, since they have only a Book—nothing else.

5. Let us look at their theory of inspiration—the orthodox one. Inspiration is divided into categories and subdivided into sections. The two usual categories are:

External inspiration

Internal inspiration

Inspiration is called external when enlightenment is brought to the individual from outside himself. This kind of inspiration is of course the all important one, and is subdivided into three sections:

(a) *Wahi*. When the angel tells the prophet his message word by word and phrase by phrase you have *wahi*—pure, unadulterated, plenary verbal inspiration. Not only that, but God causes the prophet to remember it all, so there is not the slightest possible chance for a mistake of any kind to creep in.

(b) *Isharatu'l Malik*. This means that angels, through the agency of indication, sign or guidance, get certain ideas across to the prophet.

(c) *Ilham*. This is actually only enlightenment, although caused by an outside agency. The saints of Islam may have this lower form of inspiration, and it may be either right or wrong. There is no guarantee.

Parenthetically, let me remark that when the Church uses the word *Ilham* (as it commonly does, for no other term seems available) and even translates II Timothy 3:16 with *Ilham*, the implication in the Muslim mind is that we are only claiming the lowest degree of inspiration possible, and guarantee nothing as to its accuracy.

6. Internal inspiration is achieved by penetration and reasoning. The heterodox in Islam, like Sir Sayyed Ahmad, would maintain that *all* inspiration is internal. That it is simply the human mind penetrating deeply into the things of the spirit, and the greatest prophet is only the man who achieves the deepest and surest penetration. Such teaching sounds like

blasphemy to the orthodox, but they do acknowledge that saints and theologians may have penetrating powers which amount to a form of inspiration. We need not say more about this second category of inspiration here, as it really has no bearing on our subject.

7. Let us go back and look at *wahi*, the highest and most important kind of inspiration. Every prophet who has brought a book was inspired by *wahi*. The Muslim does not worry much about all the other Books, but his theory regarding the Quran is extremely enlightening. As was said in the last chapter, the Quran was originally in the seventh heaven, written on preserved tablets. It was brought down to the lowest heaven, and from there it was taken piecemeal as needed, and given word by word to Muhammed. When that was done, the original Book was removed to its exalted place in the seventh heaven. The real point here is that the message was not given through human assimilation. Muhammed's character or personality has left no mark on it. (Even the most ardent believer in verbal inspiration in the Christian Church would not accept a theory of inspiration so devoid of the human element.)

8. The idea of *Isharatu'l Malik* is very vague and seems to have no practical significance in Muslim thought.

9. Finally, there is *Ilham*. Here you get the first touch of the human element, that is, the possibility of mistake. But the Muslim will never use this word about the inspiration of a prophet or about the Books sent down from heaven, for in those there must be no possibility of error.

10. When a Muslim has said all this he has no more to say. He is satisfied. He has a guaranteed Book, a clear guidance, a Word of God. When you say to him: 'How do you know?' he points proudly to his infallible Book as his source of information.

11. Alongside this purely mechanical inspiration theory, the Muslim also believes that Muhammed's entire life as well as his ordinary table talk was inspired. A prophet is a prophet 24 hours a day. The Roman Catholic idea of a pope who can make mistakes ordinarily but never when speaking *ex cathedra* has no place in Islam. This daily-life inspiration is, according to the Muslims, of a lower form but in the same degree inspired. Just what that means is hard to say. In practice, the Muslim gives just as much weight to the one as to the other. However, in theory this inspiration of Muhammed's life has nothing to do with the Quran as such.

12. When we now turn to Christianity we find something entirely different. The very first thing we see is that Inspiration is not the last word, not the final thing at all. Back of Inspiration lies REVELATION. For the



Christian Church, inspiration has only to do with the reliability of the record and with the truthfulness of the interpretation of Revelation.

13. Parenthetically, let me explain what I mean by the word 'interpretation'. The New Testament records give us certain facts. A man was born, lived, worked, taught, died, rose again, etc. These facts might have been recorded in many different ways to show the economic, social and political atmosphere of that time, but the Apostles saw in that life something of supreme spiritual importance for mankind and interpreted these facts theologically, so that they mean something for us. This theological interpretation of the Apostles is closely connected with their own personal contact with our Lord and therefore also with the teaching of the Old Testament prophets. The personality and thinking of each of the Apostles is unique, and yet we believe that they were inspired, both in their choice of materials for the record and in their teaching based on that record, so that the Scriptures are able to make us 'wise unto salvation'.

14. However, back of this inspired record and inspired interpretation lies revelation that is the divine act itself. The inspired record says, 'the Word became flesh'. That is the great divine act which gives us knowledge of God proceeding from God Himself. That is God, the hidden God, unveiling Himself, and yet remaining hidden.

15. Now I suppose many of you are wondering why in the last couple of generations discord and strife has spread through the churches of Europe and America because of varying theories of inspiration. Even a superficial study of the history of canon in the Church will show you what happened. As I have said in the last chapter, at the very start the Church had to be sure of its documentary source of Christianity. Heretical books were being written, and the authentic books were being interpolated with heretical passages. The Church therefore had to find some standard by which to judge its teaching. This action was both necessary and logical, for if Revelation is the divine act of self-revealing in history, then history is of great importance, for certain events in history have to be accepted as criteria by which all other events are judged. The record, therefore, had to be inspired, that is, the men chosen to write the records had to be accepted as reliable, not only in the ordinary human sense of being good and accurate historians, but also in their choice of material. Furthermore, they had to be reliable in their interpretation. The Church has always maintained that Apostolic reliability is not based on human integrity or capability, but on divine choice of certain men and divine inspiration in the choice and interpretation of material. Therefore Apostolic authority, a purely historical

phenomenon, together with a faith-value, was the criterion. The Church insisted on two points only: Every teaching had to be able to show that it was backed by Apostolic authority, and it had to be in agreement with the catholic faith. The Church simply took it for granted that it could recognise the signs of Apostolic authority and that it knew what the catholic faith was.

16. In fact, from Apostolic days until most recent times, Holy Scripture has been subjected to scientific enquiry and criticism which in the course of years has strengthened the trust of Christians in the Bible. Regarding the Canon of Scripture, an open-minded debate went on for almost 16 centuries. Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Beza, Farel and Tyndale all expressed views on the Canon in one way or another. Luther's remark that St James is rather a strawy Epistle is perhaps the best known, though certainly not anything unusual in his day and age.

However, about that time a change of approach is noticed. All the great doctrines of the Church had been developed, the Christian faith, traditionally speaking, was already formed. But with this change of approach, when the question of canon came up, inspiration was no longer emphasised as having been given to certain men chosen of God, but the Book was thought of as inspired. In other words, the historical approach was sidetracked and a subjective value-judgment was given the right of way. It is therefore really not surprising to see that in many creedal statements of the 16th and 17th centuries the canonicity of books is accepted because the Holy Spirit witnessed in the hearts of the authors of these creedal statements that these books came from God, that is, were divinely inspired. The final step had to be (logically enough) that every syllable and every word was divinely inspired, and this theory became an article of faith.

17. The Bible was taken out of the sphere of where it had been for 1600 years, and put over into a 'spiritual atmosphere' where feelings and experiences were rampant. By then the Church seemingly had all but forgotten that back of all inspiration lay the vital thing, the act of God, that is, Revelation.

18. Strange, is it not? To see the Christian Church slowly forgetting that unique revelational knowledge: The Word became flesh, and the significance thereof, and getting all entangled in controversies that approximate the Muslim point of view, where there is nothing but a book and its inspiration to discuss. However, when the Christian Church began to awaken to its responsibility to contact the Muslim with the Gospel, it was—because of this forgetfulness—more or less in a position to argue about inspiration theories on a level with the Muslim's thoughts—as though

there were no revelation back of the Bible, and the Bible itself were Revelation, just as the Quran is supposed to be Revelation.

19. When the Christian has to answer the question: How do you know? he does not primarily point to an inspired Book, but to Revelation. This point is so extremely vital, that if you miss it you lose every opportunity of ever getting the Gospel across to Muslims.

**Why? There are two reasons:**

(a) St Paul mentions the mystery of Revelation at least three times (Rom. 16:25; Col. 1:26; Eph. 3:9) which was hidden before but now has come to light through Christ. The mystery of Revelation is just: *That God Reveals Himself through Himself*. Or, said in another way, God and His Revelation are one. There is no third something between God and Man. There is no book, no person, no law, no other agency used by God to reveal Himself. He is His own Revelation. This statement is NOT, definitely not, philosophical. Considered as philosophy it is quite absurd and entirely outside the range of man's speculation. It is a theological statement, pure and simple. It is the outcome of a fervent study of the life and work of Christ. It has been held by the Church from the very start, as may be seen from the Church's answer to the heresies of the first five centuries.

We must go one step further. From the study of the life of our Lord one fact becomes astonishingly clear: Christ as the Revelation of God is not immediately available for mankind. It is only where and when it pleases God that He, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, opens the eyes of men so they can see God revealed in Christ. In other words, God in His revelation does not pass out of God's control and into man's. Man cannot with his own power accept or reject God in His revelation. God is God, in Himself, in His revelation, and in the comprehension of His revelation. Thus and only thus can God be God, and yet be revealed to mankind.

(b) The other very important point arises here. If you are going to keep your discussion with the Muslim on the basis of inspiration theories, you will be doing what he has to do, but what you have no justification for doing; you will be presenting Christianity as intellectualism. The Muslim challenge sounds something like this: The Quran is a clear guidance sent down from heaven. Anybody who is not a fool or an idiot—when face to face with the Quran—is forced to admit that here is a book which appeals to man's reason and good sense. God has made it so clear and rational that everyone could accept and follow its laws and commandments. Therefore there will be no excuse for anyone on the Day of Judgment. Any theory of

inspiration that in practice ignores revelation must end up by pointing at an old, inspired book that supposedly appeals to reason.

That is just what Christianity does NOT do. It proclaims a past completed divine act as the great once-for-all self-revealing of God. The Logos, the Word, spoken of God, was born in Bethlehem and went away again in the mountains of Judea. This is the uniqueness and finality of God's revelation of Himself.

But—and this is where so many fall down—the Church has never, no never, proclaimed that that past revelation is a doctrine only requiring mental acquiescence. On the contrary, it boldly proclaims that past, factual revelation as the only presupposition possible for a present revelation. In other words, if God speaks now, He speaks through the Church's repetition of what happened then.

God's great mystery, the marvel of angels and men, is the contemporaneousness of Christianity. He who came, comes. Time in the Church is not an elongated line with the Incarnation, that is, Revelation, at one end and we at the other. It is a circle with Christ in the centre, so that we and His first disciples are equally close to Him. He who came, comes. God reveals Himself to us through Christ just as He revealed Himself through Christ to those very first disciples. What we now call 'past revelation' was for them present revelation, just as present revelation now is God revealing Himself in Christ.

20. From these two points you should now be able to see how essential it is to keep revelation in your mind when talking with the Muslim. But you will also have seen that our whole idea of revelation is so new and strange to the Muslim that it should not surprise you if he simply does not grasp the idea at all. Remember you have almost 2,000 years of Christian background and Christian thinking in your favour.

21. If you have been following this line of thought, I am sure it has occurred to you that any conception of revelation you may have is closely related to your idea of the very nature of God. What are we saying about God when we proclaim His revelation? God has revealed and does reveal Himself through Himself. Therefore it is not enough that the Word of Revelation existed in the beginning, and that It was with God. It had to be God. Then, and only then, could It become flesh and take Its abode among us and become Immanuel, that is, God with us. In other words, that simple question: How do you know? involves our faith in the triune God. No wonder, then, that the Christian Church through one thousand

years struggled violently to make sure of what it believed ABOUT GOD. If Christ is the Word (Revelation), He is God. If He is not God, He is not the Word either. For God and His Revelation must of necessity be one. No created thing could be the Revelation of God. The very fact of its creatureliness would make that utterly impossible.

22. When we now go back and take another look at Islamic theology, it should not surprise you to see that almost from the very start their problem was how to understand the nature of the Quran in relation to the unity of God. About the year 110 after the Hijra, Wasil ibn Ata, a prominent theologian, taught that God has no attributes and that the Quran was created with words and sounds, and that some day it might even cease to exist. Probably this man—in the 8th century of our era—had run up against Christian teaching about Christ, had seen the difficulties faced and realised that these same difficulties were in the way of the Quran. He therefore, in order to secure the perfect unity of God, had come to the conclusion that both divine attributes and the Quran must be explained in such a way that they did not endanger the actual mathematical oneness of God. This man and his disciples were called *Mu'tazilites* which means: The separated ones. They were the rationalists of those days, and their idea was to keep the doctrine of the oneness of God pure and undefiled. Later *Mu'tazilites* modified this teaching somewhat by saying paradoxically that God's attributes are inseparable from His essence. Yet the main idea was the same; to postulate the mathematical oneness of God.

23. Later a sect arose that was called *Makhlūqiah* from the word *Makhlūq*: That which is created. Their contention was that the Quran must be *Makhlūq* (created) for if it were *ghair-makhlūq* (uncreated) it must mean that God was not one, but two. Then another sect arose called *Lafziah*, from *Lofz*, meaning *word*. They tried to compromise the issue by saying that the Quran itself was created, but the words (that is, commands and orders) were directly from God and therefore uncreated. That was more or less nonsense.

Others were agnostics, saying one could never know anything for sure about the origin of the Quran.

24. The arguments presented by both sides seem logical and legitimate inside their own scope. The orthodox will say that the Quran is eternal, it is written on the preserved tablets in heaven, and is not in the same category with created things. For if this were not so, if it belonged to creation, then (i) there would have been a time when it did not exist, and God's Word must be co-existent with God; and (ii) if it is created, then other

created things might also be revelation, but that would mean we have no sure means of knowing God, for all creation is finite and sinful as far as we know it or experience it, and it certainly passes away. Therefore either say the Quran is uncreated and call it God's revelation or else say it is created and call it a human book, not God's sure and clear guidance, not the very Word of God.

25. The other group says: All right. But then let us once for all give up our faith in the absolute unity of God. However, that is the thing in Islam which is unshakeably true; the belief in the absolute unity of God is the cardinal doctrine of faith. That doctrine must be maintained at all costs. Therefore if the Quran falls, let it fall. We will not be guilty of the sin of 'shirk' (accepting something alongside of God as God or equal to God) whatever happens to the Quran itself. It may some day conceivably cease to exist, but the one God lives eternally. Fear Him. By talking of the Quran as uncreated you are postulating two uncreated beings: the one, God; the other, the Quran. And even if you say that these two are one, you are still talking of Allah as though there were differentiations in His nature. You are discarding His absolute unity. You are talking like the Christians do.

26. Ah, very well, replies the first group. But how do you know that God is one God? And how do you know that 'shirk' is the great unforgivable sin? Only from the Quran itself. But if the Quran is a created thing, then that knowledge of God may not be true. Nor is it then certain that 'shirk' is the unforgivable sin. For without postulating the uncreatedness of the Book you cannot postulate any real knowledge of God. Either the Book is uncreated or we know nothing of God.

27. The argument on each side looks logical enough. So what? That question has been a flaming fire of contention in the ranks of Islamic theologians from the very start of their study of theology. They are just as far from a solution today as they were when they started.

28. It will not now surprise you to see how the difficulties of the Islamic theologians run parallel with those of the Christian theologians. The Christian Church studied the nature of Christ in relation to God. The Muslim studied the nature of the Quran in relation to God. The question arises: How did the Church settle the great problem once for all in the Nicean and Athanasian creeds, while the Muslims still carry on their bickering and have nothing to say except baseless postulates about divine inspiration, divided and subdivided in many ways?

29. First look at the Church's thinking. No one can ever accuse the Church of playing fast and loose with the conception of the oneness of

God. The Apostles, the Church fathers, and the great councils all maintain that God is one God. The Athanasian Creed threatens people with damnation who dare to think otherwise.

But—they were not blocked and frustrated by fear. They were not pinned down beforehand to any single conception of oneness. Boldly they studied the life, teaching and work of Christ, and could come to no other conclusion than that here God was revealing Himself through Himself. And they acknowledged that without the gift of understanding from the Holy Spirit they could not see or understand God's revelation in Christ. When all the facts of faith were put together, it worked out to a doctrine that laughed at mathematical oneness and ridiculed philosophical wisdom. The facts of faith, based on Revelation, *had* to lead to differentiation in the Godhead. The Church, guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, had the courage, precisely in a philosophical age to accept, believe and propagate this teaching, because only through this medium could she give a definite and clear answer to the question about revelation.

30. The Muslims, on the other hand, have been frustrated all along by fear. Neither side has ever dared to accept or acknowledge the problem of revelation as pivotal. The absolute mathematical oneness of God is the only pivot. Around this all else must revolve. The very first Mu'tazilites argued the createdness of the Quran in order to preserve the unity of God as absolute. The orthodox argued the uncreatedness of the Quran in order to have sure proof of the unity of God. Islam has never given its theologians courage to work out the problem of revelation, independent of all presuppositions, on its own pivot. The one side is afraid of committing the sin of 'shirk', even in its thinking, and therefore gladly drops the debate. The other side is afraid of losing the revealedness of the Book and therefore prefers to skip the question without too much ado. And so they go on arguing every conceivable question, and ridiculing Christian doctrine from every possible point of view. But that very simple question: How do you know? has never been answered by them. In the final analysis they do not know how they know. The very idea of revelation is lacking in their theological thinking, simply because it would of necessity involve a critical revision of their conception of the oneness of God. They try to make a rigid, verbal, plenary, mechanical inspiration do duty as a guarantee, but the more rigid it is, the more it cries out against them as false security.

31. If the Muslims would be content with saying that they know God to be one God as a result of philosophical study or natural theology, the rest would be simple. Some have done just this. Prominent among them is

Sir Sayyed Ahmed, but the great majority insist that what they know about God is revealed. The problem that they have before them is to show how God could reveal Himself in any way, and still retain the mathematical oneness of the Muslim concept of unity. The Christian challenge should be centred at this point.

32. Remember, however, that when you try to get your Muslims to think along these lines, it is not because we are more astute thinkers than they, nor is it because we have a philosophical conception more worthy of acceptance than theirs. Strictly speaking, what we have to say on the subject is not philosophical thinking, it is only a description of revelation itself. The Church has always maintained that revelation is factual, that is, certain concrete and limited facts of ordinary, secular history are accepted as revelational. There is nothing abstract or universal about these facts. What St John says has been accepted by the whole Church as the foundation of our knowledge of revelation:

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you . . . (I John 1:1ff.; cf. John 3:16; Acts 2:32, 33, 36; 3:27; 4:20).*

33. Furthermore, when you declare these things to the Muslim, keep in mind that man's capabilities, his ability to comprehend, to think, to digest, has in the final analysis nothing to do with his acceptance or rejection of what you are saying. How often we forget that the ability to apprehend and to comprehend revelation is given in each instance with the hearing of the Word; it is utterly dependent upon God's grace and never on man's natural capabilities. It is, therefore, equally possible for a professor of theology and an illiterate person to hear and comprehend and believe the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It is also equally impossible if God's grace is not given.

34. In other words, we have nothing in ourselves, in our thinking or in our doctrines, to boast about or to make us proud or arrogant.

What I have tried to do in these two chapters is to show you the place of Inspiration in relation to Revelation. If I have succeeded, you will agree with me that while we have to maintain that the New Testament is an inspired book, yet the real crux of the whole matter is what we have to proclaim about Revelation. Our job is to try to get the Muslim to see that here we are on a level which he knows nothing whatsoever about. In other words, we have to raise the argument from the level of Inspiration, and



put it on the level of Revelation. The Muslim may take it or leave it, that is his business, but then we have at least contacted him with the Gospel, and that is our business.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the Muslim doctrine of Inspiration.
2. How does this differ from the Christian teaching on Revelation?
3. What is the dilemma in which the Muslim finds himself if he maintains, on the one hand, that the Quran is uncreated, or on the other, that it is created?

SECTION SIX

IS IT LAW OR EVANGEL?

## CHAPTER 19

# Wherein Did Christ Differ from the Jews in the Matter of Faith?

1. In the time of our Lord, Judaism was definitely a theocratic-state religion; Islam is also definitely a theocratic-state religion. The theocratic state is one ruled politically and socially by God's representatives. Probably it is not surprising that previous missionaries to Islam did not see how vital this central theme is to Islam, for at that time Islam had fallen on bad days, and the real aggressive, conquering spirit of past times had been replaced by a dull fatalism. The fatalism we meet among the masses of Muslims today can probably be explained theologically as emanating from the Quran, but, in actual fact, it is a sort of defence mechanism of a stupefied people who know that Islam should be the world government, and yet, until very recently, found its adherents as 'slaves' to other nations.

2. Since the First World War a number of new, independent Muslim states have been set up, and things are changing rapidly. Muslims everywhere are beginning to lift their heads, and hope gleams in their eyes. Although many of the foremost protagonists of Islam quietly pass by the theocratic state ideal in their propaganda, yet anyone who keeps an eye on practical politics sees that all the leading states and statesmen who profess Islam are working energetically toward an Islamic cultural reunion and an Islamic power block in international politics. In other words, the fact of Islam is drawing men and nations together anew. Once that cultural reunion and that political power block is established, nothing is going to stop Islam from again emerging as a totalitarian state, with world government as its goal. The totalitarian conception of the state, especially when the state itself is conceived of as theocratic, invariably brings with it the idea of world government.

3. Therefore it must interest us to know just what our Lord's attitude towards the Jewish theocratic state was. In trying to find this out we must not confine ourselves to the Old Testament idea of how that state was conceived, for although the Scriptures were the highly revered, great final authority, yet they were all too often used (as Scriptures always are!) to prove and authenticate popular theories and ideologies that had sprung from other books or circles of learned men.

4. In the last two generations historians have studied the literature of Jewry which was in vogue just previous to the coming of our Lord, and it (together with the Old and New Testaments) shows that the real point of collision between the Jews and our Lord was the position of Israel in God's plan for the world. It is utterly impossible in one chapter to go into details, but I want to touch on some of the more obvious points, and then on some of the results that had to follow our Lord's position. Before we are finished I think you will see how diametrically our Lord is opposed to anything Islam has to propose.

5. The first and most obvious question that arises is this: why did our Lord use the title 'Messiah' so sparingly, whereas the other title, namely, 'Son of Man', was the one He chose, and used almost exclusively? When St Paul argues as he does in Acts (for example, 17:3) that Jesus is the Messiah, he is not arguing that Jesus is what the Jews conceived of as Messiah. St Paul's Messiah is the entirely new idea of Messiah which the first disciples had, having received it from our Lord Himself.

6. In order to answer this question we need to go way back to the beginning of known history. Kings were always 'priest-kings'; they stood in some direct relationship to the deity of the nation or the tribe. The king could be that deity personified, or he could be his brother or son. In cases where the deity was feminine he could also be the husband, even in some mystical way both husband and son. He could be an incarnation or he could have become a god after his death. The point is that he was always directly related to the cult, the forms of worship, that were prevalent at the time.

7. Up to the time that the Israelites settled in Palestine they had no kings. The peoples around them had these priest-kings. Then the Israelites asked for and received a king. He was not crowned, but anointed with perfumed oil. He was called 'Jehovah's Anointed'. He was a priest-king: he not only led the political and cultural life of the people, but he was also closely related to the religious functions. Do not misunderstand this to mean that the Jews accepted the heathen religions by which they were

surrounded. They simply and naturally took the only outward form they knew, and adapted it to their own purpose and religion.

8. The word we know as 'Messiah' appears to be the short form of 'Jehovah's Anointed', at least it was used in that way. However, when Jehovah's anointed kings failed, the one after the other, to bring Israel into the glory for which it believed itself to be predestined (because it was Jehovah's chosen people), religious and learned men began to look for an ideal Messiah. During the exile and thereafter, when all hope was gone and the Jews were as hard hit as a nation could be, they began to think of the Messiah in several mystical ways. He was the Anointed One, in a special way; He was to come in a special way with special powers; some even thought of Him as pre-existing in heaven; He was not only to restore Israel but also to give it its rightful place as the great nation on earth, because of Jehovah's covenant with it. Other nations were to be vassal states.

9. However, regardless of how mystical the expressions were, still, in the final analysis, the Messiah was a man, a king, a political person, capable of waging war and carrying on the traditions of David, the great king. It is interesting to note that the Jews usually spoke of Messiah as king. It was King Messiah.

The theological or religious point of view was of course that it was Jehovah Himself, working through His viceroy on earth, His anointed one, who was doing all things according to His own will. But on earth it was King Messiah who was to rule over the kingdom of Israel, and by extending that rule over other nations was to establish the kingdom of God on earth. When our Lord definitely said His kingdom was NOT of this world, as far as the Jews were concerned He could no longer lay claim to the title of 'Messiah'.

10. That the Jews thought of King Messiah as a political ruler, on the whole like all other kings only immeasurably greater, can be seen from several historical facts. Already at the time when the Maccabees organised the fight for independence many thought that Simon was King Messiah. Later three or four historically known individuals arose who claimed to be King Messiah. Each of these tried to bring about open rebellion and thereby to establish the kingdom. This was the thought present in the minds of those who tried to force our Lord to become king (John 6:15), as well as of those Jewish leaders who took Jesus before Pilate and accused Him of perverting the nation and claiming to be Christ, a king (Luke 23:2).

11. In other words, the popular conception of King Messiah was that He should be the ruler of a theocratic state that was to bring in the kingdom of God in all the world, first by restoring the pristine greatness of Israel and then by subjugating other nations under His world Government. Naturally therefore our Lord avoided using the title 'Messiah' except in very special circumstances. For such a kingdom of this world was diametrically opposed to everything our Lord believed and taught.

12. The expression 'the Son of Man' has puzzled theologians and historians for many generations. Our Lord did not coin it Himself for it is found in Daniel 7. Exegetes are now, I believe, more or less agreed that the Son of Man in Daniel's vision must be taken as symbolic of the whole Israelitish nation, as the interpretation in verse 18 seems to indicate. The whole chapter gives the idea of a theocratic state having world government. So it is hardly probable that our Lord took the expression from the Book of Daniel. John 12:34 seems also to indicate that the title 'Son of Man' had no Messianic connotation for the Jews, and that they did not know where to place it in their thinking.

13. Among certain smaller sects like the Mandoans and among a small section of the scribes and theologians an idea had taken root which was found in a great variety of forms in many countries. It was the myth of the primeval, aboriginal 'Man' who was the prototype of all mankind. This 'Man' was always identified with God in some way. Sometimes he was the agency by which all things were created, sometimes he was God-man, and he could even be God Himself. He was usually the agency for the final restoration, when all evil had been overcome. The interesting point is that he was in no case ever identified with a historical person, but was usually hidden away in heaven until the time for his revealing came.

14. Wherever this idea had taken root among the Jews this primeval 'Man' was called the Son of Man, and those who worked along these lines were not so interested in the coming Messiah, as they were in the idea of a final restoration, 'the end of all things'. There must be a final day when the struggle between good and evil finally ends, they said. Then all that has been weakened or destroyed by sin and evil would be restored to its pristine purity. The Son of Man, one like unto sinful flesh, was to be revealed at the end of time to bring about the conclusion of the great struggle between God and Satan. I cannot bring in details, but this one main thought is found with variations in at least three of the apocryphal books (Enoch, Esdras, Baruch) that were current at the time of Jesus and just before His time. Some did try to fit King Messiah in by letting him reign

for a 1,000 years before the Son of Man came to finalise the great drama. Usually, however, King Messiah was left out, for he was thought of as a worldly practical ruler who played no part in the great final showdown between God and Satan.

15. Obviously, just as the Messiah idea could not be used as it was, so also the Son of Man idea had to be changed. It is not easy to understand why our Lord chose that particular title. We only know:

- (a) that He chose it,
- (b) that it was already known in certain sects and circles,
- (c) that the prominent thought in it was not political but religious,
- (d) that it made it possible for our Lord to avoid the final clash with the Jews until after He had time to get His message across, and
- (e) that this Son of Man conception was completely modified when He took it over.

As mentioned before, the aboriginal 'man', the prototype of all mankind, was a mythical figure, hidden away in heaven, to be revealed only at the end of time. When our Lord called Himself the Son of Man He made that unknown figure a concrete, historical person.

16. Both this Son of Man idea and the previously discussed King Messiah idea were completely upset when our Lord related that small group of prophecies found in Isaiah 42:1–4, 49:1–6, 50:4–11, and 52:13 – 53:12 to Himself. The Jews had no understanding of, nor use for, these prophecies; they were not even sure they were prophecies. The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:32–34), a man evidently well-versed in the Scriptures, reflected the uncertainty of the time, when he asked Philip if Isaiah was referring to himself or someone else. The Jews did not know, and they just could not place these prophecies in their scheme of things.

17. This idea of suffering and death was completely at variance with the doctrine of the Son of Man, for he was to come at the end of time with power and great glory, precisely to overcome suffering and death. Likewise the idea of suffering and death was repugnant to the King Messiah idea, not only because the Jews could not conceive of God's Anointed King as suffering and dying, 'the Messiah abides forever' (John 12:34), but also because the efficacy of this humiliation is not, according to Isaiah, confined to Israel. (Only once [in the Targum] does a Jew try to make these prophecies fit the King Messiah idea. But—it is done by completely changing

the picture, so that the suffering and dying ones are the people whom King Messiah comes to help, not the Messiah Himself!) The suffering and dying servant has universal significance. He is not out to secure the supremacy of Israel over other nations, and there is no mention of vassal states. He is the servant of Jehovah in a strange and, for the Jews, unfathomable way.

Yet our Lord took just these prophecies and related them to the passion Psalms and the whole history of Israel, and proclaimed the startling truth that the righteous Man, the true servant of Jehovah, had to suffer and die if He were to glorify God on earth.

18. To sum up, Our Lord was Messiah. He was the Son of Man, and He was the suffering servant of Jehovah. The Jews thought of each as being quite separate and (at times) irreconcilable with the others. Our Lord welded and joined them together in His own person in a radically unique manner. Each of the three becomes an entirely new creation in the person of our Lord. The theocratic state that the Messiah was to rule over disappeared, the Son of Man became a historical person, and the suffering servant of Jehovah became the Messiah as well as the Son of Man, but shorn of all His worldly power and glory.

The utter uniqueness of our Lord, seen in this way, is dazzlingly clear for us. That contemporaneous Jews were not able to accept or understand this uniqueness is not to be marvelled at.

19. However, one obvious result of Jesus Christ having brought these three elements together in His own person was His peculiar relation to and attitude towards the Old Testament Scriptures. Our Lord's attitude towards the Old Testament has always puzzled serious students of the Bible, for He seems to contradict Himself (cf. Matt. 5:17, 18, with Luke 16:16). The moment our Lord rejected the Jewish idea of King Messiah as Jehovah's viceroy on earth, ruling the theocratic state, the Kingdom of Israel, He had to have a unique attitude towards the Old Testament.

20. There is no doubt that our Lord drew inspiration from the Old Testament and depended on it for the development of His own teaching, and for the conception of Himself and His work on earth. On the other hand, His treatment of it, and His conception of its ultimate meaning, was entirely different from what the scribes and teachers of theology had. Common people were astonished. He brought a new doctrine, they said (Mark 1:27), and He taught as one having authority (Matt. 7:29). His entire approach to the Book was new and startling.

21. This unique attitude was most apparent in relation to the Old Testament shariat (law). The reason for this is not hard to find. The Jews



were under the Roman Government; the Messianic kingdom, that is, the theocratic state, was (in terms of Jewish piety) a matter of hope, expectation and faith. The shariat of this kingdom was, on the other hand, a very present thing, always being promulgated, taught, and talked about. Naturally, therefore, it was the law, the shariat, that was the great bone of contention between our Lord and the *Ulema* of the Jews. They accepted it as being verbally inspired, universally applicable and everlastingly in force. They pondered over every letter and every word.

22. Our Lord said He had not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. It would be nonsense to suppose (as some Muslims would like us to do) that the word 'fulfil' here is identical with 'keep'. Our Lord never said, nor meant, that He had come to keep the law. By fulfilling the law, the shariat, He was actually making it obsolete as law in the Messianic kingdom. We find a parallel to this thought in the sacrifices. The supreme sacrifice of our Lord fulfilled those of the Old Testament and made them obsolete.

23. Here I must stop for a moment to give you a warning regarding the word 'law'. At the time of our Lord and in His environments, the word 'law' meant a concrete, limited set of codified commandments, revealed by God to Moses. 'Law' was not only law in the present sense of shariat (revealed religious laws), but also in the sense of *qanun* (laws governing the state), for in a theocratic state both are one.

St Paul uses the word not only in the religious sense, but also philosophically and scientifically. In Paul's writings the word is used for (i) the law of Moses; (ii) the law of the state as such; and (iii) moral law and natural law. It can therefore be extremely difficult in places to know in which sense St Paul is using the word. When the Reformers broke away from the Roman theocratic state, they had the same difficulty. In our day and generation, theologians have an added problem. In the Reformation, all rulers in that area were submissive to the idea that their governments should obey the laws of God, that is, they were Christian in that sense. Now governments arise in which this submission to the laws of God is ignored or rejected. Men want to find the principle of law in the philosophical realm. Theologians have, therefore, worked on the concept 'law' philosophically, trying to find some approach whereby the Church can be justified in working together with non-Christian governments in this phase of national life. The result has been that the concept 'law' has become very broad, and can no longer be thought of as only concrete, codified laws. In philosophy law is simply the principle of regulation and therefore of restraint.

24. The problem behind all this striving for clarity, concisely stated, is this:

On the one hand, Christ (and therefore Christianity) rejects the idea of a theocratic state in which revealed codified commandments can be the principle of law in any earthly government. On the other hand, Christ did not (and therefore Christianity does not) maintain that God has given the authority to rule and govern the world completely over to the Evil One, or to man himself. The question then arises: If God does not rule and govern the world by the means of a revealed, codified law, *how does He do it?* Some would maintain that He does it by the promulgation of a moral law. This would, however, confuse two meanings of the same term, for it would be based on the assumption that the contravention of moral law would bring its own immediate penalty in the same way as it does in natural law. Let me illustrate it very simply this way: A man may get drunk, then become disorderly and get arrested. His disorderly conduct is the natural effect of or penalty for his having got drunk; his arrest is the penalty for his having broken the moral law, but it is not an effect of having broken the law; rather it is imposed by an outside authority. All natural law is descriptive; it only says: certain causes have certain effects. Moral law says: 'Thou shalt, and thou shalt not'. But where God has been rejected as the one who lays down the law and decides the penalty, and a natural principle is allowed to take His place, the 'Thou shalt, and thou shalt not' become nothing but urgings in man's nature, due to a law of cause and effect. If the Christian theologian accepts this position of the non-Christian, he is actually changing the moral law to a natural law. You will find the answer to this problem in the following chapter.

25. However, as far as our study is concerned, we must narrow the issue down to the question of shariat.

Ever since the time of St Paul (Rom. 3:8) Christianity has been accused of abrogating law and introducing a reign of anarchy; simply because people have not understood how the shariat could be abrogated without abrogating all divine rule and government.

26. Regarding the ceremonial law of the Jews, we know very little of what our Lord's attitude was; but certainly He (and the Apostles after Him) swept away the whole burdensome codified moral law, and replaced it with an ethical attitude, when He picked out those two verses from Leviticus and Deuteronomy about loving God and your neighbour, and said everything hinged on these. But He certainly never conceived of His

ethical teaching as a codified law that supplanted the law of government in any kingdom of this world, theocratic or otherwise.

27. Our Lord certainly recognised two orders, the natural and the redeemed, when He gave the answer that we should give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's, but just how Jesus conceived of God as ruling and governing in the natural order is not clear, nor is it clear in St Paul's writings. However, it is clear that, even in the redeemed order, we cannot take the ethical teaching of Jesus as having the same significance as the shariat in Judaism. For the significance of the law was that in keeping it man became well-pleasing in the sight of God. In any kingdom of this world the subjects are well-pleasing, just and righteous in the eyes of their sovereign, if they keep the laws promulgated by him or his government. Likewise in a theocratic state the shariat has the same significance. The ethical teaching of our Lord never had this significance.

28. When you bear in mind that our Lord definitely rejected the theocratic state idea, it is not difficult to see that His attitude to the shariat of such a state must be critical. In the Old Testament the Covenant and the law (shariat) belong together. Our Lord did not reject God's Covenant with Israel; but He did not conceive of that Covenant as including the idea of a universal theocratic state, and therefore He could not accept the shariat as having everlasting and universal validity. The Sermon on the Mount is typical of our Lord's attitude. Many of the ideas of the old shariat are there, but they have been released from their bondage to the theocratic state and applied to the redeemed order. No government of this world, regardless of how much it considered itself to be ruling as God's viceroy on earth, could ever accept the Sermon on the Mount as its 'shariat'. The kingdom of Israel could be built on the law of Moses, but only the kingdom of God, which is NOT of this world but which is present here and now as a promise and a hope, could have the Sermon on the Mount as its shariat, because it is not in any sense a law, the keeping of which makes man well-pleasing in the sight of God.

29. Muslims (and some Christians) will tell you that as man is limited by the imperfections and evils of sin, a practical shariat like that of Moses or of Muhammed is a necessity. Everybody knows that a state needs laws. What the Muslim and some Christians forget is that the word 'shariat' implies a God-given, revealed law for a kingdom of God here on earth. (It makes no difference if that kingdom of God is thought of as identical with the kingdom of Israel or the kingdom of Islam.) That is what our Lord protests against. The kingdom of God is the Kingdom of heaven; it is not

of this world, and therefore the subjects of that kingdom must not and cannot blend or confuse its laws with that of any temporal state. Its laws must be purely religious (that is, related directly to God) and unattainable.

‘Why unattainable?’, is the question that both Christians and Muslims ask. The answer is simple. For if sinful man could attain perfection by keeping the law then he is either no longer sinful, or else sin has become a recognised and admitted part of the kingdom of God. The righteousness of the Pharisees was the best, the highest of which the Jews knew, and our Lord said that unless your righteousness exceeds theirs you cannot have a hope of getting into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20). The unattainable nature of the Christian way of life constantly reminds man of his sinful state and of his need of God’s righteousness.

30. The Jews thought this was a strange, astonishing, new teaching. So it was. The Muslims feel exactly the same way about it. However, until the Jew or the Muslim sees that Christ has unconditionally rejected the idea of a theocratic state as bringing in the kingdom of God, he will not be able to understand our Lord’s attitude towards his shariat.

31. Let me illustrate this very important point in another way. Our Lord said the law and the prophets all hang on these two commandments: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . [and] thy neighbour as thyself’ (Matt. 22:37–40). The first of these commandments is taken from Deuteronomy, the second from Leviticus. The second more or less obscure command is found in Leviticus 19:18 and reads like this: ‘Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’. When the lawyer asked our Lord to define ‘neighbour’, He would, if he had accepted the context in which that commandment is written, have said; ‘The children of your people, whom you contact’. Instead, He made the Jews and (of all people!) the hated Samaritans neighbours. Our Lord took the sense, the idea, in the old commandment and lifted it out of the covenant law which was the state law and applied it universally and personally.

32. When our Lord said, ‘Those of old said such and such, but I say unto you . . .’, He was not just spiritualising the law, as some would have us think. He was actually introducing a new element. He was introducing the consequences of His own preaching when he said: ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the Gospel’ (Mark 1:15). The kingdom of God is the kingdom of heaven. No theocratic state with its shariat could ever bring it near. Repent, that is, turn your back on that idea, and believe the Gospel, believe that the

Messiah, the Son of Man, the suffering and dying servant of Jehovah, has brought the kingdom near, and has introduced God's righteousness for all men equally, everywhere.

33. The difference between our Lord and the Jews of His time was, concisely, this: The Jews knew that Jehovah had chosen them to be His covenanted people on earth. They therefore thought that they should establish a worldly kingdom of God on earth, probably through the work of the coming King Messiah. Jehovah had given them a shariat together with the Covenant. This they thought was everlasting and was to be applied universally as the law of that universal theocratic state, for by keeping it men became pleasing in the sight of God.

34. Jesus, on the other hand, said that while the purpose of the Covenant with Israel was to establish a special relationship to them, it was not intended to establish a universal theocratic state with a universal law, in which Israel, as a nation, was God's viceroy on earth. No theocratic state, no shariat, could ever establish righteousness on earth, that is, God's righteousness. With the rejection of the theocratic state, the law of that state (as the instrument appointed by God whereby men could be well-pleasing in His sight) must also be thrown overboard. Righteousness, God's righteousness, could only come, as Isaiah said, through the suffering and death of Jehovah's righteous servant, the Son of Man or, if you like, the Messiah.

35. If you will take this whole idea and apply it to Islam you will find how remarkably applicable it is. Although some of the details will differ (as for example, sabbath-keeping, which is unknown in Islam), yet as such, the picture is clear. Our Lord would be in direct, clear-cut opposition to the Muslims at every step. Nothing they could do would be right, because it is all based on the idea that they belong to the people whose God-given right it is to dominate the world in Allah's name and thus bring in the 'kingdom of God' (although they never use that particular expression) on earth.

36. The Jews thought that they were bringing in the kingdom of God. The Muslims think they are bringing in the kingdom of God—and our Lord says to both: The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel, which you need as well as every other person on earth.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What did the term 'Messiah' mean to the Jews?
2. What was Christ's attitude to the ceremonial law?
3. What resemblance do we find between Islam and Judaism in their attitude to law?

## CHAPTER 20

# How Does Your Concept of Faith Differ from That of a Muslim?

1. One great difficulty in our approach to the Muslim is the almost universal lack of clarity as to the Christian position regarding law in relation to Islam. Especially in our day, when the Muslims are alive to their need of a law that will cope with modern conditions, the question about law in Christianity is constantly cropping up when we contact Muslims. If we want to help them to understand Christ, it is worse than useless to argue that they are under law and we under grace, for as soon as you begin to define your thoughts more carefully you will probably find (i) that although you talk freely about grace, you insist on carrying the law in some shape or form over into Christianity; and (ii) that the Muslim will not accept the position that he is under the law in the sense of it having the power of final Judgment.

2. There are several real difficulties that we ourselves have to face before we can get on with the job of our practical approach to the Muslim with the Gospel:

(a) The first real difficulty is to try to find out just what St Paul meant when he was using the word 'law'. For example, what does he mean when he says that the heathen have the 'law' written in their hearts? What law is he thinking of? Surely not the Ten Commandments. What heathen ever thought of keeping the Sabbath, for example? Again, in the 3rd chapter of Galatians he is obviously talking about the Mosaic law, and speaks of it as being abrogated with the coming of Christ. He also makes it a very secondary thing, a parenthesis in between the promise given to Abraham and its fulfilment in Christ. But in the 5th chapter, in his ethical admonition, he goes over to the law of love in which 'all law is fulfilled', and

speaks of the 'works of the flesh' in very general terms, saying that those who do these works of the flesh shall not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, the 'works of the law' are evidently not, in St Paul's thinking, the direct opposite to the 'works of the flesh', and yet the law of love is mentioned as though it is the opposite of the works of the flesh. If you now compare the above with St Paul's use of the expression, 'another law in my members' (Rom. 7:23), which brings him into 'captivity to the law of sin which is in my members', and then in the 8th chapter, 'the law of the Spirit of life' which made him free from 'the law of sin and death', you will see how very difficult it is, if not impossible, to follow Paul's use of the word 'law'.

(b) Another genuine difficulty we have to face is that, both at the time of our Lord and again at the Reformation, the breakaway was from a theocratic state. In both cases the actual background was a shariat that pretended to regulate not only religion in the sense of a ceremonial law, but also society, as such, in all of its intricate civil laws. Now to break away from a theocratic state is, in every sense of the word, a revolution, for when the law of a theocratic state is made of non-effect, naturally all ordinary civil laws go to pieces with it, as both have one and the same source. This very important point is often lost sight of in our day, for it is outside our experience and scope of observation. It was impressed on me very forcefully when Pakistan gained its freedom in 1947. The leaders had throughout the years been hammering into the heads of people that they were slaves and should fight for their freedom. Thousands of these simple people had no conception of what freedom means. When Pakistan did get its freedom people thought it meant that they now could ride ticketless on the trains, first, second or third class as they pleased; that they could send letters without stamping them; that they could carry weapons without licence; that they could fight and kill without being arrested. That was their conception of freedom. It was actually anarchy they confused with freedom.

Our Lord's position must have been such that, while he was destroying the idea of the shariat, at the same time He had to avoid the anarchy which invariably would arise if He uncritically destroyed the authority of the law as the Jews of His time knew it. For example, when He said that not a dot or tittle would pass away until all was accomplished, and threatened those who dared to teach otherwise (Matt. 5:18ff.), is it not in all probability to be understood as a localised statement in order to avoid the anarchy that otherwise was sure to follow His teaching? The same is probably true of



the admonition that people should do as the officials said, for they sit in the seat of Moses (Matt. 23:2).

Our Lord did NOT want to invalidate ordinary civil law as a result of His destroying the theocratic state idea. Likewise, when the Reformers preached that one use of the law was that the civil administration had to be obeyed for it was from God, was it not because they wanted people to understand that breaking away from a theocratic state did not mean lawlessness in the sphere of civil life? Again, when all the great confessional Churches have incorporated the Ten Commandments in their symbols, articles of religion or liturgies, is it not also because they wanted people to comprehend the fact that God rules in the natural order as well as in the redeemed order?

(c) All through this searching for a standpoint regarding law, the main difficulty is: How are we to conceive of God's law functioning in the realm of the natural order, without changing that natural order into a theocratic state? The Jews, the Muslims and the Roman Catholics have simply not been able to do so. For them, each in his own way, the natural order is just a continuation of the 'church'. And outside of the Roman Church we others have certainly not been very successful in our struggle with the problem.

3. There seems to be only one answer to the question. The law of God in the natural order must be conceived of as a part of history as such. Now God does NOT reveal Himself in history as such, but certain definite localised events and episodes inside history are accepted as revelational, and, because of them, the Christian Church believes that God rules and is sovereign in all history. That does not mean that we are to see the will of God expressed in any particular man or event of history, but only that somehow the man or the event is within the purpose of God, and that He is sovereign in relation to it. Likewise law and ethical codes in the natural order are accepted as being under the sovereignty of God not because any particular law or code of ethics can be accepted as divine, but because we (through Jesus Christ) accept the sovereignty of God, in all the various phases of the history of mankind. Admittedly this statement puts the Christian who accepts it in a paradoxical position, for while no man can pound the cover of his Bible and shout: 'Thus saith the Lord', in order to establish respect for any definite law or code of ethics, yet on the other hand the Christian must face the question of law and ethics as a very essential part of his attitude towards God. We might illustrate the point in this way: while we must accept St Paul's dictum that the powers that be

are ordained of God, yet we do not and must not accept that dictum to mean that revolution or change of government is necessarily against the will of God. But our attitude toward the powers that be will be an essential part of our attitude toward God, whether we side for revolution or change of government or not.

4. If you can explain that paradoxical position to your Muslim enquirer you are on the way to showing him the difference between your faith and his.

5. Now leaving behind the question of God's sovereignty in the matter of civil law, we can go on to what is usually called the 'moral law'. The most common argument is that while the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament have been abrogated, the moral law has been retained and is binding on all men. Unless you happen to be thinking of the advice the pillars of the Church of Jerusalem gave the heathen Christians (Acts 15:29–30) it is puzzling to know just where this distinction came from. Certainly not from the New Testament itself. There the words 'moral law' and 'ceremonial law' are not found. For example, we find nowhere that the law about bringing a sacrifice for the first male child born has been abrogated, nor do we hear of the laws regarding the feasts being made of non-effect.

6. However, because of this rather artificial distinction between ceremonial and moral law, legalism is rampant in the whole of the Christian Church, and has been ever since the days of the earliest sect of Judaizers, the Ebionites, who insisted on carrying over into Christianity the laws and rites of Judaism. The author of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, in writing against this crude legalism, tries to solve the problem by rejecting the details and paragraphs of Jewish law, but carrying over into Christianity the principle of law. Moses no longer decides what is right and what is wrong. The new Law-giver is Christ. This book was at one time so highly esteemed that even Origen said he fancied it was 'divinely inspired', probably because it, in a subtle way, satisfied man's craving for law, for definite authority in all things.

7. The Roman Church brought in the principle of law very cleverly, for while it does definitely teach that salvation is *solo gratia* (by grace alone) it vitiates that teaching by contending that man must show himself to be worthy of grace, and this he does by keeping the law. It is like a scholarship that is given gratis to the boy most worthy of it.

8. The Reformers took this prerequisite away. We are justified by faith alone, without the works of the law. No 'ifs' or 'buts' or 'provided's'

were allowed to remain. And yet, as before mentioned, the Decalogue was incorporated into the documents of every one of the confessional Churches. Somehow or other, the law, or at least the principle of law, had to be taken in. One does not need to attend very many services in the usual Christian Churches before the confusion in the mind of the pastor makes itself felt in his sermons.

9. It is after all not so remarkable that a legalising sect like the Seventh Day Adventists is able to carry off so many sheep from the Christian fold. The sect makes capital out of the general confusion in all Protestant Churches on this question of law in relation to grace.

10. Legalism is found in three different forms, not outwardly similar, yet all basically the same:

(a) There is first of all the simple, over-optimistic conception that to be a follower or disciple of Christ means to do what He said, and that this obedience is straightforward, involving no paradoxes or impossibilities in itself. For example, the law of love is taken to mean that you should be as fair and just and humane towards your neighbour as circumstances permit. The fact that any real effort at loving your neighbour as yourself brings you into conflict with party and group loyalties, and therefore puts you into a paradoxical position of trying to do the impossible, is quietly ignored. In liberal theology, this superficial and easygoing conception of the demands of our Lord is carried to such an extent that the work of Christ in His life, death and resurrection are overshadowed, if not completely ignored. Liberal theology (and much other) is in this way blatant legalism. The principle of law is made to be the one really valuable thing in Christianity.

(b) Another type of legalism is more subtle. The moral law is accepted as binding. But as we are not able to keep the law to perfection, Christ was sacrificed for us, and we can then plead that Christ fulfilled the law for us, He was punished instead of us, and therefore we are free from the punishment and curse of the law. Jesus is thought of primarily as the perfect sacrifice for transgressions as typified in the Old Testament. Now if you will look at the Old Testament idea you will find that, since civil laws are part of the body of laws of the theocratic state, the man who had transgressed the law paid a fine in the form of a sacrifice for his transgression. In other words, a part of the Old Testament system of sacrifice was the counterpart of our legal systems today. The moment you think or speak of Christ as a sacrifice for sin, you must be careful not to make Christianity a law religion with the immoral touch that a man can get by with anything he

likes so long as he has a substitute ready to take the punishment and bear the cost. It is no wonder that when the Muslim hears of this kind of 'justice' he protests violently. And yet it is perhaps the most common conception of how law works in relation to grace that the Muslim hears. Have you ever stopped to think that when this point of view is presented the Muslim will understand the argument, although he will disagree with you? That fact in itself should warn you that you are on legalistic ground or his ground, and not where you should be—on Christian ground.

(c) Finally, you hear people say that the Muslim shariat as well as the law of the Jews—in fact all law—is all right, but what natural man lacks is the power to keep the law. And once he becomes a Christian and believes on our Lord he is given the victorious life, the power to do what the law demands of him. The only answer to that argument is that the man who says this is completely blind. First of all blind to the real demands of the law as propounded by Christ; then blind to his own life in its smaller and larger environments; and finally to the life of the Church right from the days of the Apostles themselves. That the Muslim smiles when he hears that argument about victorious life is not to be wondered at.

11. Now the question which bothers us most of all is this: Just what is meant by law? In my dictionary there are nine definitions, some having as many as four sub-definitions. Obviously, then, we must have some criterion by which we know what we are talking about. In regard to rule of conduct, jurisprudence and divine commandments, one thought goes through all these definitions, that is, a system or a body of rules and regulations, and it is in this sense the word is used in these chapters. As soon as you introduce any shape or form of legalism into Christianity you have to be able to produce your system or body of divine rules and regulations. Unless you can do so, your whole concept of law floats about in midair like dry clouds driven by the wind. This fact is doubly true if you are going to talk to the Muslim, who very definitely has his own complete and minutely detailed system of rules and regulations.

12. One answer to this demand for definite laws that is very common is that the moral law (as distinct from the ceremonial law) of the Old Testament is God's law for all mankind, and is still valid. The moral law is simply a law telling people how they must treat each other according to a given standard of right. If you think that the law of the Old Testament telling people how to treat each other is still in force, please take time off to carefully read it through, in Exodus from the 20th chapter onwards and in Deuteronomy from chapter 18 on. Stop a moment at the question of

slavery in Exodus chapter 21, especially verses 20 and 21. Look at 22:2 and 3 carefully. See the justification for witch-burning in 22:18 and for burning heretics in verse 20, and in Deuteronomy 18:20 for killing false prophets. See the tactics of war as described in Deuteronomy 20:10–18. See the treatment of wives in 21:10–17, and how to punish a rebellious son in verses 18 to 21. In chapter 22:5 women are told not to use men's clothing and vice-versa. In chapter 23 an illegitimate child and ten generations of his descendants are to be excluded from worshipping God in the congregation. And in chapter 24 there is a law telling you how long a man must be free to cheer up a new wife. These are just a few highlights along the way.

13. None of these things mentioned here are ceremonial law, they are all moral law. But when you have read these chapters through, I am sure you will admit that such laws cannot have eternal validity. And yet if you think these laws were suggestions, try to read the long list of curses in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 for 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.'

14. I doubt whether even a modern Jew would go to the Muslim and tell him that these are the laws of God, and that they must be kept. Certainly no Christian would, if he were in his right mind.

15. Another group, and by far the largest, would say that we can dispense with all those detailed laws and accept the Decalogue or the more bulky body of laws. The general conception or principle of law is found in the Decalogue, and in many a catechism it becomes the basis of a new system of legalising Christianity. True, the Decalogue is a summarising of the whole law, also the summary that in all probability was most popular with the Jews at the time of our Lord. But whether summarised or not, the idea, the principle, the background is the same as for all the detailed paragraphs of law in the Old Testament. In other words, if you want to understand the Ten Commandments they must be interpreted by the Old Testament itself. It is begging the question completely to take an ethical ideology from the New Testament or from the time in which we live, and on that basis to re-interpret the Decalogue. It must be crystal clear, that either the Decalogue stands on the interpretation its authors gave it, or it has no more divine value than that of the new interpretation itself. We cannot take a law, give it a new meaning and then say that this is the law as it was before. By giving it a new meaning it becomes a new law, and as such has no more weight than its own inherent value. A very good illustration of this point is what is known as 'Sabbath-keeping'. The Decalogue says: Remember the

Sabbath day to keep it holy, because on that day God rested from all His labours (Exod. 20:8–12). The New Testament talks not of the last day of the week, but of the first, because on that day our Lord arose from the dead. But there is not a verse in all the New Testament that even suggests that the first day (or any day of the week) should be kept holy. (This is not to say that the keeping of Sunday has not been consensus in the whole Church from its beginning.) The Church then took the command regarding the Saturday, dropped the reason for its being a day of rest, and drafted this command into Sunday, after adding its own reason for keeping the first day of the week. Likewise the law on adultery. If it is interpreted according to the Old Testament itself, it means that no man had a right to transgress with another man's wife because she was his property, just as much as his house and his domestic animals and his slaves were his property, and should not be transgressed against. But in our day that command is made to cover all sexual impropriety, partly on the basis of what the New Testament says and partly on the basis of the accepted sex conduct of the time.

16. One could go on through all the commands of the Decalogue that have ethical significance and show how they have lost their original meaning and have been interpreted in a fashion that suits the present situation, and then promulgated as an authoritative divine law that is a *must* for every Christian.

17. There is still a third group of people who talk about the Sermon on the Mount as the law of Christ. This question will come up later in a chapter on ethics, but here I just want to say that the Sermon on the Mount is what dialectical theologians call the impossible possibility in ethical living. Christ never meant it to be a law to supersede any other law, civil or religious. Any person who seriously tried to keep it as divine law would be destroyed by it, and any society of people who tried to keep it would be dissolved by it. In our present sinful set-up it is definitely the impossible possibility.

18. The only result we can come to is that, try as we may, there is no place where the Christian can find an authoritative body of divine rules and regulations which in any sense can justify him in combining law with the Gospel.

19. If we are going to get anywhere at all with the Muslim, we have to go back and try to see things in the New Testament in an entirely different light. The question of law was just as pressing for St Paul as it is for us. He was up against the same opposition as we are. Although some of his

uses of the word 'law' puzzle us, there is something he does say clearly, and that is that it was NOT because he failed to keep the Mosaic law that he was driven to Christ. Paul was proud of being a Pharisee who as touching the law was BLAMELESS (Phil. 3:4–10). It was this very perfection, this blamelessness in the eyes of the law, the shariat, that St Paul threw on a dunghill, for he did not wish to be found having his own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ. (Remember our Lord had said: If your righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, you will in no wise enter the Kingdom of heaven. You should therefore seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 5:20). The point here is that the Pharisees had a righteousness of their own. They were not defeatists, saying it was a hopeless task trying to keep the law. But what Paul discovered was that the law was only a tutor to bring men to Christ. Some people think of this expression in this way: the law teaches us that fulfilment is utterly impossible, and since we cannot fulfil the law it drives us in desperation to Christ. He then fulfils it for us and we are thus freed from the law. Actually the opposite is the case. Let us use another illustration. There is an exceedingly high mountain that looks as though its peak reaches into heaven. A man sets out to climb to that peak with the idea of reaching heaven, but when he reaches the top he sees that for all practical purposes he is as far away from heaven as the people in the valley below. That climb was a tutor that taught him the truth regarding heaven. That is why Paul does not want to be found having his own righteousness. Not because he had not reached the pinnacle of perfection; but because, having reached it, it really did not get him anywhere. Therefore, without the imputed righteousness of Christ, that is, without the righteousness of God, he was as far from heaven as the common people down in the valley below.

20. The question that here needs to be answered is: Just why was Paul worried about the value of his effort at keeping the law? He had kept the law blamelessly from his youth up. It was because he recognised the difference between what I want to call sinful perfection and sinless perfection. Now these two expressions placed in juxtaposition may sound rather strange to you. But the point to remember is that the shariat, the Mosaic law, or any other law of its kind, pretends to be a divine regulation of civic life; that is, it gives rules and regulations for people living together in a community as though they were revealed directly from God. But a law from God MUST be absolute (cf. 'Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy', and 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is

in heaven is perfect'). Now because of the disruptive force of sin that works in every community of mankind, laws that are to be effective must be based on a consideration of this one vital fact of sin. Laws must be accommodated to human nature and be relative in their value. For example the law may say, 'Thou shalt not kill, but if thou dost then an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth and a life for a life'. That regulation would be fair and just in any human, sinful community, but certainly any absolute law of God would never stop at suppressing the outward manifestation of an inward hate or anger. On the other hand the Muslim is perfectly justified when he says that a law has to be practicable to be effective as law. What he does not understand is that these relative laws of his or of the Mosaic shariat only help a man to sinful perfection, while the demand of God on man is sinless perfection. The Sermon on the Mount and the law of love, properly understood, point to what sinless perfection would be and show us what an utterly impossible possibility it is.

21. Until the Jew, the Muslim and many a so-called Christian has learned to differentiate between the sinful perfection attained to by keeping certain relative good laws and the sinless perfection which God demands of man, he will not be able to understand why his own righteousness is not enough to make him well-pleasing in God's sight. Or said in another way: There can be no divine law on earth because the absolute good, the sinless perfection, which the divine law must demand, would be nothing but the mocking of mankind. It would either drive him to despair or leave him utterly cold. It could have no real relation to him in any way.

22. Now there is one more very important point to bring out regarding law. Laws may cause a man to regret his trespasses, but never to repent of them. I have seen literally hundreds of individual Muslims smile happily and say: 'Yes, we are all God's sinners'. When he gets caught red-handed breaking the law he may pull his earlobes and say: I repent, I repent; but in actual fact he only regrets that he got caught. Repentance is not the reaction of a law-breaker, but only that of a sinner. The true Christian is one who knows his own sinfulness and puts his hope in God for redemption, and he knows it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin. It is always said, and rightly so, that a Muslim has no consciousness of sin. What he has is a consciousness of having trespassed against certain laws. He expects that God will be lenient and merciful, or, if the worst should come, that he will have to go to 'God's gaol' for some years.

23. In this connection it is well worth noticing that before St Paul was a Christian he could boast of having kept the law. It was only after he



became ‘the slave of Christ’ that he saw how the law in actual fact condemned him. If you try to reverse this process your words will fall on deaf ears. You can never hope to use the law as a stepping stone to the Gospel. It just simply does not work that way. It is the Gospel that reveals the seriousness and yet the futility of the law.

24. Finally, let me say that the only possible approach to the Muslim is to show him that the shariat, which he regards as perfect law, is in fact NOT perfect, for it has to be of relative value to be effective. His keeping of the law, then, only gives him a sinful perfection that falls far below the demands of God. Therefore the righteousness he has acquired by the law is not a guarantee that he will enter the kingdom of heaven.

25. Christianity therefore drops all discussion of the relative merits of law and of merit gained by keeping the law. What it says is that the Lamb of God is the Passover Lamb. In general the symbolism of Christian truth is NOT taken from the shariat<sup>1</sup> and is not related to it in any way; it is taken from the people of Israel living in slavery and death, in Egypt. This is the Christian conception of sin. By faith in the Passover Lamb they were taken out of that country and given freedom and life in the Promised Land. The symbolism of Christianity points clearly to an act of redemption by God Himself. And this redemption is quite apart from all laws, rules and regulations. It is an absolute act of God, not related to anything man is capable of doing.

26. I know it takes courage, conviction and knowledge to preach an absolute Gospel, a Gospel that knows nothing but Christ and Him crucified, no laws of conduct, no conditions, no ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’. If you do not have the courage, the conviction and the knowledge to preach such a Gospel, your efforts among Muslims will be futile, for there is no other way of truly presenting Christ than to present Him as the revelation of God.

27. Let me say, then, in answer to the question we asked at the beginning of this chapter, that the difference between your faith, properly understood, and that of the Muslim, is that while Allah is in the final analysis the JUDGE, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is in the final analysis the REDEEMER. That does not mean that our God is not the Judge; it means that the Judge Himself is our Redeemer. The man who has

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<sup>1</sup> Even in its absolute rejection of the ceremonial law in the Letter to the Hebrews, the particular element referred to is a ceremony quite set apart from the ordinary daily function of the shariat.

not seen and understood Christ will insist on standing on his own merits, and presenting his own sinful perfection. God is his Judge. The man who has seen and understood Christ will look to God the Judge, as his Redeemer, not trusting in his own sinful perfection, but in the revelation of God as it is in Christ.

### QUESTIONS

1. How did Jesus deal with the idea of a theocratic state?
2. What is your understanding of the relationship between law and the Christian faith?
3. What are the practical implications of the material in this chapter in your dealings with the Muslims?

## CHAPTER 21

# Is Islam Law or Evangel?

1. Have you ever had the experience of some keen Muslim trying to tell you what Christianity is, and then proving it from the Bible or the Creeds? If you have, you will know what I mean when I say that one's reaction to such keenness is indifference and if he persists it grows to irritation. Well, that is just how the Muslim will react if you are unwise enough to try to tell him what Islam is, and try to prove it from the Quran or the Traditions. On the other hand, if you do not have more or less accurate and complete knowledge of the main doctrines of Islam, the modern Muslim will be able to make you believe almost anything he likes. In other words, you have got to know and yet never try to teach a Muslim his own religion.

2. A second introductory remark is this: Just as there are widely divergent conceptions of what Christianity is, so likewise Muslims disagree amongst themselves as to what Islam is. This disagreement does not always run parallel with the sectarian lines; as often as not, it cuts straight across them. Therefore it is quite probable that if this chapter is referred to a Muslim for his judgment, he may condemn it as not giving a true picture of Islam. What he means, of course, is his idea of Islam. However, if you are going to learn anything at all about Islam you have to run the risk that some Muslim is going to tell you it is all wrong. In that case, do not be impatient with him, hear him out; you may learn something from him. At least let him have his conception of Islam and try to meet him there. Do not try to make him receive your conception, only to have it taken away again in favour of your Christianity.

3. The question we want to discuss today is whether Islam as a theological system is based entirely on law, or whether there is some other way by which a man can save the day, even after he has broken the law. In other words: Is Islam an absolute system of law, so that the 'works of the Law' are the basis of salvation, or does it in some way proclaim an

evangel, that is, the good news of salvation by means other than the law, and not dependent on man's ability or effort?

That question is not easy to answer. Obviously one of the first questions one asks is, what happens on the Judgment Day?

4. It is more or less agreed that the urgency of Muhammed's earliest preaching sprang from his vivid conception of the Last Day. Belief in a Judgment Day was a mental revolution for a pre-Islamic Arab, for the prerequisite was belief in one Creator—God and a continuation of life after death. And the purpose of the Judgment was, according to Sura 39:70, that 'every soul shall be paid back fully what it has done' and 'every soul will know what it hath produced'. There can be no doubt that at least in the beginning of his career Muhammed envisaged this Judgment scene as a genuine 'Yaumu'l Hisab', that is, day of reckoning. The 'mezan' mentioned in the Quran, is a great set of scales, wherein the bad deeds done by mankind will be weighed. The seriousness of this final Day leaves no one in doubt. On that day men shall cry: 'Where is there a place to flee to?' But in vain. There is no refuge (Sura 76:10–11). Some of the stories told in the traditions also show the seriousness of the final day of reckoning. For example:

The first person who shall receive sentence on the Day of Resurrection will be a martyr, who will be brought into the presence of the Almighty: then God will make known the benefits which were conferred on him in the world, and the person will be sensible of them and confess them; and God will say, 'What didst thou do in gratitude for them?' He will reply, 'I fought in Thy cause till I was slain.' God will say, 'Thou liest, for thou foughtest in order that people might extol thy courage.' Then God will order them to drag him upon his face to hell. The second, a man who shall have obtained knowledge and instructed others, and read the Quran. He will be brought into the presence of God, and will be given to understand the benefits he had received, which he will be sensible of and acknowledge; and God will say, 'What didst thou do in gratitude thereof?' He will reply, 'I learned knowledge and taught others, and I read the Quran to please Thee.' Then God will say, 'Thou liest, for thou didst study that people might call thee learned, and thou didst read the Quran for the name of the thing.' Then God will order him to be dragged upon his face and precipitated into hell. The third, a man to whom God shall have given abundant wealth; and he shall be called into the Presence of God, and will be reminded of the benefits which he received, and he will acknowledge and confess them; and God will say, 'What return didst thou in return for them?' He will say, 'I expended my wealth to please thee, in all those ways which Thou hast approved.' God will say, 'Thou liest, for thou didst it that people might extol thy liberality'; after which he will be drawn upon his face and thrown into the fire (Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, p. 542).

5. This idea of the Judgment has taken such a hold on the minds of the Muslims that a thousand different stories are told even about the pre-Judgment scenes. Just a couple of examples are given here. The really good people will come to the Judgment riding on camels; the indifferent good will come walking; and the bad, crawling. The ungodly will be classified in ten categories, each having some obnoxious shape, for example, backbiters will look like apes, the greedy like swine, etc. The book containing a man's deeds will be given to him in the Judgment. Every soul shall recognise its earliest and latest actions. For there are guardians over you, illustrious recorders, who are cognisant of your actions and record them (Sura 82). If the book is given to a man in his right hand, he may well rejoice for his good deeds have outweighed his bad; if, however, it is given to him behind his back, well, he is just out of luck, that is all (Sura 84).

6. The reason for the Judgment being public and official is not because God and the man concerned do not know what the sentence will be, but because all creation must know that God has been scrupulously just in His dealings with man, when He sends a great part of the race to fill hell.

7. What I am trying to get at is this; the first impression you get of the Judgment Day is that a just and righteous God is going to reward His creatures according to the merits of their conduct here on earth. Now, if that really were so, it would be easy to maintain that Islam is a law-religion. Man gets his due deserts, and there is nothing more to say about it. However, such a conclusion would be as far from the truth as heaven is from earth.

There are three thoughts that project themselves into the picture almost at once. They are:

- (a) The relative value of certain deeds in comparison with others;
- (b) The idea of an intercessor;
- (c) The mercy of God.

### **THE RELATIVE VALUE OF CERTAIN DEEDS IN COMPARISON WITH OTHERS**

8. The Quran says: 'Verily those who have believed and have done the things that are right, on them the Compassionate will bestow [His] love (Sura 19:96). Although some rationalist Muslims hold that the punishment of hell is not eternal for anybody, still the great mass of Muslims hold that

hell is only temporary for the people of Ahli-Kitab, and then only for those whose sins are so great that they must needs be punished.

Apparently it works out to this: if you are a professing Muslim (probably also a professing Jew or Christian) you belong to Ahli-Kitab, and as such the danger of hellfire is only temporary. In other words, the real test on the Judgment Day is, in the final analysis, NOT the book of your deeds recorded by the 'illustrious recorders', nor the great set of scales that will weigh your deeds, but whether or not you have professed the faith. The crucial question for a Muslim is always: Does he say the Kalima? This attitude approximates St Paul's statement in Romans 10:9, 'that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved', or even with our Lord's own statement, 'whosoever therefore shall confess me before man, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven' (Matt. 10:32).

9. Admittedly, learned doctors of law in Islam will discuss this question and probably disagree among themselves, but an overall picture of the systematic theology of Islam will undoubtedly show that the first and most vital thing on the Judgment Day is belief and confession. Once the fact is established that so-and-so said the Kalima, his real danger is past. He may have to go to 'purgatory' for a while, but the bottomless pit is not for him. In other words, God has, of course, given His shariat to guide man to heaven, and the keeping of it is obligatory on all, but in the final analysis the keeping of the law is not the pivot around which all else revolves. That is why the average Muslim can smile, call himself 'God's sinner' and be quite happy about it. He is only a sinner in the sense of a transgressor, not in the sense of a kafir or a blasphemous idolator. One might say the difference is like that between an ordinary law-breaker and a revolutionary.

### THE IDEA OF AN INTERCESSOR

10. The thought that naturally comes to be associated with belonging to the 'household' in Islam is the idea of an intercessor (see paragraph 7). When you believe in Muhammed's one God and in Muhammed's prophethood, you become a member of his spiritual family and you have a right to expect him to look after your interests in the next world.

11. The doctrine of intercession is, however, not universally accepted amongst the learned. There are too many verses in the Quran, as well as

Traditions, that seem to contradict it. For example, in Sura 2 where God is talking to the Jews, He says: ‘And be on your guard against a day when one soul shall not avail another in the least, neither shall intercession on its behalf be accepted, nor shall any compensation be taken from it, nor shall they be helped’ (v. 48).

Likewise in Sura 82 it says that ‘one soul shall be powerless for another soul’. Rationalists use such verses to prove that intercession has no place in Islamic theology. Likewise in Sura 39:53–54, where God says He forgives all sins, and then goes on to say that people should repent before the penalty comes, for ‘After that ye shall not Be helped’. A. Yusuf Ali comments as follows: ‘No help will come to you when the Judgement is actually established and you stand before the Judgement-Seat’.

12. There are about half a dozen verses in the Quran that do seem to indicate the possibility of intercession, but these are then interpreted to mean a plea for unmerited reward will be made, but not for the forgiveness of sin.

13. However, as said before, the consensus is that intercession will be allowed for the forgiveness of sin on the Last Day. Muhammed and other prophets as well as certain learned doctors and martyrs, says a Tradition, will themselves have so secure a position that they will be able to intercede for others. (Another Tradition contradicts the above and says God will offer the office of intercession to others, but they will reject it, saying that they themselves are in need of intercession and only Muhammed will accept it.)

Anyhow, as far as the Muslim is concerned, a verse like Sura 19:87 is of vital importance: ‘None shall meet (on the Judgment Day) with intercession save he who has entered into covenant with the God of mercy’. Although this verse can be interpreted in three different ways, yet the main idea is that the presupposition must be acceptance of Islam.

Likewise the tradition that Muhammed is supposed to have said: ‘He is most fortunate in my intercession in the Day of Judgment who shall have said from his heart, without any mixture of hypocrisy: “There is no God but Allah”’. Again: ‘I will intercede for those who have committed great sins’.

14. It thus appears that once you have ‘entered into covenant with God’—that is, in practice once you have said the Kalima—Muhammed will intercede for even the greatest sinner.

15. What the whole idea boils down to so far is this: There is going to be a real and genuine Judgment Day, but for the followers of Muhammed

two considerations alter the inexorable justice to be meted out. First, the common understanding is that the saying of the creed is so important that it excludes the possibility of a 'Momin' receiving eternal punishment, and secondly, this efficacy of the creed is realised through the intercession of the prophet Muhammed.

16. So far it does undoubtedly look as though Islam has an evangel, namely the good news that you are saved by faith, and not by works of the law. Many Muslims, who know somewhat of their own religion and of ours, will argue that fundamentally both are the same; we are saved by faith through the mediation of Christ, and they are saved by faith through the intercession of Muhammed. A Christology that is over-emphatic about the doctrine of mediation is very apt to get into trouble here, unless the matter is very carefully thought over.

17. When a Christology does emphasise this aspect of the work of our Lord, it is always as the basis of the merits of Jesus Christ. Only the Lamb is worthy to open the book (Rev. 5:1-9). He will present the Church as His bride spotless and without wrinkle for she will be washed in the blood of the Lamb (Eph. 5:27). Christ was obedient unto death and therefore that name was given Him which is above every other name (Phil. 2:8-11).

18. Personally, I am not over-fond of the mediation emphasis in Christology, as it smacks too much of legalism, even though this jurisprudence is of divine origin and exercised in the 'courts of heaven'. But as it has a place in the history of Christology, and as many missionaries seem to find it a good way of trying to explain redemption, it needs to be said that if you do like that approach, please remember that the whole weight of the argument lies on the merits of Christ. He completed the work God sent Him to do, and therefore He and only He can plead for His Church, His body, in the courts of heaven.

19. In Islam it is entirely different. The ability to intercede has primarily nothing to do with the merits or the demerits of the intercessor. It depends entirely on the will of God, as the Quran says (Sura 30:45), intercession is wholly with God. Again in Sura 20:108 you read that 'No intercession will avail on that day, save his whom the Merciful shall allow, and whose words He shall approve'.

### **THE MERCY OF GOD**

20. That brings us to the third point in paragraph 7, namely, the mercy of God. At the beginning of every chapter of the Quran, with one



exception, you will find that God is called the Merciful, the Compassionate. When ‘the Merciful’ decides upon whom He will have mercy, then there is evidently a possibility of intercession for that soul, but here the real snag becomes apparent. Although Allah is called Merciful and Compassionate a great number of times in the Quran, and although people usually repeat the formula: ‘In the name of the Merciful, the Compassionate’ before saying the creed, before eating, and before starting on anything new, or before going on a journey—yet the theologians of Islam almost all agree that the human qualities of mercy and compassion are NOT to be predicated of God, and that whatever qualities of mercy and compassion there may be they are utterly dependent on the will of God, which no man can presume to know.

21. What is the final result?

- (a) You may do your utmost to keep all the laws of Islam;
- (b) You may believe with your heart and confess with your mouth that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammed is His prophet;
- (c) You may hope against hope that Muhammed will be your intercessor on the Judgment Day;
- (d) You may think and talk of God as both Merciful and Compassionate.

22. BUT—in the final analysis, you know nothing of what God is, nor what He may do for you or for anyone else.

What it actually boils down to is this: Islam as a theological system is neither law nor evangel. That is to say, in Islam God has not bound Himself by any covenant or pact to anyone in any way. The Jews had the idea (even though it was wrong) that God’s law was related to His covenant in such a way that he who kept the law was sure of salvation. The Christians say: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31), for God so loved the world that He gave His Son (John 3:16). The Muslims say you can know nothing about God, His attributes, His qualities or His will. In other words, theologically, God has not revealed Himself at all. Everything in Islam that might be construed as evangel is tied up with God’s mercy (Occidentals would be more inclined to call it leniency). But God’s mercy (or leniency) is unpredictable, and therefore, when you get down to theological brass tacks, a sorry negative.

One of the things that often surprised me in my first studies of Islam was the note of despondency and insecurity that is found in the deathbed

utterances of so many of Islam's great men. For example: Abu Bakr was a prince among men, of sterling character and a true Muslim. It is said of him that he was so fearful of the future and laboured so much under distress that his breath was often as of a roasted liver. According to two traditions he is supposed to have said to Aisha on the day of his death: 'Oh my daughter, this is the day of my release and of obtaining of my desert—if gladness it will be lasting; if sorrow it will never cease'.<sup>1</sup>

Do you see those two 'ifs'? Nothing in Islam can remove them; not even the fact that Abu Bakr was given the title Atik (Free) because Muhammed is supposed to have said to him: Thou art free (saved) from the fire.

Likewise, when Umar was lying on his deathbed he is reported to have said:

'. . . I am none other than as a drowning man who sees possibility of escape with life, and hopeth for it, but feareth he may die and lose it, and so plungeth about with hands and feet. More desperate than the drowning man is he who at the sight of heaven and hell is buried in the vision . . . Had I the whole East and West, gladly would I give up all to be delivered from this awful terror that is hanging over me.' And finally touching his face against the ground he cried aloud: 'Alas for Umar, and alas for the mother of Umar, if it should not please the Lord to pardon me'.

Do you see Umar's difficulty? It is the uncertainty expressed in the 'if' of the last sentence. That 'if' does not express any feeling of uncertainty regarding Umar's faith, Umar's belief in one God, Umar's trust and confidence in the prophet, or Umar's lack of the good life. All of these things were in order as far as a human being could do that which is right. No. The 'if' refers to God; 'if'—it should not please the Lord to pardon him. When Yazid was burying his father he is quoted as saying:

I will not magnify him before the Almighty in whose presence he has gone to appear. If He forgive him it will be of His mercy; if He take vengeance on him, it will be for his transgressions.

Here again you have the two 'ifs':

- (a) If God forgive . . .
- (b) If God take vengeance . . .

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<sup>1</sup> This and the following quotations and examples are found in *The Torch of Guidance to the Mystery of Redemption*, translated by Sir W. Muir, and printed by the Religious Tract Society, London.

This remark of Yazid's seems to me to epitomise the whole of Islam. When you for years have worked through the great and imposing structure of Islamic thought, it is desponding beyond words to find that the foundation of it all is that little word 'if'. That 'if' is the feet of clay of the colossal and awe-inspiring image, known as Muslim theology. It comes out even where the author's intention is just the opposite. For instance regarding Sura 39:53, which was mentioned before (see paragraph 11), in which it says Allah's servants are not to despair for He forgives their faults altogether, Muhammed Ali comments as follows: 'The mercy and love of Allah, which are much talked of in other religions, find their true and practical expression in Islam'. No religion gives the solace and comfort which we find in this verse. It discloses the all-comprehensive mercy of Allah, before which the sins of men become quite insignificant. He is not a mere Judge who decides between two parties, but a Master who deals with His servants as He pleases, and therefore He can forgive the guilty without injustice to anybody.

Note the last sentence: A Master who deals with His servants AS HE PLEASES, and therefore He can forgive, etc. Even the Ahmadiya, Muhammed Ali, with his very careful choice of words would not presume to say that this Master of whom he speaks does forgive, for He does as He pleases, and Muhammed Ali like all others cannot know what His pleasure will be.

As you have seen, it is ridiculous to tell a Muslim that his religion is a law-religion. It is, no doubt, in the sense that he feels it incumbent upon him to abide by a great number of rules and regulation as an expression of God's will. And yet for the Muslim it is not really a law religion, for his obedience has no bearing on his final condition before Allah. On the other hand it is not an evangel, that is, the publishing of good news, for what good news can there ever be in that awful, uncertain, unpredictable 'if'; and yet no man, from Muhammed himself right down to the lowest aboriginal Muslim, would ever presume to know or dare to predict what 'if' will mean for him.

There is also an 'if' in Christianity, but the great difference between it and the 'if' of Islam is that that 'if' is never predicated of God. The whole content of the Gospel is simply this one thing: to show mankind that God is faithful towards His creation. He has restricted Himself with pacts, covenants and promises; He has revealed Himself in a perfect union with manhood; He has carried the burden of man's fall on Himself—all so that we may know Him and trust Him as the 'Faithful One', that is, as the One

who keeps faith with His creation. The ‘if’ in Christianity is always predicated of man: *if you will believe, if you will trust, if you will accept*, then God is faithful, you can always count on Him.

I have often been asked what Islam is, if it is neither law nor evangel. There is only one appropriate answer: *Islam is submission to the inevitable*. Just that and nothing more. Not, mind you, submission to God. If you, the Christian, say that, you are thinking ‘God’ in terms of Christian teaching, that is, you are thinking of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And even then the idea of submitting yourself to God is found only once (James 4:7) in the whole of the New Testament. The Christian, eagerly with prayer and dedication, places himself gladly in the hand of God, the Father. If, on the other hand, the Muslim says Islam is submission to God, *he* means the Allah of the prophet Muhammed, and that, in reality, means submission to the inevitable.

You can get no further with the Muslim, neither in his daily life nor in his eschatological belief.

### QUESTIONS

1. What place does the conception of law occupy in Islam?
2. Christians are saved by faith through the mediation of Christ and Muslims are saved by faith through the intercession of Muhammed. Do you consider these statements parallel? Discuss.
3. How do you think that the conclusion is reached that Islam is submission to the inevitable?

## SECTION SEVEN

# WHAT ABOUT THE DOGMA OF THE HOLY TRINITY?



## CHAPTER 22

# Is This Dogma Preachable?—I

1. This question must be related to the purpose of this series of lectures to be understood correctly. We are working on the Christian approach to Islam. So the question means: Can we in our proclamation of the Gospel to Muslims use the Christian belief in the Holy Trinity as a method of approach?

2. I am taking it for granted that those who read this chapter, and who aspire to be missionaries to Muslims, have made or are making a serious study of Christian doctrine, at least as far as it pertains to the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, for one must be exceedingly ignorant of Muslim history not to know that Muslim polemics against Christianity have always been most active and violent in regard to these two doctrines of the Church universal.

On this assumption, and because it is outside the scope of these chapters, no attempt will be made to present the actual development of these two doctrines through the ages.

3. In answering the question which is the title of this chapter, the first point to note is that proclamation is always specific and never general. In other words, we proclaim revelation and not philosophy. Let me develop this point in the following way:

4. While no clear mention is made of the dogma of the Holy Trinity in the New Testament, either in the sections addressed to the Church, or in those written for Jews and pagans, yet all that we know about the Holy Trinity we know from the Church's understanding of the Bible. This is a statement of fact. It emphasises, first of all, that the Bible itself has forced us to face the question of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. There is nothing in man, in nature, in the skies above us, or in the earth below us, which obliges us to think of a triune God. If the question had not come through the Bible it simply would not exist.

5. Admittedly there were triads and tritheisms in various religions long before our Lord came to earth, and some are still found today, for example, the Hindu Triad: Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The Babylonians had the triads: heaven-earth-sea, and sun-moon-venus (star). The Egyptians had: Osiris-Iris-Horus; and the Romans: Jupiter-Juno-Minerva. Even a superficial study of these triads shows that a triad is only what the word actually says: a group of three. The relationship between them is the figure 3, that is, the grouping together of three rather than, say, five or ten. On the other hand, in Christian theology the word ‘trinity’ means tri-une. Triplicity in unity. This language, unique in the Christian Church, has been forced upon it by the Bible.

6. I have a very good reason for reminding you that the Church’s understanding of God as a Holy Trinity has its roots wholly and solely in the Bible. It should help one never to forget, even temporarily, that the dogma of the Holy Trinity is a work of Faith formed by believers. Men who have accepted Christ as their Lord have striven to make their faith comprehensible. The object of such effort was not to develop a method of approach to non-Christians; it was confessional. The aim behind all credal statements—even the later separate Church confessions—is to express what was accepted and believed.

7. That these great confessions of the faith have been used polemically we all know. One needs but to read about Abelard, or the perhaps better known Raymond Lull, to see how men have tried to present Christian truth as intellectual propositions, which must coerce the intellect of truth-loving persons.

8. Now if you agree that it is the Bible that forces the question of the mystery of the Holy Trinity upon us, it necessarily follows that it cannot be a philosophical, mathematical or abstract theory of the Trinity which the Church accepts and believes. Every argument or discussion along these lines is barren and useless. True, an abstract philosophical argument purporting to prove that a god who reveals himself cannot be mathematically one, is not an impossibility. But such an argument would say nothing about the God of the Church. The Church speaks only and specifically about the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—Who reveals Himself in the Son.

9. In this connection it is interesting to note that the Apostles’ Creed does not contain a single philosophical term. The Nicene Creed has the word *substance*, which may or may not be a philosophical term as used there. Then there is the interesting word *person*, which has caused a world of trouble when used in speaking about the Holy Trinity. It is certain



that the word *person*, when first used as a theological term, was not, as we shall later see, a philosophical term, any more than the Greek word *prosopon*, meaning face and mask, was.

10. The great theologians of that age were trying to find human expressions that could be used to indicate the incomprehensibility of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Obviously, when one reads with the eyes of faith, the New Testament speaks of God in three very different ways. This differentiation is so sharp that one cannot escape the conclusion that the Father is NOT the Son, and that the Holy Spirit is NEITHER the Father NOR the Son. And yet, God in the New Testament is one, true, living God.

11. Superficially, it may seem strange that not one of the New Testament writers makes an effort to help us understand this mystery. On the contrary, the fact of the Holy Trinity is taken for granted just as the existence of God is taken for granted. This fact seems doubly remarkable since our Lord was often challenged particularly about this mystery.

12. The point I want to make is this. Later on, when the Church had to formulate its belief in clear-cut, intelligible terms, it had great difficulty finding words which at all adequately said what was intended by the men using them. Obviously *substance* is a poor word, for it suggests the feeling of something massive. In the same way the word *person*, as then used in the theatres, meant first a mask, and then the role played by an actor (it still has the latter meaning in the theatre). In those days actors usually played more than one part, and so when the word was adopted by theology, it came to mean that God (the actor Himself) was one, but that the *roles* He was playing were three. From this word used, however, difficulty arose, because on the stage the person was only a role played by a reality (a human being), while in theology the word *person* was used to indicate one reality which should not be confused with another reality, for as the Athanasian Creed says: Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance.

13. In modern language the word *person* is also utterly inadequate but in a diametrically opposite direction. Now *person* is used to distinguish one individual from another. In other words, the danger now is not 'confounding the person', but 'dividing the substance', or one might say, the danger of tritheism.

14. Philosophy cannot be a proper discipline of theology. Whether you like it or not, Christian theology is conditioned by and framed by revelation. Philosophy, which is man's seeking, always runs parallel

with, or contrary to, revelation. Philosophy is constantly becoming *myth*; theology is constantly becoming *truth* (note that I have used the participle *becoming*, and not the copula *is*). Philosophy is the study of Phenomena, aiming at a comprehension of the whole. If the whole may be comprehended by a study of Phenomena (nature), then it necessarily follows that the origin of revelation is to be found in nature. The conception of truth was carried to its logical conclusion by Si Sayed Ahmed, the founder of Aligarh university, who insisted that prophethood was dependent solely on a keener and deeper insight into the things of nature than was ordinarily common among men. Philosophy, even when purporting to understand and communicate revelation, is earthbound. It must not, cannot and will not raise its eyes above the horizon. That is why it is constantly becoming myth.

15. Naturally, Philosophy, as such, leads to heresy, understood as falsehood in doctrine, and therefore in faith. First of all, it leads people to believe that their chief concern is with the nature of God, whereas revelation shows it to be with God's relation to us. Secondly, it almost invariably leads to some form of modalism. This common error, which has cropped up in the Church from the earliest days, teaches that God in His essence, in Himself, is one unknown and unknowable God, but He for practical purposes in His revelation, unveils Himself as three 'Persons'. To go back to the origin of the word *person*, the actor in the theatre is one undivided individual, but for the practical purposes of the drama he shows himself masked, first as one person, then as another and again as a third. The people in the audience see and know him as the three persons of the drama, although they are aware of the fact that behind these three persons an undivided individual is the origin and source of all three, of whom he in reality is not one.

16. This heresy, whether blatantly stated by Sabellius in olden days, or more cleverly and subtly by Schleiermacher in modern times, can never be other than idolatry, for the 'Persons' one relates oneself to are not really God but only phenomenal forms, improper to the real God. Every form of modalism has its roots in a dilemma; the religious impulse forces a man to acknowledge the triplicity found in the Scriptures; whereas reason forces him to confess the simple unity. His philosophy is then an effort to combine the two, and in this effort, reason invariably runs away with faith, and his religion becomes idolatry.

17. My point is that in the beginning all the words of the Creeds were used pictorially, not philosophically. It was at the time when the Christian

theologians began trying to talk the language of Greek philosophy that serious difficulties and confusion arose. If you wish to get an idea of how the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity were brought into the higher sphere of philosophical thinking in relation to Islam, you need but read Al Ghazzali's statements as found in Dr Sweetman's book *Islam and Christian Theology* (vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 262 onwards) and remember when reading it that Al Ghazzali is writing along the lines of Christian arguments. You will quickly realise how far all this is from the simple, pictorial language of the Creeds and, correspondingly, how far it is from the thought of the New Testament.

18. When Christian theologians argued with the Muslims about Aql-qil-Moqul (intellect, activity of intellect, and the object of that activity; or reason, reasoner, reasoned—see page 293 of *Islam and Christian Theology*, vol. 1, pt. 2), or about other philosophical generalities that have absolutely nothing to do with the New Testament, they were not talking as theologians; and certainly not as philosophers, for no philosopher on earth would work out philosophical statements such as these, unless he antecedently believed in the specific Holy Trinity of the Christian Church.

19. When at the beginning of this chapter I laid so much emphasis on the fact that all we know about the Holy Trinity is what we have in the Bible, it was partly to bring out this point of the *specific* in contradiction to the *general*. If we could be satisfied with a creed that said: 'There is no God but Allah', we could happily discuss and argue philosophically about the nature of that god. But the Bible will not allow us to do this, for it says: 'The one true God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit is LORD'. In all probability one of the first Creeds of the earliest Church was: 'Christ is Lord'. Or it may have been: 'Christ is risen'. Whatever way you prefer it, the idea is the same. These Creeds mean that revelation does not call for philosophical study by the person receiving it, but for the attitude of acceptance, belief and obedience. While philosophy is interested in solving the question of the divine nature in its relation to the comprehensibility of life as a whole, revelation is given in order to bring the creature into a right relationship with his self-revealed Lord, that is, with the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

20. It ought to be obvious now that philosophical arguments and discussions of the so-called philosophical terms of the Creeds, preached to non-Christians to make the dogma of the Holy Trinity reasonable or intelligible, are not and never can be preaching of the Holy Trinity. In fact they are harmful in that they lead men's thoughts astray.

21. Now let us take up another point. From the very earliest days men have attempted to use the Quran as their basis for preaching the Holy Trinity. Some only go so far as to say that Muhammed must have known the true teaching of the Church, and what he repeatedly condemns in the Quran is not this genuine teaching, but the serious idolatrous forms of heresy which he apparently had met with. Others argue from the various names of Christ as found in the Quran, that such unusual titles must indicate a belief in the divinity of Christ and thus in the Holy Trinity. In other words, the Quran willy-nilly testifies to the truth of the Gospel.

22. It is comparatively easy to see how an older generation of stalwarts in polemics thought they were preaching the Holy Trinity in this way. For the most part, they had a legalistic conception of the Bible, related directly to the idea of verbal inspiration. When one believes in verbal inspiration, the authors of the various books and epistles are easily isolated from their words, as these words are actually the language of God, and not that of men. The next step is to ignore the author completely and give one's own interpretation to the words, so they no longer say what St Paul or St Peter etc. meant, but what the present expositor thinks God wants them to say. When a person is accustomed to treating his own Scriptures in this way, it is easy for him to treat the Scriptures of another religion in the same way.

Such a procedure in relation to the Quran cannot be too severely condemned, whether it has to do with the teaching about the Holy Trinity or any other Christian doctrine or dogma. Let me tell you why.

23. First of all, regardless of what a missionary may believe about the Bible, no Christian missionary can accept what lies implicitly hidden in this method, namely, that he takes the Quran and Muhammed seriously as instruments of revelation. Whatever else one may dispute about Muhammed, no one can question the fact that, whatever his grammar, words or phraseology may be, he never accepted, directly or indirectly, any doctrine which in any way questions or refutes the absolute, immutable, mathematical *oneness* of Allah. To twist his words—even if they lend themselves to such twisting in order to make them say the diametric opposite of what he meant—is unethical and a great disservice to the cause. But what is much worse, it would be an implicit admission that there is a source outside the Bible in which revelation can be found. In other words, to use the Quran in a serious effort to preach the Holy Trinity is literally to destroy the very documentary basis of the Church's faith in the Holy Trinity.

24. This is true in two ways:

(a) Our Scriptures say that the Holy Spirit will take of the things of Christ and use them to lead us into all truth, and in relation to Christ He will convict the world of sin. Now—either that is wrong, or the use of the Quran is wrong—unless, of course, you think of the Quran as one of the ‘things of Christ’. Figure it out for yourself.

(b) Arguing about words, phrases and grammar in the Quran can never be more than merely discussing the possibility or the probability of a trinity. But that procedure is in actual fact the denying or the ignoring of the specific, unique, and revealed Holy Trinity which the universal Church accepts and confesses on the basis of the New Testament teaching.

Let me illustrate. Suppose someone should take Jules Verne’s book *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* and on that basis argue about the possibility or probability of the existence of a submarine. Would he not be denying or ignoring the fact that submarines do exist? Otherwise he would stop arguing on the basis of the book, and argue directly from the actual existence of a submarine.

In other words, if you agreed before that all that is known about the Holy Trinity comes to us in the Bible as revelation, that should automatically exclude the use of the Quran in any effort to preach the Holy Trinity.

25. There is still another way in which the Church through the ages has tried to make its teaching about the Holy Trinity comprehensible. It is called ‘Vestigium Trinitatis’. This means that there are ‘vestiges’, signs or symbols, of the Holy Trinity to be found in nature. Even St Augustine looked for and catalogued some of these ‘vestiges’ or symbols of three-ness in the usual one-ness of natural things. Any good book on dogmatics should give you the complete list, so by way of illustration I will mention only a few. The five categories under which they fall are nature, culture, history, religion and man.

## NATURE

26. In the realm of nature, Anselm of Canterbury has, as his favourite, the Nile. It was spring—stream—lake. The spring is origin, the stream is channel, and the lake is fulfilment.

Luther, in his table talks, used to speak of indications of trinity in nature, such as:

hope	wisdom	usefulness
weight	number	measure
solid	fluid	gas
height	breadth	depth
yellow	red	blue (the primary colours)

### **CULTURE**

27. The division of society into teaching–military–food supply. In music, the three basics: First–Third–Fifth. In poetry, the three forms: epic–lyric–dramatic.

### **HISTORY**

28. In the realm of history the following one is interesting:

The Petrine kingdom of fear, and past . . . indicating the Father.

The Pauline kingdom of truth, and present . . . indicating the Son.

The Johannine kingdom of love, and future . . . indicating the Holy Spirit.

### **RELIGION**

29. In this category there are many, such as:

Knowledge–meditation–contemplation

Faith–reason–contemplation

Dependence–security–longing

Then of course the ‘historical’ triads of Babylonia, Egypt, Rome and India were used.

### **MAN**

30. St Augustine preferred to use memory–intellect–will, as the triplicity in the unity of man. Others are: lover–loved one–love; body–soul–spirit.

31. Now if you take the most complete list you can find of these illustrations and study them carefully, you will find that whatever else they may illustrate, not one of them offers an apt or satisfactory illustration of the specific Holy Trinity of Christian doctrine.

32. Let us look first at the triads of ancient religions. The grouping together of three was not trinitarianism. In Egypt the triad Osiris–Isis–Horus was obviously the deification of the family principle: father–mother–child. But in this there is no necessary unity of any kind. Likewise in the Babylonian triad it was the deification of the three elements: heaven–earth–nature. In the Hindu triad it is nature: creation–preservation–destruction.

Look at all the others: either there is no necessary unity, or else there is no delimitation and necessary differentiation.

33. Gairdner, in modern times, tried working from a slightly different angle. He tried to illustrate how nature moved from simplicity to complexity as it went from lower to higher forms. The stone, if broken to pieces, simply makes so many more smaller stones; the plant, if cut to pieces, does not. The animal is still more complex and finally man is the most complex and the highest creation. To think of God as complex, therefore, would only be following the line found in nature.

34. This new definition is no better than the oldest of the old. To begin with, differentiation or complexity in nature has not the faintest possibility of connection or association with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity because: (i) the complexity or differentiation is of an entirely different kind; and (ii) this line of thought, followed through creation, cannot legitimately be projected outside of our sphere of experience to the Creator.

It must be said that Gairdner, like all others before him, presents these thoughts with diffidence and apologies.

35. You will find, in the end, that you are left with nothing but the figure 3. Not very much is it, if you want to preach the doctrine of the Holy Trinity with the help of vestigia?

36. There is, however, another aspect of this question of vestigia, which should be taken very seriously. Through the ages certain theologians have been so sure that the threeness-in-oneness found in so much of nature was a definite indication of trinity in unity in the Godhead, that they were led to teach the doctrine of *Vestigium Trinitatis* as being a logical, reasonable and natural proof of the Holy Trinity.

37. Missionaries to Muslims can be heard to say: ‘If you can see God in nature at all, it must be the triune God because everything in nature has this

remarkable triplicity in its relationships. Why even the oldest nature-religions saw the triplicity in nature, only they ascribed it to three separate gods.’

38. What is actually happening when a person argues or teaches along these lines?

First of all, he is assuming, perhaps unknowingly, that our knowledge of revelation has two different roots, namely: (i) in the record of revelation, which the Bible contains; and (ii) in nature. If we ask: Which of these comes first, the answer could easily be: nature, for it is older than the Bible and it inspired belief in divine triads long before the Bible was written. The final simple phase would then be to retain the first and primary revelation (that is, nature) on the ground that in all probability the record in the Bible is only a variant of the triplicity in nature, known and recognised for centuries before the Christian Church started writing its record of revelation. In the final analysis this means eliminating God entirely. It means that man is seeking inside the sphere of phenomena to find an answer to the enigma: God; and this endeavour is parallel with that of philosophy, which seeks the answer inside the range of man’s wisdom and intellectual ability.

39. Secondly, if you take the doctrine of *Vestigium Trinitatis* at all seriously, the Muslim is perfectly justified in saying that you are doing what men have always done—making gods in their own image, or in the image of ‘creeping things’. In other words, you are buttressing your faith in genuine revelation with earthly things.

40. Finally, while it may or may not be true that the ancient faiths in the triads of Egypt, Babylonia, Rome and India were built on the observation of certain triplicities in nature, it is utterly impossible to postulate that these or any other triplicities could guide or spur mankind towards the Christian doctrine of God as triune. There are two reasons for this statement. First: History shows us that the doctrine of *Vestigium Trinitatis* was thought out about the time of St Augustine, when it seemed desirable, in the apologetics of that age, to try to prove intellectually what the Church for centuries had received and accepted on faith. Second: The position of the Church is that no man can come to a belief in God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—except through impact and contact with Jesus Christ.

41. Thomas Aquinas said that the infidels jeer at all these arguments about vestigia, and if we are to be realistically honest, all we can say is that we do not blame them! We would in all probability do the same, if we had not previously accepted the doctrine on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ.



42. What I have tried to do in this chapter is to force you back upon the Bible as your only source of information about the Holy Trinity.

But please don't misunderstand me.

When I say 'force you back upon the Bible', I am not thinking of it in the sense that I am trying to get you to give your own clever little private interpretation of what the Bible says about the Holy Trinity. On the contrary, the Creeds are the confession of the Church, and that which they confess, we confess.

43. Finally, one thing stands out clearly in the Bible: It does not preach the Holy Trinity. What the Bible does is infinitely more difficult. Just as others assume the existence of a god, and base their life, faith and work on that assumption, the Bible assumes the existence of the Holy Trinity and on that basis it speaks of faith, eternal life, and the works of God. This is the crux of the whole matter. If Christ were presented to Christians and non-Christians alike on the basis of a living, working faith in the Holy Trinity, our every deed and every utterance would reflect that faith. The need for explanation would arise—it did arise very early in the life of the Church—but that is neither 'preaching', nor 'living'.

44. In our day the preaching and living of the Church is so divorced from its origin that the explanation which is needed is no longer the explanation on the basis of its preaching and living, but the explanation of an antiquated, isolated dogma, a theory, which has no reality or value in the stress of life.

We will discuss this in the following chapter.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is the basis for the Christian Church's belief in the Trinity?
2. Why is it not valid to endeavour to prove the dogma of the Trinity from the Quran?
3. Why is it not valid to use the *Vestigia Trinitatis* to prove the dogma of the Trinity?

## CHAPTER 23

# Is This Dogma Preachable?—II

1. In my previous chapter I promised to take up this question from the angle of the life of the Church. Admittedly the Church finds it depressing and difficult to confess and proclaim its faith to the Muslim world. Just what is that difficulty?

2. First of all, it is not essentially an intellectual difficulty, as though the understanding was being burdened beyond its capacity. The word, 'God', when spoken by man, is always and inevitably spoken in faith, regardless of what conception of God the speaker may have, and regardless of whether that faith is true or false. The intellect may help to distinguish between obvious superstition and reasonable conceptions; it may also help in the understanding of what faith really is; and does help when the conception of faith is to be formulated in human language. Yet God is always accepted (or rejected) in faith. There is no other way.

3. But now: Faith is only faith insofar as it conditions one's life. Here is the stumbling block. The Church (like every other religious body) is, in the finiteness of its humanity, always prone to let orthodoxy supplant faith. That is to say, intellectual acceptance of a theory, a doctrine or a proposition usurps the place of a living relationship of trust and obedience. Mental acquiescence does not condition life, whereas faith as a relationship of trust and obedience, of necessity does.

4. When backed into a corner, or when it, in quiet isolation from life, repeats a Creed, the Church will say it believes in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. But is there anywhere, in any group or church, a faith—not in God, but in the Holy Trinity; in Father, Son and Holy Spirit—which really and definitely conditions the life of that group? If there were a community conditioned by the faith that the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Spirit is Lord—not three Lords, but one Lord—then the fact of such a community would be a witness to genuine

Christian faith, closely related to the creedal statements. In such a community the dogma of the Holy Trinity could never become an abstract theory presented in terms of intellectualism and reason, distinct from the life-conditioning faith of the people concerned.

5. Faith in the triune God can never die, for then the Church would die, and we have the assurance that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church. But in our time that faith is, for the most part, embarrassed, inarticulate, confused, uncertain and isolated, having been replaced to an astounding degree by three kinds of unitarianism. Replaced, I say, in the sense that these unitarian faiths actually condition the lives of so-called Christians everywhere. For the sake of convenience, I shall call them: Common Religion, the Jesus Cult, and Spirit Worship. They are far from new, but what is new is their overwhelming popularity, and the recognition they receive through infiltration everywhere.

### COMMON RELIGION

6. The common religion of the majority of people in most western countries might be called unitarian Deism. People have a vague feeling or superstition about God being in heaven and all being well on earth. This 'God' is more or less responsible for the destinies of men and women, and he supports those who are upright and wish to be fair and square. He is also either the explanation of or the enigma behind all unusual events in life. If you have lived a fairly moral life according to your light, and paid every man (more or less) his dues, you need have no fear of losing out, either in this world or in the next. This is the kind of religion governments trade in when they try to chain religion to Politics. Making religious blocks for political purpose is a common but demonic trick in present-day politics. This 'God' is also the First (or Final) Cause in pseudo science, the Theos of Greek philosophy and the supreme God of Zoroastrianism.

7. Moderns who have this ancient common religion often complain that they do not understand the language of the Church. Surely it is not the usual run of ordinary, inane pulpit utterances they do not understand. On the contrary, it is the old, classical, catholic traditions, the liturgies, the symbolism, and the ancient hymns which to them seem to be anomalies and anachronisms. Probably one reason for this condition is that the clergy themselves feel that these things are antiquated, cumbersome and out of touch with present day 'realities'. Their own dissertations are therefore of far greater importance!

8. Let us remember, however, that clergymen are usually just ordinary people who do not rise above the level of the prevalent thinking of their own particular community. In Western schools of theology the emphasis is for the most part so completely on modern trends of thinking that at least by inference the dogma of the Holy Trinity (together with other ancient teaching) is relegated to the category of antiquated creeds, with which students get only a nodding acquaintance under the heading of 'The History of Doctrine' or some such subject.

9. The missionary to Muslims who comes from a community or an institution of learning where he has had to breathe in such an atmosphere is simply flabbergasted by his impact with Islam. He usually reacts in one of two ways; either he refreshes his acquaintance with the 'History of Doctrine' and produces some undigested, intellectual terms in his effort to defend what the Church at one time really took seriously, or else he joins the already crowded ranks of the activists who fondly believe that 'the impact of their lives' communicates to others what they themselves are not able to express in words.<sup>1</sup>

What they do not realise is that, in both cases, these lives cry out loud, witnessing to the fact that faith in the Holy Trinity as a life-conditioning factor is non-existent, so far as they are concerned.

10. Another difficulty, found not only among laymen but also all too often among missionaries, is that it is utterly impossible for them to discover any vital difference between Islam and Christianity. The Supreme Being, they say, is the same, whether you call him God or Allah. As long as people worship Him and live decent, moral lives, what difference does it make if the outward formalities and rites differ? Naturally the person of our Lord has no unique meaning for people who think along these lines.

### THE JESUS CULT

11. Here I must ask you to think twice, and then once again, before you go off the deep end. There is a sizeable section of Christendom in which a cult has grown up in which Jesus is an end in Himself. Everything begins and ends with Him. Songs of praise, often supercharged with erotic sentiment, are sung to and for Jesus. Prayer becomes conversational

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<sup>1</sup> Note: An activist may be defined as a person who believes that getting something practical *done* is more important than getting something said, in contradistinction to the Apostles, who believed the *kerygma* was of primary importance.

familiarity with Jesus. The Christian life is described as ‘a walk with Jesus’, as living and being keen about Jesus. He is the Saviour God on the one hand and the great personality-example on the other. As the Saviour God, He not only takes you to heaven, but He carries the heavy end of your burden here on earth. As the personality-example, He helps you to develop yourself and build up such qualities as love, mercy, leniency, tender-heartedness and tolerance of compromise. The sterner qualities, the iron in His blood, so apparent in His constant clashes with the religious people of His day, are conveniently and necessarily forgotten or explained away. They spoil the picture, for they might lead to conflict and a lack of ‘Christian charity’.

12. The astonishing fact is that adherents of this Jesus cult, while using the very words and phraseology of the New Testament, have built up a fantasy, an idol, which they call Jesus (just as other idolaters use the same word ‘god’ for their idol), although He is far removed from the actual historical Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Church believes to be the Second Person of the Three, and the Word or Agency of the Father. Our Lord never was and never will be an end in Himself. All things are through, in and by Him. Yes, exactly. But please study those prepositions ‘through, in and by’. Theologians like to insist that Christology is the distinctive element in Christianity. The truth of that statement depends entirely upon the kind of Christology one has in mind. The Christology of, say, a Schweitzer, is not the distinctive element in Christianity. It is only when the distinctive element in Christology is the fact that, through Christ, God is revealed as a Trinity in Unity that Christology is the distinctive element in Christianity, and Christianity itself becomes distinctive from all other religions. Of course, naturally, the key question in the New Testament is: What think ye of Christ? because according to New Testament Christianity there is no other way of asking the final, vital question: What think ye of God?

13. Many an adherent of this cult will say, ‘Of course we know that God the Father is there in the background’. Just so. In the background. It is an ancient and common occurrence that people have a retired ‘almighty’ somewhere in the background of their beliefs. That idea solves quite a few problems, the problem of creation for example, but their concern is with the imminent god or spirit, the one they more easily comprehend, the one they can get on a more familiar footing with, the one that really means something in their daily lives. In other words, the basic idea in the Jesus cult is as old as religion itself.

14. There is an apparent contradiction one cannot help noticing when many of the Jesus cult missionaries contact Muslims. They place an almost fanatical and often untimely emphasis on Jesus as the Son of God. It is not the emphasis found in the Creeds, for in them the dogma is theologically rounded and clearly (or as clearly as can be) stated, whereas their postulate seldom has any clear or necessary reason behind it. I have heard it stated in this way: 'You have to believe that Jesus is the Son of God or you cannot be saved'; but what necessary relation there is between salvation and this conception of sonship none of them seems to know, for in all other connections they think of Jesus Himself as the Saviour, without relation to anyone else.

15. I think it is likely that the answer to this paradox lies in a proverb one hears in Pakistan, namely 'The nawab's son is a nawab'. In like manner, 'A god's son is a god'. Subconsciously, I should say, they are desperately trying to establish the Jesus of their cult as God, and that can only be done in the same manner as the nawab's son is a nawab.

16. Probably every great historical personality has or has had some myth built up around his life. I wonder if, through the ages, anyone has suffered more from myth-building than our Lord! When the Muslim meets a missionary with a mythical or fictional conception of Jesus, it does not take him long to tie the missionary up in knots. The reason is obvious. The Creed says of our Lord that He is 'very God of very God'; the cult has the simpler and more straight forward idea that Jesus is 'very God'. Therefore when the devotee has to explain 'very God of very God' he is up against a dogma which confuses him, as it does not agree with his oversimplified conception of 'very God'. As a last resort he can only comfort himself by singing:

I want my life to shine for Jesus  
So that everywhere I go  
Men may his fulness know  
I want my life to shine for Jesus.

One cannot help thinking of the verse: 'If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!'

### SPIRIT WORSHIP

17. We need not waste much time on that smaller but very vocal group who centre their lives around what they call the 'Holy Spirit', for they

hardly ever even attempt an impact with Islam, preferring to contact the 'nominal' Christians who need individual baptism of the Spirit, the 'baptism of fire', the 'second blessing', for according to their doctrine it is in fact these nominal Christians who are preventing the Spirit from descending in a great revival, in which the Muslims (probably) will also become involved.

18. It is the naked and unpalatable fact that the various cults of the Spirit are semi-mystical and belong to the universally common type of mystical idolatry in which individuals by means of certain prescribed practices (for example, 'full surrender') align themselves with a supra-human power, the Holy Spirit. By their 'surrender', their 'confession of sin', their 'agonising in prayer', etc. etc. they then manoeuvre this Spirit into a position where it is bound to carry out the purposes and plans of the devotees, whether it be their own perfect sanctification, rain for the crops or revival for the nation. Obviously, therefore, according to them, it is a rather harebrained effort to try to preach to Muslims unless the prairie-fire of revival is already burning.

19. Although these cults of the Spirit usually have no direct bearing on the subject under discussion, yet indirectly they have, for insofar as they go under the name of Christianity, they misrepresent the Church's belief in the Holy Trinity, in that their exclusive concentration is on their spiritual experience.

20. If these extraneous cults were well-defined and isolated inside the Christian fold, the problem would still be there, but all would be more or less aware of it, as is the case with the doctrines of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Mormons. These spirit-worshipping cults have, on the contrary, infiltrated into the various Church bodies and pitifully weakened them. One of the results is that honest churchmen are often deeply disturbed in their faith, because God's power seems to be inadequate when confronted with the hold Islam has on people in almost all Eastern countries. They do not even realise that the present-day Church is so incapable of preaching the Gospel to Muslims that one can confidently assert that Muslims, as such, have neither heard, seen, nor understood what Christianity really has to say, since the Church neither lives nor preaches the Gospel of the triune God in such a way that its life and preaching are conditioned by faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

21. Here a problem arises which causes endless confusion. An imaginary or mythical deity is built up, regardless of whether it is an idol

of wood or of stone, or whether it is a thought idol, with such familiar names as God, Allah, Jesus, Ram, Supreme Being, etc. Numberless people relate themselves sincerely to these various fictional deities, and their lives are so obviously conditioned by this relationship that outsiders pronounce their faith to be genuine. Some people are surprised and shocked to find genuine faith outside Christianity; others respect that faith and think it is wrong to interfere and present 'our' faith.

22. But now think of this: Any honest relating of one's self to a deity, fictional or otherwise, is genuine faith insofar as it conditions the life of the believer. If, however, the deity to whom one is honestly relating oneself in life-conditioning, genuine faith, is a fiction, then that faith, genuine though it may be, is not true faith. Genuine faith can only be *true* faith if the deity to whom one relates oneself is true deity. In other words, the genuineness of faith depends on the subject. The trueness of faith depends on the object. For example, in ancient days when parents gave their children to be burned in the arms of Molech, they proved the genuineness of their faith beyond the shadow of a doubt: but as Molech was not true deity, their faith was not true faith.

23. It should therefore be apparent that our 'interest' is not in the genuineness of anyone's faith. That is purely subjective. A Muslim may gladly sacrifice his life for the honour of his prophet or of Islam; a Hindu may eagerly forsake the blessings of this world and wander about as a naked sadhu; and any devotee of so-called Christian cults or sects may in various ways demonstrate a wholehearted genuine faith in the myth or heresy which satisfies his religious need. So what? 'It availeth nothing'. The only question we can ask is this: Is the deity to whom they relate themselves the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? If not, their faith is NOT true faith.

24. You may think the whole of this argument is theological hairsplitting. Not so. It stands to reason that if genuine faith is life-conditioning, then that faith will and must express itself in all the various phases of life, but if faith is not *true* faith, then its way of expressing itself in all the phases of life will be wrong. It may even be evil, as when our Lord says: 'When they kill you, they will think they are doing God a service'.

25. Why is it that the Church reacts so differently in the spontaneity of living in the different ages, if not because its life-conditioning faith varies from age to age? In the early centuries of Christianity the life of the Church was related in genuine and true faith to the triune God. Its struggle in



confessing its faith over against internal as well as external foes made sense, not to be understood as proof, but as congruity. In the New Testament age, theological discussion postulated the Holy Trinity, just as others postulated deity, as such. Their problem was how to understand the revelation of this Holy Trinity in relation to man and his works of religion. When it was pressed in on all sides and attacked both from within and without, the early Church dug deep into the kaleidoscopic life of the New Testament community, and from what it found there began to formulate and define true faith, realising that this and this alone was immeasurably more important than any activity which might (or might not) prove to others the genuineness of their faith. The faith, life and work of the Church was therefore, as a whole, congruous.

26. Although inimical contemporaneous forces in our day are basically identical with those of that age, the Church now reacts by soft-peddalling its unique confession of faith in the triune God, and indulges in every shape and form of hectic activism conceivable. This is true not only of missionary activism, but of the Church as a whole. For example, in 1956 when the great Christmas Pageant was staged with elaborate and spectacular pomp in Washington, some fifty countries, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Atheist, and Christian, took part, and in the opening address the name of Christ was *not* mentioned, not even once. It was 'the Christmas spirit' and the 'spirit of peace' which completely supplanted our Lord Himself. The whole pageant was obviously staged for the purpose of making Christianity serve Western political idealism, without differentiating itself from the religious political idealism of any other country or religion.

27. At the same time, when inside the walls of a Church, or when cornered by religious questioning, the very same people will pay lip service to the old, classical Church confessions. The whole set-up is therefore completely incongruous, and the Church, conditioned as it is by faith in everything but the Holy Trinity, proclaims by its life that the dogma of the Holy Trinity is abstract theory, really valueless in the stress of life. In other words, the emphasis now is on genuine faith, not on true faith.

28. Yet it is just that confession of faith in the Holy Trinity, so unreal, so abstract, so difficult when put into intellectual terms, so incongruous in the present situation, and so effectively hidden under the clouds of dust raised by the Church's activism, which differentiates the Church from everything else on earth. The Church is still the redeemed out of every nation and tribe and tongue, reconciled to God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ, and kept, even in its present-day Babylonian

captivity, by the Holy Spirit. Therefore the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

29. Now I want to stop a minute and explain what I mean by life-conditioning faith in the Holy Trinity, for I fear some will think I am only using a rather strange vocabulary for the same idea which lies behind jargon like 'shining for Jesus' or 'the impact of your life'.

30. The Athanasian Creed says: 'The catholic [universal] faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity . . .' That is the very first point: WORSHIP. Faith in the Holy Trinity does condition worship in a very real way. In corporate worship the community lauds, praises and magnifies the name of the Father, the Origin of all things, for He has revealed Himself as being faithful to His creation. He is not only Creator, not only the Origin, but the Redeemer and Restorer of His creation as well. The community lauds and praises and magnifies the name of the Son, the divine Agency of redemption, the Lamb of God Who, although one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, became incarnate so that man could be reconciled to God. It lauds, praises and magnifies the name of the Holy Spirit, the Giver and Sustainer of life, for He takes the revelation accomplished in Christ, and with it convicts men of sin, righteousness and judgment, and thus leads them into all truth. The community prays to the Father, in the name of the Son, through the mediation of the Holy Spirit. Thus it worships one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity.

31. All of this is clearly, concisely and beautifully stated in the ancient classical traditions of Christianity, in its liturgies, rituals, collects, hymns and orders of divine service. The true, apostolic worship of God in the Church is the most compelling and impressive witness to the Holy Trinity which any unbeliever could hear. And yet it is precisely this that many people call dead ritual, antiquated phraseology, and unintelligible mumbo-jumbo. Even in Churches where an effort is being made to retain a beautiful and true worship of God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, the clergy do not take the trouble to instruct the sheep of their flocks, preferring in their religious pride to believe that everything depends on the sermonette they produce. The result is of course empty lip-service in worship and a rather poor, second-class, intellectual or emotional approach to the religious aspects of life. The service, therefore, instead of being by force of its very nature a witness becomes, on the contrary, a source of confusion for the non-Christian.

32. I am not proposing that true worship should be used as a means of getting the Gospel across to non-Christians: that would be blasphemy. I am

only stating the fact that genuine faith in the Holy Trinity is characterised first of all by true worship, and true worship is, in the very nature of the case, a witness to the Holy Trinity, which together with the Church's other confessional acts makes a congruous whole of Christian life and witness.

33. Another characteristic of a life conditioned by faith in the Holy Trinity is genuine nonchalance, in the sense of unperturbed unconcern, in the spheres of life where man's concern is impious. Christian nonchalance is misunderstood, misjudged and condemned by all whose faith is not genuine faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Why this should be so is easy to understand. The life of faith has to be lived in, through and by our earthly life. There are no watertight compartments. All life on earth is regulated by the natural law of cause and effect. We manipulate this law of cause and effect in order to get certain results. We are concerned about results, and rightly so. We live and work for results. If you plant a garden you want flowers and vegetables; if you plant trees you want fruit, shade, beauty, conservation of soil or wood, and you plant trees according to the results you want; if you start a business you want profits; if you support a philanthropic organisation you want to see better social conditions; if you marry you want a home; and so on. Our lives are dependent on certain known and unknown aspects of the law of cause and effect. Insofar as we know this law, we can create certain causes that will have guaranteed effects. These effects are the results we are working for. All that is as it should be in this earthly life of ours.

34. Now comes the difficulty. Wherever there is informed faith in the Holy Trinity, the believer is conditioned by that faith, that he has no concern whatsoever for results, for his faith makes it an impiety—almost a blasphemy—to work with the law of cause and effect in order to get certain desired results in the life of the Church, or in anything related to it. In this sense there is no spiritual law of cause and effect parallel to the natural law of cause and effect. No manipulation of any kind will bring about guaranteed results. Nothing follows; as, for example, day follows night or summer follows spring. That which happens in, through and by the Church, which has eternal value, is NOT related to the work life of the Church in a relationship of cause and effect. God is God—in His revelation, in the Agency of His revelation, and in the acceptance of His revelation. In other words, God Himself alone is the cause and the effect. Not in the mechanical sense of law, but in the sense of free sovereign action. When the Church proclaims the Gospel and faith is created in the hearts of men, then that faith is not effected by the proclamation, but by the

Holy Spirit working in and through the word of proclamation, according to the goodwill and pleasure of God.

35. Any Church or group of people whose attitude towards preaching is genuinely conditioned by faith in the triune God is therefore of necessity nonchalant about the results of proclamation. There is the direct commission to the Church to communicate the Gospel to the ends of the earth. About this there can be no nonchalance, no unconcern. And yet 600 million people—the Muslims—are practically untouched by the Gospel. Here, at this point, the Church is nonchalant. It is unconcerned about that direct commission to reach all. And why? Because where it should be nonchalant it is, on the contrary, concerned about results. In other words, because it has lost its faith in the Holy Trinity, its whole life is topsy-turvy. Many—probably the majority of Christians—think that if preaching does not bring results it is because: (i) the preaching is wrong; or else (ii) the effort is being wasted, and the preacher (or missionary) should go somewhere where he can get results. This line of thought is conditioned by the natural law of cause and effect, just as completely as are a businessman's thoughts when he is trying to find a market for his goods. It is only true Christian nonchalance about results which can give the Church courage really to preach the Gospel in all the world.

36. What is true of the corporate body of Christ is also true of individuals. When a man comes and says, 'Convince me of the truth of Christianity and I will become a Christian', what is the answer? In my youth I used to rejoice over such 'opportunities' and sweat over the proofs to be presented. Now I answer, 'the first truth of Christianity is that you can't become a Christian even if I do convince you of its truth. This act of becoming a Christian is neither dependent on my proofs nor on your decision; it is dependent on a free sovereign act of God. In the pride of your sinful humanity you are arrogating a power to yourself that belongs alone and only to God'.

37. Another thing. Clergymen often aim at producing certain effects by their preaching, that is, getting money for missions or philanthropy, rousing patriotism during war, bring about mass revivalism, stopping pleasure-seeking on Sundays, stiffening up lax morals, and so on. In all probability they succeed. The law of cause and effect is operative in psychology just as well inside as outside the walls of a Church. It is not the pulpit that makes the Gospel. Here again, it is the psychology of the businessman trying to sell his wares. The nonchalant clergyman aims at only one thing: faithful communication of the text. What happens thereafter is not his

responsibility. Whether there is an effectual working of the Holy Spirit or not, and what the result is, are matters completely inside the domain of God's own free and perfect will. The nonchalant clergyman can therefore smile in every situation. Thirty years without a convert or thirty converts daily; empty churches or overflowing churches; persecution or popularity; ridicule or praise; death or life. Through and in it all he sees the free sovereign act of God, and therefore he can smile. The nonchalant Christian is neither optimistic nor pessimistic, since the causes of optimism and pessimism are no concern of his.

38. A final point. Naturally no one can say, either theologically or theoretically, that Church union is not or cannot be the work of the Holy Spirit. However, certain efforts at Church union can proclaim loudly a complete lack of life-conditioning faith in the Holy Trinity. Recently I read one of the usual articles on Church union which ended thus: We must unite or perish. My thoughts went in two different directions. Our Lord said something about the gates of hell not being able to prevail against the Church. Why then this frightened cry? Probably because the anti-communist element in the United Nations is almost hysterically frightened and is therefore shouting the same slogan. When the slogan, in imitation of the UN, becomes 'Unite for the salvation of the Church', then you have blatant unbelief in the Holy Trinity. In another article I read that the indigent Church un-united is poor in finances and leadership, therefore union is essential. That is the businessman talking. According to the law of cause and effect, a good merger is always a gain. Again, I have heard it said that an un-united front is a poor witness in the Muslim world. I ask: Are we witnessing to the Gospel or to our ability to compromise and organise? If faith in the Holy Trinity is really and genuinely life-conditioning, one knows that church union has already been accomplished and completed, for Christ is the head of the body in which the Holy Spirit dwells, and which has been reconciled to the Father by the merits of the Head. One is then nonchalant about the empirical aspects of Church union. If Church union can become effectual without any extraneous urge, without cheap compromise, without elimination of the rich inheritance of the fathers, without hysterical fear of contemporaneous forces, then one can, with genuine nonchalance, accept it and be happy in it.

These are just a few of the characteristics which most probably would be apparent in a community whose faith in the Holy Trinity genuinely conditions the life of that community. In isolation, these characteristics will certainly meet with misunderstanding, misappropriation and censure; but if

combined with confession of faith in the Holy Trinity they will prove to be a congruous whole.

40. Now a warning: We should not fall into the trap of believing that if only a few groups of Christians led lives which were genuinely conditioned by faith in the Holy Trinity, as I have just described it, then we could get on with our proclamation and confession of the faith with some hopes of getting results among Muslims. If you think that, it only goes to prove that you are still working with the law of cause and effect; that you still do not believe that 'results' are exclusively the free sovereign act of the triune God. All we can say is that under such ideal conditions the confession of the Church would be a genuinely true confession. That might lead to further enquiry by Muslims, or it might result in widespread persecution of the Church. And we cannot even say that truth must carry the burden of its own proof, for truth is only Truth through the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.

41. Any number of people ask the question: How should I present the dogma of the Holy Trinity to Muslims?

Let me ask you a question: Is not your interest in and knowledge of the Holy Trinity purely theoretical? Could you not, without serious or radical changes in your manner of life and faith, conveniently drop two of the three names in the name of the triune God? Could you not, for example, rather easily just stick to the name 'God', or even 'Father', and leave it at that? Or, are your thoughts so Jesus-centred that spontaneously you never think of anything else? Or, is it the indwelling 'Spirit' that makes religious experience real and living for you? Could you not, with a few minor changes in your vocabulary, be quite satisfied with dropping the two other names?

42. I am just throwing out a suggestion. But think it through carefully before even trying to present the Church's teaching about the Holy Trinity. In other words, your first question should not be how you can present the dogma of the Holy Trinity: it should be either whether you yourself are just wanting to defend an old teaching of the Church, or whether you want to know how best to witness to a faith which genuinely conditions your own life. If it is the former, let me advise you to drop it, or you will only be doing Christianity a disservice; if it is the latter, the following chapter should be of interest to you.

### QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the author's statement that 'Faith' is only faith insofar as it conditions one's life? Elaborate.
2. In what way does the author distinguish between 'genuine faith' and 'true faith'? Is this a valid distinction?
3. What are the basic reasons why a true Christian should be 'nonchalant' about results?

## CHAPTER 24

# If Not Preachable, Then What?

1. After having been through the two previous chapters, you have probably come to the conclusion that evangelism among Muslims is a rather hopeless undertaking. So it is, for several reasons. First of all, because the evangel you are forced to preach among Muslims is not the commonly accepted thing in the Church today. In all probability you are not called to be a reformer. Therefore, since you cannot reform the Church you will have to stand alone. Genuine evangelistic work among Muslims is (and has always been) the stepchild of the Church, not only of Western churches, but also of the Church in Muslim countries. Secondly, it would appear that almost every avenue of direct approach is cut off. Every avenue you explore, sooner or later, becomes a blind alley. The more you study the evangel on the one hand, and the Muslim on the other, the more clearly you see the complete inadequacy of the undertaking.

2. If the Church would only be serious, this position of inadequacy is glorious. The Israelites seriously believed they were to conquer the land, therefore the huge, high walls around Jericho really meant something to them. They could not do what the Church is now doing, leave Jericho alone and conquer the open villages around.

3. If the Church were serious, Islam would force it to sit down and figure out just what: (i) it is all about; (ii) we can do about it; and (iii) we are to expect as results.

The answer to (i) would be that although Islam may be Jericho with the high walls around it, its people still have to be evangelised. This is not synonymous with saying that we have to make proselytes or converts. It means that we have to get the evangel across to them in such a way that they understand it and realise they are faced with a decision. The answer to (ii) is that if we have faith enough to put our back to it, we can evangelise the Muslim. The answer to (iii) is that the only result we can expect is a



decision either for or against. Whether the decision is for or against is outside the sphere of our competency, as we have nothing to do with that side of the question.

4. My argument is, then, that if we presuppose genuine faith in the Holy Trinity, we CAN, with complete nonchalance as to hindrances, obstacles and results, evangelise the Muslims.

5. Throughout these chapters I have advocated the general principle that you should always meet the Muslim at the point where he wants to begin. He has a perfect right to ask any question he cares to, and to expect you to give him a proper answer. But there are two things you have to watch carefully. As far as the central theme of Christianity is concerned, the chances are that, nine times out of ten, the Muslim's question will be wrongly put. How can God be man? How can man be God? If you mix the two, you have neither God nor man, but something in between. How can three be one? How can one be three? How can Mary be the mother of God? Was Mary's father, then, God's grandfather? What real justice is there in substitution, even if the substitute voluntarily carried the burden of the crime? I could fill a whole chapter with questions of this kind, all of them wrongly put, although the Muslim himself may not know that his question is wrong. Take a few examples. The Church has never said that God can be man, nor that man can be God. The Church believes in the union of perfect Godhood and perfect manhood. To put the question correctly, the Muslim must ask: How can union between Godhood and manhood be possible? Likewise, the Church has never said that three could be one, nor one three. The definition of oneness never coincides with the definition of three-ness. For example, we say of Christ that He is 'very God of very God', but we do not say He is 'very God'. If we said that, then the Muslim's question on arithmetic would be correct.

6. Here the three great Creeds of the Church are a tremendous help (that is, Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian). I strongly recommend to all, quite apart from the preaching of the Word, to make a serious study of these documents, under the guidance of some capable theologian. The Church has never been able to replace them with anything better, nor has it been able to modernise them—thank goodness! At the risk of being tedious, I wish to say, once again, these are confessions of the faith once for all delivered to the saints in the Bible. If you know your Creeds, you will have no trouble in spotting the wrong questions which the Muslims put to you.

7. The only proper answer to a wrongly put question is to make the questioner understand that his question is out of order. It is perfectly right

and in order to tell a Muslim that he is knowingly or unknowingly wrongly accusing the Church of idolatry, polytheism or supine stupidity when he assumes that it believes some doctrine which is nonsensical.

8. The second danger you have to look out for is an intellectual void or vacuum. When you have told a Muslim fairly and clearly that you have no interest in a philosophical, abstract discussion on the dogma of the Holy Trinity, and that arithmetical problems have no relation to our belief in the triune God, and when you have said that you do not care to discuss the possibility of a trinity, but that you accept and confess faith in the specific, unique Holy Trinity as the Church has formulated that faith in its early Creeds; then you are logically in a position to tell him that if a person is ignorant of Jesus Christ as He is portrayed in the New Testament, he simply does not have the knowledge which is prerequisite for the conversation to be serious and sober. In other words, you are not only justified in telling him that a discussion would be futile; you are bound so to do.

9. This is true because our faith is not the product of either primitive or astute thinking, but is the result of a life lived here on earth nearly 2000 years ago. That is to say, it is historical. Is it not true, in any branch of learning, that intelligent discussion presupposes at least a modicum of knowledge? If a very primitive person were to ask me how my car works, I should find it impossible to explain, for even his language would not contain words like internal combustion, piston, carburettors, timing, camshaft, etc. Until he had learned these and other expressions, it would be a waste of time to try to discuss the working of an engine with him. If that primitive person really wanted to know, he would exert himself enough to acquire the prerequisite knowledge. Otherwise his question would be just idle curiosity, or perhaps a desire to prove something to be absurd.

10. Exactly on the same level, knowledge of Jesus Christ is the only basis on which you can approach the dogma of the Holy Trinity. There is no hocus-pocus about the Gospel. 'God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ', in that He has raised Him up from the dead, and exalted Him at His right hand. 'That same Jesus'. This is where everything starts. So spake St Peter on the day of Pentecost, and so it has been ever since. Christianity has had to fight enemies and friends both within and without the Church in order not to be misused as an ideology, as a myth embodying eternal truth, or as the utterance of wisdom, profound philosophy or ethics. That lonely figure, Jesus of Nazareth, stands there, blocking the way. He cannot be ignored. He is the Way; there is no other way.

11. Here I am simply trying to emphasise this one fact; it is not only utterly useless, but it is actually a disservice to Christianity to approach the dogma of the Holy Trinity in any way other than through Christ.

12. We have now finally arrived at our starting point. If man is ever to have faith in the triune God, Christ must be preached in such a way that the proclamation is capable of becoming revelation. This does not mean that there must be an inherent quality or capability in the proclamation, so that, because of this quality, it will become revelation. But it does mean that if it lacks that capability, we may not reasonably expect the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ through the medium of that proclamation. For example, a Muslim may preach about Isa Ibn-i-Maryam (Jesus, son of Mary) but such preaching would not have the capability of becoming revelation, for the Holy Spirit could not reasonably be expected to reveal Christ through the medium of such a sermon. Likewise a Christian might preach a sermon on character-building or on personality problems, without any hope of such a sermon ever being used by the Holy Spirit to mediate the revelation of Christ, even though the speaker may use Christ both as illustration and example. Although God's acts are free and sovereign, and He can, if He so wills, raise up sons to Himself from 'these stones', yet He has given us no grounds for assuming that the Holy Spirit will use a proclamation that is not capable of being the medium of revelation.

13. Presenting Christ in a way that can be used of the Holy Spirit is not, and never has been, a simple matter. The present-day easygoing, superstitious habit of throwing Bible verses about as though they contained some magic influence is not presenting Christ, it is misrepresenting Him.

There is nothing more fascinating or edifying than a study of the development of faith in the triune God in the early Church.

14. To understand it at all, the Muslim must be made to face squarely the Christian conception of history. The Jews understood the history of their own people to be the result of direct dealings with God. It was through the history of Israel that other nations were to learn the truth about God. That conception of history (as distinct from the Greek) was carried over into Christianity. God is without doubt the Lord of all history, just as He is the Lord of all nature, but that does not mean that He has revealed Himself in all history or in nature. People who work along those lines end up by saying what they want to say about God, without ever hearing or understanding what God is saying about Himself.

15. God's revelation in history means that He acts in a comparatively small, localised segment of history in such a way that here in this segment,

and only here, His word about Himself is disclosed. From what you learn here in this segment, you are able to comprehend His relationship to you, and to all history.

16. This conception of revelation being an actual, integral part of history is contrary to anything a Muslim believes and is, as a matter of fact, often a stumbling block for many well-meaning Christians. The Muslim will say that history may illustrate divine truth, as you can also see from the Quran, but truth itself ‘descends from heaven’ in the form of teaching and laws of conduct. Truth is inscribed on the ‘preserved tablets’ in heaven, from whence it came down to earth. History, therefore, has no real significance for the Muslim. You may be sure that as the Muslim cannot even follow, much less accept, your presentation of revelation as an integral part of history, he is going to have great difficulty in grasping your presentation of Christ.

17. When Jesus was born, the Jews were firm believers in the unity of God. They might easily have had as their creed: ‘There is no God but Jehovah’, just as the Muslims later said: ‘There is no God but Allah’.

18. Jesus was brought up in this atmosphere, and later a small group of ordinary Jews was attracted to Him. Their first impression of Him was, as St Peter said to Cornelius, that He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil. Not only that, but He preached the nearness of the Kingdom of God, repentance and peace. As they got better acquainted with Him they heard the story of His strange birth, and of the cryptic remarks of Simeon and Anna in the temple.

19. Later our Lord told them of His baptism, and of that awe-inspiring voice from heaven (which St Peter could never forget having heard on the Mount of Transfiguration). He also told them of those gruelling forty days and nights in the wilderness, and especially of those subtle temptations which the devil put into His mind. (These are worthy of much study.)

20. When this small group of men toured about with Him, they discovered that He not only did a great number of incidental good deeds, but He constantly said things which shocked them. There was the man in Mark 2 whom He healed, but at the same time Jesus asserted that He had power to forgive sin, an authority which belongs to God alone. When He raised Lazarus from the dead, He proclaimed Himself as the resurrection and the life. He called Himself the Good Shepherd, though every Jew knew that that metaphor was used in the Psalms and elsewhere of God, symbolising His care of Israel. In another place He says: Before Abraham was I Am. We may not understand the shock such a statement could cause

among Jews, until we read of the Great I Am of the Old Testament. Then we see why they wanted to stone Him. It was blasphemy in their ears. Our Lord also clearly proclaimed His divine lordship by demanding a discipleship which involved forsaking all, even, if need be, one's own life. That idea conflicted with the first commandment of the Decalogue. Then He healed a man on the Sabbath, and declared Himself Lord of the Sabbath. When discussing the law, He said: 'They of old said . . . but I say unto you . . .', putting Himself above the law.

21. When presenting Christ it is wrong to isolate any miracle, or series of miracles, or any stories that border on the superhuman, and try to get the Muslim with the naked, unaided eye to see divinity here. The Muslims, together with the Jews (and ourselves), MUST see Him in all His pure humanity, just as He was. Then it is that the day comes when Jesus asks them what they think Him to be. Slowly the idea had been growing that here, in this humanity, was something more than humanity, something hidden, something greater, something different from humanity. St Peter's spontaneous answer was: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt. 16:16ff.). That remarkable expression (Son of God) was used by them once before (Matt. 14:33).

22. It is very important to dwell on the answer our Lord gave St Peter. It was not flesh and blood that had revealed this to him, but God. It cannot be over-emphasised, neither in our own thinking, nor in our approach to Muslims, that while the actual living with Christ, seeing His deeds and hearing His words, was absolutely necessary, yet this contact in itself was NOT the cause of faith. They had personal, first-hand, intimate knowledge of everything Christ had said and done, but the witness of the human eye could never create faith. That witness was essential and it was essential that that witness should be true, but faith was the direct creation of God.

23. The worst parody on the presentation of Christ that can be imagined is to preach on verses or episodes which can be twisted to appear as though they destroy the incognito of Christ, as though they expose the 'Son of God' to the naked eye. Every man must see Jesus of Nazareth with his natural eyes, that only and nothing more. If flesh and blood begin revealing the 'Son of God', then God Himself is no longer present. Let Jesus of Nazareth be Himself, let Him speak Himself, do not soft-pedal any side of the picture. Let people hate Him, let them mock Him, let them crucify Him afresh for themselves; this they have always done wherever He is being presented faithfully by His Church. If you have to suffer

ridicule and persecution as His disciples had to, then nothing has befallen you that your Master has not already suffered.

24. I hope you understand that what I have been saying is not concerned with method. I am not telling you that this is the best method for getting results, or even for getting the evangel across. What I have been telling you is theology, pure and simple. Presupposing we believe what we say we believe—that Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, and that in Him perfect Godhood and perfect manhood are united—if we believe that, I say, then there can be no question of method. Either you believe, and that belief conditions your presentation of Christ; or you do not believe, and then you are free to present any picture of Jesus that you at the moment are inclined to put forward.

25. Let us now go back to the first followers of Christ. Just what St Peter understood his own reply to our Lord to mean is hard to say, but of one thing we can be sure, neither he nor his fellow-disciples thought of Jesus as God. It was common in those days among the nations (that is, the heathen) to proclaim an unusual or superior man *god*. The Romans were constantly deifying their emperors and there are a few places in the New Testament which show how easy the process of deification was (Acts 12:21–23; 14:8–18; 28:6). But certainly no Jew in the time of our Lord could be accused of accepting so crude and simple a solution of their problem: ‘*Who Christ was*’.

26. When the first disciples began to talk about this Jesus, whom they had seen with their eyes, heard with their ears, and touched with their hands, they used remarkable, ambiguous expressions, which clearly show that they were trying to express the idea of some-thing-more-than-humanity, and yet definitely inside the framework of humanity. Expressions like: ‘In the beginning was the Word’, ‘the Anointed Servant’ (Messiah), ‘Son of God’, ‘Lamb of God’, ‘Immanuel’ (God with us), ‘Chief Shepherd’, ‘Lord’, ‘Saviour’, and some others, all go to show that, while these terms were taken from the Old Testament, they were now being applied to a certain historical person, whom the disciples believed to be more than, and different from, ordinary humanity. Different and yet closely related to the history of Israel. This very fact, that they connected Him up so closely with the difficult prophecies of the Old Testament, should suffice to prove that they did not think of Him as God, in any straightforward, unitarian sense.

27. As matters developed and came to a head, the disciples found it difficult to keep their faith in Him. It would have been easier for them if He had followed the pattern which the Jews expected to be followed by

the Messiah when He came. He, on the contrary, began to talk about having to be given over to the authorities, to suffer, to die, to rise again, and to go to the 'Father'. And what made matters worse, He spoke of His death as a ransom for many, as being the 'way' to the Father. In other words, He spoke of the mission of the Messiah as being fulfilled through humiliation and death, and not through conquest and glory.

28. Besides all these new ideas, which demolished the Jewish conception of the Anointed One, another new element was introduced. Jesus spoke in a strange, personal way of the Spirit. It was not the ordinary usage, as when He said one man came in the spirit of another, nor was it the principle of life, which is sometimes called soul, sometimes spirit. This was Spirit with a capital S, so to speak. A Holy Spirit of truth, an Advocate, a Comforter, a life-giving Spirit. This Spirit would come out from the Origin of all things, the Father; He would be in them and lead them to all truth, although the world would not know Him. Only as this Spirit revealed Christ would Christ be understandable. They were therefore not to begin their work as the Church before this Spirit had come.

29. Then came the final Passover, the arrest and unjust trial of Jesus, and His death. Jesus was given a proper burial 'among the rich'; a stone was put at the entrance of the tomb and sealed. That was that. Possibly the most poignant remark, showing the utter despair of the disciples, is Peter's statement. One can almost see him shrug his great shoulders, shake his head, and say: 'Finish, I go afishing'. In a sealed tomb lay all his hopes, his faith.

30. Now, regardless of what present-day historians with their scientific methods make of it, the fact remains that, according to the whole testimony of the New Testament, the resurrection of our Lord on the third day was accepted as a literal fact. Every episode which was recorded after the resurrection, in one way or another, points to the fact that Jesus, whom the disciples saw, was not a ghost, not an illusion, not a dream. He ate with them. He let them touch Him. He used certain expressions which they recognised, etc. In this resurrection they saw not only the victory over death, but, what was probably uppermost in their minds at the time, God's seal of approval on everything Jesus was, said and did.

31. When Christ had ascended to heaven, and they sat back and took stock of what had happened, there were two thoughts uppermost in their minds. They were waiting for the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit to be fulfilled, and they were expecting soon after that the return of our Lord to earth.

32. None of this—not one bit of it—was ideological, nor spiritualised. For these Jews it was simply God dealing in history with Israel. That is a point one must almost harp on, especially in our day when the tendency is to spiritualise or allegorise everything at which scientific historians thumb their noses.

33. Then the day of Pentecost came. It was one day in history, just as any birthday is one day in history. Something actually happened, as the Apostles said to the crowds: ‘That which ye both see and hear’ (Acts 2:33). What happened that day was far removed from any pantheistic teaching, or philosophical conception of divine omnipresence. It was a fulfilment of the prophecy of the Old Testament and the promise of our Lord. In other words, again it was an act of God, His dealing with the children of Israel.

34. The whole purpose of this review of the facts is to show that for about three years something was actually happening. And that which happened affected the lives of a certain group of people so radically that it would have been ridiculous of them to stop and argue the how, why and wherefore of it all. They simply said: ‘Father, Son, Holy Spirit’, and they said it naturally. To expect then to argue the how or the possibility or the reality of the Holy Trinity would be just as ridiculous as asking any man how God is God.

35. From the very start, on the day of Pentecost itself, Peter said: ‘HOLY TRINITY’—not the way we say it, dogmatically, but as proclamation. He told the crowds to be baptised in the name of *Jesus*, and they would then receive the gift of the *Holy Spirit*, which was the promise of the *Lord God* (that is, the Father). This pattern is carried out fairly well through all the New Testament. Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, God the Father raised Him from the dead, to the end that He might exercise lordship over the living and the dead, through the agency of the Holy Spirit. All the writers of the New Testament show remarkable agreement in this aspect of their presentation of Christ; in other words, they are all trinitarians in actual practice. They could not be anything else.

36. Later, where the communities of trinitarians were attacked, and their teachings misrepresented, both through ignorance and hatred, the three great Creeds were formulated, so that Christians could definitely know what their confession of faith in Christ really was. These Creeds do not try to say how, for revelation never says how; it only gives knowledge of facts, divine facts.



37. In concluding these three chapters on the Holy Trinity in relation to our approach to Islam, I would like to say this:

(a) Let the man who aims at being a missionary to Muslims first of all get into the position that his life and thinking and speaking are really conditioned by faith in the Holy Trinity. Let him get into the habit of thinking, preaching and speaking on all occasions in the terms of St Peter at Pentecost. He will then be preaching Christ and Him crucified, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, and thus, while not preaching the dogma of the Holy Trinity, he will in very truth be presenting God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

(b) When he meets opposition or interest he can clear away all misunderstanding as to what the Church believes and confesses, and thereafter he can only do what I have done in this chapter; present Christ historically and show how He in His life, work and teaching, then in His death and resurrection, was and ever since, has been accepted as God's revelation of Himself. If the Muslim refuses to follow him in this historical presentation of our Lord, there is nothing he can do for him, except pray.

(c) Let no man presume to supersede the Holy Spirit. Present Christ just as He is, as man, perfect in His incognito. And let him trust God that the Third person of the Holy Trinity will, when and where it pleases God, give faith to Muslims as well as to all others, to believe that in Christ the First person of the Holy Trinity is actually revealing Himself as our gracious Father, faithful to His creation, in spite of all its unfaithfulness.

*Note:* Barth's *Credo* should be a prescribed textbook for every missionary to Muslims; Kelly's *Early Christian Creeds* is also be a must.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the statement that the Muslim's questions are 'wrongly put'? Why should we feel no obligation to answer such questions? How should we deal with them?
2. By what process did the Apostles come to understand the personality of Christ? Is it fair to say that a Muslim must in general follow the same process?
3. Summarise in a few sentences the main points in the three chapters on the Trinity.

SECTION EIGHT

WHAT ABOUT THE ETERNAL  
SONSHIP OF CHRIST?

## CHAPTER 25

# Conceived by the Holy Spirit

1. In the last three chapters we related the question: Who God is, to our approach to Islam. In this and the following chapter we want to do the same regarding the next question: What God does. A study of the New Testament brings out three questions, namely, Who God is, What God does, and For whom God does what He does. This order follows the classical order of the Holy Trinity, that is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This order is not the order of faith, but the order in which the believer thinks, on the basis of faith, and is therefore justifiable, even though faith comes in the order used in the Apostolic Blessing, namely, Son, Father and Holy Spirit. For in trying to answer the question, Who God is, we find the answer revealed through the answer to the second question, what God does, and it is also this second question which receives most attention in the New Testament, if not in the whole Bible. That does not mean that the other two are not just as important; but it does mean that, having obtained the answer to the second question, you can more readily find the answer to the other two.

2. There is only one answer to the question, What God does, which is uniquely Christian, and that is: God takes form. Since we know that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that the Son is none other than Jesus Christ, we could expect no other answer to the question of what God does than this: God takes form. This answer of the Church is the great stumbling block for all advanced religious and philosophical thinking. In Judaism, Islam and Greek religious philosophical thinking (at least in so far as it tried to relate to the mystery religions prevalent at that time) two ideas are prominent: the transcendence of God (Who was described as immutable, illimitable, impassible, without form, etc.) and the immanence of God (without prejudice to His transcendence). God's name, Immanuel

(God with us), is a name which appeals to pious people of every creed. Immanuel was thought of as being in the temple at Jerusalem, in the Holy of Holies. The Immanuel idea is in the Quran when it says that God is closer to one than one's jugular vein (Sura Qaf, v. 16). Likewise, the Immanuel idea is there when Brother Lawrence talks of 'practising the presence of God'. The Immanuel idea is found in the conception of Hindu avatars.

3. But now notice the difference. It is quite possible to believe in the immanence of a transcendent God so long as that immanence does not signify taking form. The Muslims would in all probability not seriously object to what they call *hulul*, that is, indwelling or pervading, but the 'Word became flesh' is not by any stretch of the imagination identical with *hulul*. And when they say that God is closer than your jugular vein, they are thinking of God as omnipresent. In the same way the avatars of Hinduism may participate in the godhood of the Universal Soul in human form. And in the temple at Jerusalem there was no person or thing suggesting that God takes form.

4. When the Church asserts that God takes form, it is asserting two things that according to all categories of human thinking are impossible, even for God, namely: (i) that God can distinguish Himself from Himself; and (ii) that it is proper for God to take form. The two are not, however, related to each other in the sense that God distinguishes Himself in the act of taking form, for if such were the case the Holy Trinity would only be a convenient distinction made for the purpose of revelation. The contrary, however, is true; it is in the act of taking form that God reveals that an eternal distinction exists in Himself.

5. Through 35 years of missionary experience, I have noted that a great number (perhaps the majority) of Christians (including fellow missionaries) and most Muslims, may be patient and reasonable in a discussion of any other aspect of Christology, but as soon as this subject of God taking form comes up they get impatient and unreasonable. The Christians are either so spiritual or so practical that they call it theological hairsplitting. And the Muslims say we are pigheaded, duped, weak-minded and perverse, when we take such a straightforward thing as the prophethood of Jesus and corrupt it with blasphemous and nonsensical talk about God taking form in Him. It not only wounds their religious feelings, but it makes them marvel at our crooked, foolish thinking. When they read the New Testament, they accept anything about the humanity of Jesus as literal truth, but all that points in the direction of divinity they accept only as

allegorical. I have heard supercilious Christians talk about the violent strife and prolonged struggles of the first six or seven centuries about the doctrine of the Person of Christ as much ado about nothing! Actually we should thank God that there were giants in those days—theological giants, who could see through the metaphysics and philosophies of their time, both inside and outside the Church, and could clearly define the true Christian comprehension of the object of our faith, namely Jesus Christ.

6. There is a point I wish I could print in red ink, it is so important. The chief and only real concern of the Church in those days was not (as many suppose) metaphysical; it was soteriological, that is, it had to do with the salvation of *mankind*. There are no three other words in our theological vocabulary which are more closely related to the *salvation* of mankind, than precisely these three: God takes form, and yet there are no words so repugnant to metaphysics as these three words. The Church knew that there was no other name given under heaven except the name of Jesus, whereby we must be saved. It was the task of the Church so to comprehend that name, that not a shadow of a doubt could arise as to its potency for salvation.

7. Apart from gnosticism, probably the earliest efforts in the Church to modify the statement: God takes form, were Ebionism and Docetism. The former tended to elevate Jesus of Nazareth to the rank and nature of God, while the latter saw in Jesus the personification of the idea of God. In other words, the Ebionites transformed Jesus into God; the Docetics transformed God into Jesus. Although the Church has unequivocally condemned both of these heresies, yet you will find that practically all Muslim attacks on the dogma of the two natures of Christ assume that the Church holds either the one or the other of them. Expressions like ‘virgin-born God’, ‘begetting is a physical act that lowers God to animal level’, are found scattered all through Islamic polemical literature, both old and new.

8. It must be remembered, however, that Muslims of an earlier age did have a reason for supposing that some such doctrine was held by the Church. For while the Melkite Church (that is, the ‘Kings’ Church) held to the creedal statements, neither philosophising about nor rationalising the statement of the fact of Incarnation, yet in the East, the Monophysite (meaning ‘one nature’) Churches, which included both Jacobites and Copts, held (and still hold) the doctrine that Christ only has one nature, which is overwhelmingly divine. They could even speak of a ‘crucified God’. Obviously God was transformed into Jesus, in genuine Docetic fashion, so that Jesus only appeared to be man. On the other hand, the

Nestorians held that Christ did have two natures, which became two Persons in one body. They were, however, not united, and so it was possible, at any given moment, to see whether it was the divine or the human person in Christ which was functioning. The tendency was to make Jesus God, and then to isolate that godhood, with the result that the human element played far the most important part. We know that these and other heretical sects were widespread, and therefore the Muslims of that age had an excuse for being ignorant of what the Church accepts, believes and confesses.<sup>1</sup>

9. The fact remains, however, that if man in any form becomes God (Ebionism), or if God in any form becomes man (Docetism), the result is transformation, and not God taking form. Anything which is transformed is changed so that it is no longer what it was. What it was no longer exists. If, therefore, God is changed into man or man changed into God, the real possibility of revelation is excluded, for that which has been transformed cannot tell us anything about what it was, but only what now it is. Because of this both Ebionism and Docetism exclude the real possibility of revelation, and if there is no revelation, then we have no knowledge of reconciliation and salvation. Such a transformation might have metaphysical interest, but it has no theological relevance.

10. Up the scale of Ebionism and down the scale of Docetism many divergent efforts were made in the ancient Church to get around or to simplify the essential mystery of the union of Godhood with manhood.<sup>2</sup> Some held that Jesus was only a body in which Christ the Eternal Logos dwelt as the spirit; others asserted that Jesus was both body and soul, but that the mind was the divine element. Others again held that the Divine Logos had emptied Himself of all divine attributes so that in Christ He was essentially man. You will have to remember, however, that gnosticism was a very potent factor in the thinking of those days. Some of the Fathers (Clement and Origen are examples) held that salvation by knowledge was superior to salvation by faith. Mystery, to them, was therefore like an enemy fortress which had to be besieged, conquered and destroyed.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The Melkite Church was the church of the Emperor. It is a branch of the Roman Catholic Church. At the time of Muhammed they were persecuting the Monophysites and Nestorians. These latter two churches sided with the Muslims against the Byzantine Emperors (ed.).

<sup>2</sup> Note: R. V. Sellers' *Two Ancient Christologies* (S.P.C.K., London, 1940) is perhaps the best modern book on the subject. Although heavy reading, it is well worth the effort made.

11. When the Church answers the question, what God does, by saying that God takes form, it is in reality saying what the Creed confesses in the words: 'Conceived by the Holy Spirit', or what the angel said to Mary, 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee' (Luke 1:35). The essential mystery of Jesus Christ is NOT that He was born by a direct creative act, while others are born by an act of procreation. There are three acts of direct creation of individuals recorded in the Scriptures, namely, the creation of Adam, of Eve, and of Jesus Christ. Adam and Eve are not held to be divine because of the mode of their creation, and there is no necessary reason why the mode of creation employed in the creation of Jesus Christ should indicate divinity of nature. Anyhow, procreation is actually just as great a mystery as a direct creative act. The only difference is that we are familiar with the former, and familiarity tends to breed thoughtlessness. We overlook the mysterious nature of it.

The uniqueness of Christ when compared with all other creatures is indicated in the words, 'Conceived by the Holy Spirit'. Some compare Jesus with others as a man or as a prophet, and in such comparison may take account of his virgin birth as the Muslims do. But all such comparison is valueless, for it is only speculation, because we have to take Jesus Christ as we find Him portrayed in the New Testament, and there He is revealed as the one in whom pure, created creatureliness is united, by a free sovereign act of God, with pure uncreated Godhood.

12. Pure creatureliness is a marvellous thing. While it is completely dependent on an act of God, it is, by the very fact of this act, something outside of God, independent of God, and distinct from God. The creature says 'I' to itself and 'Thou' to God. Christ, on the other hand, as the Eternal Logos, is NOT dependent on an act of God, nor is He outside of God, nor independent of God, nor distinct from God. God's essential nature is such that Christ is the Son in exactly the same way, and in all eternity, as the Father is Father. Therefore, 'conceived by the Holy Spirit' indicates that God by a free sovereign act has done the impossible. He has united the created with the uncreated, that which is outside Himself to that which is inside Himself, that which is independent of Him to that which is dependent on Him, that which is distinct from Him to that which in all eternity is Himself.

13. Therefore, without attempting any explanation, we must maintain that there are indications of these two opposites in the Logos Incarnate, which for the non-believer are only puzzling indications of contradictions,

but for the believer are signs pointing to and confirming the mystery of the divine conception of our Lord.

14. At this point the Muslim always and invariably throws up his hands in holy horror. It is blasphemy to speak of the coition of God the Creator with a woman, His creation. And it is precisely at this point that so many missionaries lose sight of the relevant point and lean over backwards to assure the Muslims that such a thought is truly horrible, and would never enter the mind of a Christian! That is completely beside the point. The mystery of the divine conception has nothing to do either with an act of creation or with an act of procreation. The word 'conceived', which in ordinary usage means to make pregnant, was given a new meaning here, indicating that since the 'holy thing' which was to be born was the Son of God, it could not in the nature of the case be the object of a creative act. That which in the beginning was with God and was God could not in the fullness of time be created. If we are to use human categories and human language, no other words than 'conceive' and 'begotten' have ever been available. So while we can speak of the human element in Jesus Christ as a free and sovereign creative act of God, and the act of uniting with the Divine as a free and sovereign act of God, we cannot speak of the Eternal Logos in Jesus Christ in the same way.

15. We are now up against the hard fact of mystery. Much depends on our attitude here. We can go in one of three directions:

(a) The first is simply to ignore the difficulty. That is, of course, the most common, the easiest and the most dangerous. The most common because it is the easiest, and the most dangerous because it involves not only the mystery of Christ in His person but also the whole structure of the Christian faith. You can say what you like, and twist it however you please, but the fact remains that, unless there is a hard core of genuine comprehension, faith in Jesus Christ can be either a weak, fickle, sickly thing, or else a strong, ignorant superstition. St Paul says: 'I know in Whom I have believed', and he rebukes the Jews for having zeal without knowledge.

(b) Another direction in which you can go is that of the many heretics of the ancient Church, who maintained that a mystery is a fact or truth which man has not yet comprehended, but which does not lie outside the power of his comprehension. In other words, the mystery is not essentially a mystery, but only accidentally. No person who has approached Christology with this attitude of mind has achieved anything except confusion and consternation, for no amount of searching,



no intricate philosophy, no brilliant thinking can disclose this eternal mystery.

(c) Finally, there is the way of *definition*. When working with the problems of Christology, one cannot term anything a mystery until the problem has been clearly stated and defined. If any of the rules used in scientific research can be followed, whether biological, psychological, physiological, philosophical or theological, they should of course be followed. If, however, the statement and definition of the problem is such that none of these rules can be applied, you are up against a mystery. The only thing you can do then is to make sure that the statement and definition of the problem is as correct as it can be. When you say: 'Conceived by the Holy Spirit', you are obviously up against one of those problems which no amount of research in any branch of learning can transfer from the category of mystery to that of comprehension. When St Paul in Romans 16:25ff. writes of the 'revelation of mystery', he does not mean that the mystery itself has been exposed, so that it is no longer a mystery. On the contrary, now the revelation of mystery is being manifested as a mystery—for obedience of faith. Before the coming of revelation, that is, before the coming of Christ, man was not even aware of the mystery, and the mystery could therefore have no relation to his faith, whatever that faith was. In several of his Epistles St Paul speaks of the mystery having been made known, but never in the sense that its characteristic as a mystery has been changed to that of comprehension.

16. What I am trying to get at is this: in our approach to Muslims we must never ignore, deny, discount or conceal the fact that mystery is at the very heart of all true Christianity. The mystery is now manifest so that we can state it clearly, define it accurately. We know precisely what it is, namely, that God takes form; precisely why God takes form, namely, for the salvation of mankind; precisely in whom God takes form, namely, in Jesus of Nazareth; and precisely how God takes form, namely, by the union of a creative act with a conceptive act. But what we do not know is how this utterly impossible thing is possible for God.

17. The very worst thing you can do in talking to a Muslim is try to make this impossibility look reasonable and possible. Far better to stress the complete impossibility of it, even as far as we can understand God—and at the same time stress also the fact of the finiteness of man's thinking. In other words it is better to maintain the reasonableness of mystery than the possibility of the impossible.

18. There are good reasons why this mystery, that is, the dialectical duplexity of the nature of Christ, must be held and stated clearly and boldly, with genuine knowledge of what is involved. Our faith is dependent on the perfect creatureliness of Christ, for it is in, by, and through His pure creatureliness that God makes Himself known to us, in that perfect creatureliness is united with perfect Godhood. We must have this confidence in the creatureliness of our Lord, that it is present at all times and on every occasion; we must always be able to point to it with the assurance that it will not suddenly disappear or change into something else, that is, it will not become either illusion or divinity. For if it did, our faith would be lost. In that case we would have no knowledge of reconciliation and salvation.

19. But another important reason is that this duplexity of nature is not limited to the nature of Christ. Let me mention a few of its ramifications:

(a) *Revelation as being historical.* The Church, following in the footsteps of Israel, has always maintained that God reveals Himself in history. Not in history, as such, but in concrete events inside a segment of history. Now a secular, scientific historian has a perfect right according to the rules of his science to study every event and any segment of history which the Church accepts as revelation. According to the amount of information available, the scientific historian can place any event or episode in its larger context, show continuity from one event to the next, explain how it came about, what it really was, what it meant, and what the results were. This is the pure creatureliness of concrete events in history, which, if they were removed and fables or supernatural events were to take their place, we could no longer speak of revelation as being historical. Take, for example, the death of our Lord. The scientific historian can explain all the causes that very naturally led up to the Crucifixion. If he could not, we would be left in doubt as to the historicalness of that death, and therefore of its value for us as an act of God in which He reveals Himself.

(b) *Mankind.* Luther's famous statement 'simultaneously righteous and sinful' (*simul justus et peccator*) sums up all mankind. Look at yourself. Seen from one side you know yourself to be a sinner, not just theoretically, but actually; seen from the other side you know yourself to be righteous, not just theoretically, but in the eyes of God. If you break up this duplexity of nature so that the real sinner disappears, then the righteous also disappears, for the righteous is always, precisely and particularly, the sinner.

(c) *The Church*. According to its creatureliness the Church is a great multitude of very ordinary people, good, bad, and indifferent, grouped together in some kind of human organisation. And yet it is this very multitude who are the body of Christ, the redeemed of God out of every nation, every kindred, every tribe—the saints. If for some reason this multitude of people should become angels, then the body of Christ would be lost. It is only when you very definitely can be sure of the creatureliness of the Church, that you can be quite sure also of the saints, the body of Christ.

(d) *The Bible*. The Bible is a book full of ordinary words and grammatical constructions. It is the work of an unknown number of men. Its different parts have various degrees of worth, just like any other book. And yet it is precisely the words and sentences of this book which become the Word of God. Destroy the creatureliness of this book and you have destroyed the book, and therefore you have destroyed the possibility of its becoming the very Word of God to all who hear its message.

(e) *The Sacraments*. The water of baptism is just ordinary water; but it is this ordinary water which becomes the washing of regeneration. Change this water into holy water or make it efficacious in itself and you have lost the sacrament of baptism, for it is only in, through and by creaturely water that the covenant of the grace of God is received. The same is true of the Lord's Supper. The bread is bread and the wine is wine, even at the very time of eating and drinking. It is only by holding clearly that the bread is bread and the wine is wine that we seriously attest the presence of the body and blood of our Lord. We say: 'This bread is the body of Christ'. Obviously it is not—and yet it is—for if you change the bread into something else, you no longer have the bread of the Sacrament, and therefore no longer the Sacrament.

20. My purpose in pointing out these dialectical duplexities in the Christian faith is to show you two things. First, to deny the duplexity in any of these is to deny the true character of the thing itself. And secondly, when you want to talk to a Muslim about them, you have to begin by telling him the creaturely aspects of each. For example, if you began by telling a Muslim that at the table of our Lord we eat flesh and drink blood, you would be telling a lie, for you have simplified the duplex nature of the Sacrament. In the same way, if you insisted that the church is a gathering together of saints, you would be wrong, for that is an unwarranted simplification of the duplex nature of the Church. If you speak of yourself as righteous, you are ignoring the fact that simultaneously you are a sinner, and only because of that can you be called righteous. Both sides of the

duplex nature have to be held absolutely, and the creatureliness of each thing must be seen, understood and accepted before the duplexity can be approached.

21. If you really are familiar with the fact that God takes form, then you will understand that all of these other duplexities of nature are ramifications of the one all-important duplexity: that in Jesus Christ there is perfect manhood and perfect Godhead.

22. All that I have said so far may seem difficult theological speculation to you. It is not speculation. I have kept close to the verities and realities of our faith. Furthermore, all of this has a very practical application to our work among Muslims. Because the Muslim cannot see, cannot understand, the dialectical doubleness of all Christianity and, especially, the duplexity of the nature of Christ, missionaries in their zeal for the Lord tend to simplify the gospel message either by ignoring the true creatureliness of every aspect of Christianity, or by overemphasising it. Let us take a case in point. A missionary is reading with a Muslim the gospel records of our Lord's life. He comes to the episode where Christ calmed the storm on the sea. He then says to the Muslim: 'Obviously only God can control the forces of nature in this way, it is outside the range of human possibilities!' The missionary is here ignoring the duplexity of Christ's nature, and simplifying it to such an extent that the human element is completely ignored, and only the divine element is present, as the actual agent at work at that moment. But the Muslim answers that, according to Islam, prophets and saints (of a certain degree) have had power given to them. Why that power should not extend to the calming of the sea, he cannot understand. In seeking to understand this episode he does not need to go outside the range of human possibilities, provided that the 'possibility' has been given by God. Now the interesting point is that in the record of this episode which we have in the New Testament, our Lord rebukes His disciples for their lack of faith. Faith is not, of course, proper to the Godhead. If, therefore, our Lord was acting in the strength of His divinity, He had no occasion whatsoever to rebuke His disciples for lack of faith. If, on the other hand, his deed was an act of faith, then all one can say is that so great a faith is outside the scope of human possibilities, but since the event happened, and actually happened through the faith of 'this man', naturally the disciples began to wonder what kind of a man He was.

23. Please note the difference between the attitude of these Jews, who knew that Jehovah was one God, and that of the idolaters in Iconium (Acts 14:11ff.) and on the island of Melita (Acts 28:6). In both cases the attitude

of the idolaters in the presence of a miracle was: A god has come down to earth! Such an easy and simple solution was not possible for the Jews. They could only wonder what manner of man He was. In other words, they accepted the pure creatureliness of Christ, and worked on from there.

24. Another missionary, at this point, would say, 'You see here how Christ helped these men in this difficult and dangerous event. It is only one of many events of that kind. And that is why the Christian Church sent missionaries out to help you all they can. The Church walks in the footsteps of her Master. And Jesus shows us God's attitude toward us in all these good deeds which He did.' As a matter of actual fact, if we believe the gospel record, the disciples did not stop to marvel at what a kind and good deed our Lord did. Rather, they were astounded at His power and authority. The humanitarian aspect of our Lord's deeds, which has secured a stranglehold on the Church of this generation, is in reality only a shallow simplification of the dialectical duplexity of our Lord's nature, which attempts—and all too often succeeds—in bogging Him down in a simple creatureliness in which no tension exists.

25. In preaching Christ, the Church is in the same impossible situation it is in when administering the Sacraments. We say: 'This is the body of Christ', and we give—a piece of bread. We say: 'This is the blood of Christ', and we give a little wine mixed with water. Anyone with a little common sense can see how impossible that is. Likewise we say: 'This is the washing of regeneration', and we pour a little ordinary water over the person. Exactly the same is true in presenting Christ. We say: 'This is the son of God', and we show—the man Jesus.

26. Here follows another important point. Without this dialectical duplexity we have neither Saviour nor Sacraments. If we give bread and wine without the Word, declaring it to be what it is not—and yet is—the body and blood of Christ, we are only feeding them—nothing more. If we pour water on a person, without the Word which declares that this water has a power which it does not have—and yet has—we are only giving an ordinary bath. On the other hand, to speak of the body and blood and regeneration, and not give the bread, wine and water, is making the Sacraments invalid through spiritualising them. In the same way, to show Jesus without declaring Him to be the Son of God, is to deny the Incarnation and falsify Christianity; but to declare the Son of God without showing the man Jesus, is just as definitely to deny the Incarnation and falsify Christianity. Both sides must be there simultaneously, absolutely and unconditionally.

Every aspect of true Christianity has this impossible dialectical duplexity of nature, and they all spring from that prime impossibility, the duplexity of the nature of our Lord. And that again arises from the fact that the Church, in answering the question, What God does, says God takes form. If that answer is false, then we have no knowledge of revelation, no knowledge of reconciliation and no knowledge of salvation. In that case, 'we are of all men most miserable'.

27. While the Church is dependent on its doctrines for its comprehension of the duplex nature of Christ and of Christianity, its faith is not dependent on a complete and perfect comprehension. There is a point here most Muslims and many Christians miss. In philosophy that which one says, is in itself that which is said. This is never the case in the Church. Nothing in the doctrine of the duplexity of the nature of our Lord and of His gospel and Church is that duplexity itself. The Church's doctrine may be profound or superficial, it may be more or less clear, and right or wrong in various degrees. Sectarians and heretics may ignore, ridicule and weaken it. Nevertheless, the fact of that duplexity is the fact of Incarnation. The Christian Church has never said, and can never say: Is this true? It can only say: How are we to understand it? And our faith is related to the fact, not to the understanding of the fact. It is only when the understanding of it vitiates or misrepresents the fact, that danger arises. And that is why the Church constantly scrutinises its own comprehension of the fact.

28. Now one final word. I have heard people say that a chapter of this kind makes preaching to Muslims discouragingly difficult. Perhaps it does. All one can do is to try courageously to overcome the difficulty, remembering that what we say has to be such that God can use it as a vehicle for His revelation, and then to believe that He will use it, in spite of our shortcomings and the inadequacy of all language.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why is the thought that 'God takes form' so repugnant to the Muslim?
2. Why is the thought that 'God takes form' so necessary to the Christian faith?
3. Discuss some further examples 'of duplexity of nature' in the Church, apart from the Person of Christ.

## CHAPTER 26

# Born of a Virgin

1. In the previous chapter we worked with the clause, ‘conceived by the Holy Spirit’, showing how this clause relates to the divinity of Christ, and how His resultant duplex nature affects the whole structure of Christianity. Here we are to work with the human side of the problem.

2. When the ordinary layman says the Creed, and repeats these two clauses, ‘conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary’, he probably thinks that the Holy Spirit in some mysterious spiritual way fructified the womb of Mary, and because this contact was spiritual and not physical, Mary would naturally be a physical virgin when our Lord was born. Hence the virgin birth somehow does say something about the divinity of our Lord. In other words, the virgin birth is thought of as a natural result of that divine conception.

3. The Nicene Creed does say in a clear and concise manner that the human element in Jesus was from His mother, and the divine element from His Father, that is, from God. If the Creed stopped there and had no more to say about the matter, it would justify us in supposing that these two clauses: ‘conceived by the Holy Spirit’, and ‘born of the Virgin Mary’, are in reality two sides of one whole. But if that were true our Lord would be some kind of an intermediate being, neither god nor man. Maybe a demigod; maybe a superman. A spiritual mulatto, neither black nor white.

4. The Creed, however, does go on to say that both the divine element and the human element in Jesus were perfect. The word ‘perfect’ is ambiguous and sometimes causes trouble. Primarily it does not mean blameless, excellent or righteous. It means that the thing in question has all the properties natural to that thing. (Note the difference between *kamil* and *haqiqi*). So when the Creed says that both the divine and the human element in Jesus were perfect, the meaning is that whatever is proper to God was found in Jesus, and whatever is proper to man was found in Jesus.

5. When you realise the significance of that word ‘perfect’ in this connection, it becomes apparent that the two clauses: ‘conceived . . .’, and ‘born . . .’ are quite independent of each other and must be understood as indicating two different things. Actually the Church believes and confesses that there were three definite acts of God involved in the Incarnation: (i) a conceptive act; (ii) a creative act; and (iii) an act of unification.

6. In the previous chapter we spoke of (i) and (iii). Here it is (ii) and (iii) we want to try to understand. Naturally (iii), the joining together of (i) and (ii), comes up for discussion in relation to both clauses.

7. One thing must be obvious. Namely, if our Lord was, as the Church believes and confesses, perfect man, then He was perfect man in body, soul and spirit (to use the familiar terminology). Let me say it in speculative phrasing in order to make the point doubly clear. If Jesus of Nazareth had been born without the conceptive act of the Holy Spirit uniting the divine with the human, he would nonetheless have been perfect man, that is, body, soul and spirit.

8. Now the Church confesses its belief that this perfect man, this human body, soul and spirit, was not the result of an act of procreation, but of a direct, creative act of God. This belief and confession has irritated, perplexed and alienated many people over the centuries. Some, like Celsus the heathen philosopher in the time of Origen, made vulgar sport of it, and suggested that Mary had been guilty of adultery. Nowadays the modern rationalists of Islam do the same thing. Others call it a myth which was brought into existence through contact with the mystery religions. Still others see no necessity for it from a theological point of view, and prefer therefore just to ignore it. In our day it is one of the most confused of all theological subjects. Much depends on how the missionary to Muslims thinks about this vital question.

9. One thing anyone must notice, who reads what an older generation of theologians had to say on the subjects, is the massive way in which they employ such conceptions as substance, essence, ego, person, attributes, etc. One would almost suppose these were things the very shape and contents of which they could see, touch and handle. The so-called science of psychology has at least taught us that we know considerably less of the riddle of man than philosophers and theologians of old thought they knew.

10. We use expressions like ‘body, soul and spirit’, but just what do we know about man? We know that through procreation there comes into



existence an entity that develops into an awareness or a consciousness of others over against itself. Then we know also that certain characteristics, attributes and qualities seem proper to this awareness or consciousness. Just why these characteristics, attributes and qualities are what they are in each case, we do not really know. Some thinkers emphasise heredity, some environment, and some the functions of physical organs. There may even be differences of opinion as to what characteristics, attributes and qualities are universally proper to this awareness or consciousness. The basic fact, however, remains that this procreated entity develops into awareness of itself through awareness of others, and that there are characteristics, attributes and qualities which seem proper to this awareness. Finally, we know that in some mysterious way that awareness with its characteristics, attributes and qualities is tied up with, and expresses itself through, the purely biological life of a physical body.

11. Now if we were to drop the old-fashioned expressions and try to state our belief about our Lord in language which is more appropriate to our time, we might say something like this: The unique entity which was Christ grew into an awareness or consciousness of itself not only over against man, but also over against God. Over against man He gained awareness of Himself as man; over against God He became aware of Himself as God. Most assuredly an entity which has the latent ability to grow into a duplex awareness of this kind is utterly unique in history. It follows therefore that this duplex awareness has characteristics, attributes and qualities proper to both godhead and to manhood. The awareness in itself, the consciousness of being man over against man and God over against God, is one and the same awareness.

12. Now please do not think that this statement is an effort to reveal the mystery; on the contrary, it is only a statement made in language which shows the mystery more clearly for people of our way of thinking.

13. Here, as well as in the ancient way of expressing the same belief, we run up against the startling fact of which not one of the three old Creeds takes notice. And that fact is SIN. Sin intrudes rather abruptly here. The awareness or consciousness of being man must of necessity be an awareness or consciousness in relation to sinful or fallen man, as there is no other. Therefore the entity which was Christ must have grown into an awareness or consciousness of sinful, fallen man, over against itself. If we are to follow the thought through to its logical conclusion then Christ, in order to be aware of Himself as man over against man, must be aware of Himself as sinful man over against sinful man. St Paul was probably

thinking along these same lines when he said Christ Who knew no sin was made sin for our sakes (2 Cor. 5:21). And that thought was prompted, I should say, by the picture in Isaiah 53 of the complete identification of the suffering Servant with those for whom He suffered. However we try to understand the problem, we still have the more difficult one of comprehending how any entity that grows into awareness of itself over against sinful man can at the same time grow into awareness of itself over against a holy God.

That is the enigma we have in Christ, no matter what terminology we use.

14. In seeking to explain this enigma many theologians argued from the virgin birth of our Lord. He had an immaculate conception, they said, because His mother was a virgin. It was not long before others pointed out that original sin is not bacilli that are carried only by the male of the species. Roman Catholic theologians, always ready to honour the 'mother of God', developed the idea of the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary. Of course that does not really solve the problem; it only pushes it a step further back. Others taught that in the womb of Mary, Christ received not one particle from Mary, 'neither flesh nor blood nor sinful nature'. He was entirely a new direct creation of heavenly origin, cloaked only by the virgin womb. Of course the cry went up: 'Then He is not ours! The blood He shed on the cross is not ours, the death He died is not ours. His resurrection is not ours. We are left desolate without a redeemer.'

15. Calvin's answer to all this is:

For we do not represent Christ as perfectly immaculate, merely because He was born of the seed of a woman unconnected with any man, but because He was sanctified by the Spirit, so that His generation was pure and holy, such as it would have been before the fall of Adam (*Institutes*, 11:13:4)

What Calvin says, in effect, is that the sinlessness of our Lord has no relationship to the virginity of His mother. The sanctification He speaks of would be just as possible in procreation as in a direct and immediate creation.

16. It seems to me that in our modern approach to the understanding of human nature, the enigma of the impeccability of our Lord becomes doubly clear. How the sanctification of the seed makes it possible, we simply do not understand. You either take it or leave it. But you can neither accept it nor reject it, prove it nor disprove it, on the basis of the virgin birth.

17. The real difficulty is due to the fact that all too often the virgin birth has been given a wrong significance. The story of this miraculous birth has always been associated with the so-called prophecy in Isaiah 7. In that section of Isaiah the whole argument is about a Sign. The prophet tells Ahaz to ask for a sign. Ahaz piously refuses. He is then told that God Himself will give a sign.

18. Let us stop here for just a moment, for some clear thinking is indicated.

Just what is the nature of a sign? It points towards or indicates something else. In itself it has no intrinsic value, apart from its purpose which is to attract attention to something other than itself. Remove that something else, or read the sign wrongly, or confuse it with the thing it signifies, and the sign becomes purposeless or misleading. For example, a sign on the road says: 10 miles to Newtown, but when you get there you see that an invading army has long since razed Newtown to the ground and that it is completely deserted. The sign no longer has any meaning because the 'something' to which it pointed is no longer there. Again: a motor car crashes into a train because the driver misread the road sign. The sign was of no value to that driver. Or again: suppose that a person zealously honours the flag; but dishonours the country of which the flag is a sign? What good, then, is the flag to him?

19. Now with this understanding of a sign in mind, let us go back to the episode in Isaiah 7. The sign promised to Ahaz was the birth of a superchild, born of a virgin. It is true that the word 'virgin' can also be interpreted to mean a young woman, but the Church has held that that would be poor and faulty exegesis, for the mention of a woman as its mother would be pointless and superfluous. The sign would in fact be no sign at all, unless the reference were to a virgin birth. The Church therefore from its earliest known history has regarded the virgin birth of Christ as being the sign promised by Isaiah. Some people get so excited about this passage as proof of the virgin birth that they forget that what it promised is a sign. Instead of wasting time and energy trying to prove what no man can prove (that is, that prophecy has been fulfilled), it would be more profitable to try to understand what this particular sign was pointing towards or indicating. For the Church has from its earliest times accepted the story of the birth of Christ from a virgin mother as a sign, that points us on to something else and has no intrinsic value in itself.

20. Some people get perplexed because of a strange double use of the word 'sign' in the four Gospels. In the Synoptics, signs are asked for by a

sinful and adulterous generation, but none are given—except the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12:39ff.), which those to whom it was given could neither read nor understand. In the Gospel of St John, signs are mentioned repeatedly as indicating or pointing to something, for believers (in the *King James Version* the word for ‘sign’ is often translated incorrectly as ‘miracles’; see, for example, John 2:11 and many others). In other words, when a sign is asked for or wanted as a proof of some truth, unbelief is at the root; on the other hand, when a sign is given to believers it indicates something which will help them better to grasp the truth of what they believe.

21. See how true this is of Muslims and of their belief in the virgin birth of Jesus. In the Quran, Jesus is called Ibn-Mariyam—son of Mary (Sura Mariyam, verse 34 and other places). Ordinarily names are: so and so, son of—the father, whose name is given. With the exception of a few rationalistic sects, Muslims the world over declare their belief in the virgin birth of Jesus. But what does it mean to them? Certainly not incarnation, divinity, sonship, sinlessness or any other Christian doctrine. They do however have an explanation which satisfies their intellect. God shows His omnipotence in His creative acts. Thus He has shown that He can create man in four different ways: without father or mother (Adam); without mother (Eve); without father (Jesus); and with both father and mother (the rest of us). It is as clear as daylight that they have missed the sign, made it a proof of something, and thereby completely vitiated it.

22. On the other hand, look at the hundreds of Christians who seek proof of something in the sign, cannot find it, and therefore reject the sign as meaningless mythology, simply because they refuse to accept it as a sign and nothing more.

23. If we accept and believe in the virgin birth as a sign, we must remember that in itself it has no significance. That is to say, we know of no divine necessity for this particular creative act, since God could, had He so willed, have united the Eternal Logos with a creatureliness which had its origin through procreation. And furthermore, the sign can only be read and understood by believers. This is very essential in our approach to Muslims. To use the virgin birth as a point of contact is not only begging the question, it is confusing the issues in such a way that the Muslims will not even have a chance of understanding anything about our Lord.

24. I mention this about our approach to the Muslims before we start working with the question: What is the virgin birth a sign of?, because I want to make it clear that, regardless of what our answer may be, the

Muslims will not accept the virgin birth as a sign pointing to or indicating just that.

25. We come now at last to the vital question: What is the virgin birth a sign of? In the previous chapter as well as in this one it has been shown that the virgin birth cannot be taken as a sign pointing to or indicating perfect godhead in Christ. It has nothing to do with that great and mysterious conceptive act. Likewise it ought to be clear that the virgin birth of Christ is not in any way related to His sinlessness. What the virgin birth does spotlight is this: The perfect creatureliness of our Lord. It points to and indicates as clearly as is possible the creatureliness, precisely because in this manner it makes this creatureliness unique. One might almost indicate a parallelism here with the mode of creation in the case of both Adam and Eve. God made a mould of earth, and from that He created the first man. He might, had He so willed, have said: Let there be man—and man would have been; but the sign which spotlighted the fact that man was a creature, that man was of the earth, earthy, was precisely that very mould of earth which God used. Similarly in the case of Eve. She was created, and yet was not made independent of man. The story of the rib spotlights the fact that the creation of the female is linked to that of the male. The very uniqueness of these two ‘signs’ points to and indicates the creatureliness of Adam and Eve, and because of these signs no believer can ever regard himself as anything except a creature of God. That old temptation: Ye shall be as gods, is no longer a danger for him. Likewise, no man can in faith deny the perfect creatureliness of our Lord, for the virgin birth is always there as a high-powered spotlight constantly being played on that very creatureliness, precisely because, as in the case of both Adam and Eve, that creatureliness is unique.

26. People who want the virgin birth to be something big and wonderful in itself, or who are willing to accept it as a sign if it signifies something marvellous like divinity or sinlessness, are apt to be disappointed with the idea that it signifies or indicates creatureliness. And they ask why God should want to emphasise the creatureliness of our Lord in such a dramatic fashion. The answer is twofold. In the first place, the creatureliness of the eternal Logos of God is in itself so marvellous and awe-inspiring that man always tends to back away from it, or to circumvent it. Not only does Church history prove this contention beyond any question of a doubt, but all history of religion proves that wherever man has attempted to bring God near, it has been done either by emphasising the metaphysical aspect of his omnipresence (refer back to the Immanuel idea

in the previous chapter) or else by transforming Him into man. It is easy to say that Allah is closer to you than your jugular vein: and it is also easy to say that: ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men’ (Acts 14:11). But mankind stands aghast at the idea that God’s way of coming near to man is to incorporate manhood into His own godhood. If this great mystery is true, and not an illusion or a myth, the manhood must be pure creatureliness, perfect manhood. In what better way could God emphasise the fact of this perfect manhood than by making the pure creatureliness utterly unique? Our only answer can be: God hath done all things well!

27. The second part of the answer to why God should emphasise the creatureliness of our Lord in so dramatic a fashion is this:

The virgin birth as a sign of the creatureliness of Christ is also the sign of a free and sovereign act of God. In the last chapter the point was made that the Logos was necessary to God, that is, that God is not God without the Logos, as the Father is not the Father without the Son. But through the virgin birth the fact is emphasised that the Incarnation was a free and sovereign act of God. Here, at this point, there can never be any talk of necessity. You may recall that in the chapters on revelation and on the Holy Trinity, the emphasis was on the fact that God was God in His revelation, that is to say, that God—at no time—gives His revelation into man’s hand nor does He need or use any assistance or cooperation from man. That same truth is emphasised here, but in a different way, by the sign of the virgin birth. God’s sovereign determination and free act, that is, His unrestricted and unaided grace, is the only and unique ground and source of all reconciliation, all redemption, all salvation. God’s grace is free, not in the sense of something given for nothing, but as having full liberty, being unbounded, unconditioned, unrestricted, without inherent necessity. Any attempt (and many have been made) to make the Incarnation a necessity because of the nature of God, must begin by ignoring, misinterpreting or rejecting the sign of the virgin birth, for that shows, if anything ever could, that here is an act restricted entirely to the realm of God’s will. He did what He did simply because that action was in accordance with the purpose of His own holy will.

28. Now if God alone is the Actor in this direct act of creation, it follows logically that man has no possibilities whatsoever, either in himself or at his disposal. He has not even the possibility of cooperation. The mother of our Lord wanted to cooperate, but did not see how she could, being unmarried. She was told that her cooperation was not possible, for God Himself would directly create that which was necessary. She could

only say: So be it. This utter inability in man is what John speaks of when he says that those who believe on Him ‘were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God’ (John 1:13).

29. To read the sign of the virgin birth rightly means to launch out into the fathomless depth of God’s free and sovereign grace, to be liberated from the tyranny of self, to be free from frantic striving and from deadly uncertainty. To read the sign incorrectly, or to reject or ignore it, means being enslaved under the tyranny of the ego, constantly trying to qualify for salvation, and continuously trying to bolster up faith because of the inward dry rot of uncertainty.

To recapitulate. In the act of Incarnation, when joining the eternal uncreated Logos with created manhood, God spotlighted the pure creatureliness of that manhood by a unique creative act because of which the man Jesus was born of a virgin. Thus the virgin birth becomes a sign for believers of the unquestionable truth of the perfect manhood of Jesus as well as a sign of God’s sovereign grace in the salvation of mankind.

30. Now there is just one other thing I want to point out here, something which needs to be emphasised more than I can do in the limited space at my disposal. It is this, that:

Form and contents cannot be separated.

31. Every truth comes to us in a certain form; it may be a form of words or a symbol, either as a myth or as a concrete shape. Take for example the story of the creation. No matter if you accept it as a verbally inspired account of what happened or whether you accept it as a myth—that is, as a story that has no possibility of being proved historically if you replace it with a theory of evolution, or with anything else for that matter—the truth of the contents of that story is lost. Take the Cross, the universal sign or symbol of Christianity. Remove it and put a gallows, or an electric chair, or a tree or pole to indicate lynching in its stead, or put nothing at all—and you have lost the truth.

*In the cross of Christ I glory,  
towering o’er the wrecks of time.*

Take away that ‘cross’ and try to explain the truth in any other way and you have lost something—something vital.

32. Carlyle said, the bark of a tree is something outward and visible, but scrape it off, and you have killed the tree. How often we see the truth of that statement where poor people scrape the bark off the trees for

firewood, never dreaming that they are killing the trees in so doing. Similarly, many Christians are constantly peeling off one outward and visible sign or symbol after the other from the faith once for all delivered to the fathers, without realising that in so doing they are actually killing the tree of faith both for themselves and for others.

33. It is noticeable that wherever you find liberal humanism masquerading as Christianity—that is, rejection of the doctrine of original sin, confidence in man's ability to qualify for salvation, acceptance of religious experience as a criterion of faith—wherever you find these and a great many other errors and heresies, you will almost invariably find that the sign of the miraculous birth of our Lord has been ignored, rejected or misunderstood. This happens simply because the form in which the truth has reached us is rejected, and therefore the truth it conveys is lost.

34. You may feel that this chapter is directed to missionaries, and has little or nothing positive to say about our approach to Muslims. But if I have succeeded in showing you that the virgin birth is a sign, and as a sign it is only relevant when faith in the Incarnation is already present, then it does tell you something positive about your approach to the Muslim. It tells you that to approach him with any argument about the virgin birth is not only useless but harmful. It tells you that even though he accepts or acknowledges the virgin birth that acceptance on his part can never be a point of contact, for he accepts it as an unbeliever, and he therefore necessarily misunderstands it. Finally, it tells you that also the Muslim is under God's free sovereign grace, and therefore also he must hear the proclamation of that grace, no matter whether he accepts it or rejects it.

### QUESTIONS

1. Does the sinlessness of Jesus depend on the virgin birth? Give reasons for your answer, whether affirmative or negative.
2. Discuss the author's emphasis on the virgin birth as a sign.
3. Since Jesus' birth is described also in the Quran as a virgin birth, does this then become a 'point of contact' for the Christian Preachers? What is the difference in the two concepts?



SECTION NINE

WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE  
TOWARD MUHAMMED?



## Muhammed's Conception of God in Relation to Yours

1. So far we have been looking more or less critically at Christianity in relation to Islam. From now on we will be looking critically at Islam in relation to Christianity. That change is going to cause certain difficulties. First of all every one of us must admit that, whatever we have to say about Christianity as expounded in our day, it is to Christ, through the agency of this very Christianity, that we are bound. As a result we know more about Christianity than we can ever know about Islam. In the final analysis only the Muslim has a moral right to say what Islam is, just as it takes a Christian to say what Christianity is. It is a fallacy to believe that any intelligent, thinking person, regardless of his personal convictions, can by careful study become a genuine theologian—regardless of whether it be the Muslim or the Christian faith he chooses to acquaint himself with.

2. Another difficulty is that we who would like to get Christianity across to the Muslim are not—cannot be—disinterested and objective. If we are to get anywhere at all, the first step must be, honestly and openly, to admit that our attitude is subjective, that we are prejudiced in favour of Christianity, and that we therefore are always tempted to see strength, light, truth, and eternity in Christianity and not to see them in Islam. When either a Muslim or a Christian starts by postulating that he is being scientific and objective you should see the red light at once. That man is dangerous, for he is suffering under a delusion, and not even aware of how unscientific and how prejudiced he is and will show himself to be. The only man you can trust is the one who says: 'I am a Christian; I am therefore naturally predisposed and prejudiced in favour of Christianity. I must be doubly careful in all my studies not to be unfair.'

3. Then again, if you are going to be able to get the Gospel across you are bound to have some idea of what you think not only of Islam, but also

of Muhammed. No Christian can accept any conception of Muhammed which comes from Muhammed himself or from Muslims. And yet, if the Christian is to know enough about Muhammed to form some idea of what he should think of him, the only source of such information is in Islam. In other words, you and the Muslim take the same basic material, and you come out in the East, and he in the West. Why is that?

4. Simply because the presuppositions differ. By way of illustration, let me take a very simple and obvious example. Christians have hammered away at Muhammed's so-called lust for women, arguing from that how utterly impossible it was for him to have been a prophet. Muslims on the other hand are proud of their prophet, who from the very start strictly forbade and severely punished all kinds of promiscuity, who regulated polygamy, who combined concubinage with responsibility and who stopped the murder of infant girls.

5. It is as clear as can be that in this case it is not the man himself who causes the difference of opinion, but the presupposed ethical standards by which he is judged.

6. One might even go a step further and say that when one European can call Muhammed a false prophet and an anti-Christ, when another can see in him one of the world's great men, and when a third can even believe that his revelations were genuine, it is again not the man himself but certain contradictory presuppositions in the minds of the Europeans which give rise to these differing attitudes towards him.

7. Remember, therefore, all the way through, that wherever you end in your thinking about Muhammed it will be just as much because you are what you are, as because he was what he was. Biographies of Muhammed have been attempted by Christians of all sects and shades, as well as by Unitarians, Hindus, Parsees; they have been attempted by historians, by story-writers, by philosophers, by missionaries and by psychologists—and of course by Muslims of varying persuasions. When you realise how limited the reliable original sources are, you will see that what we know about him—apart from a few basic facts—has to be derived from what he taught. And that is why I emphasise the subjective attitude of the biographers in this connection, for every one of them agrees or disagrees, partially or wholly, with his teaching—insofar as he even understands that teaching. Naturally, then, what you get from these biographies will depend on your own basic presuppositions.

8. In the list of contents, the heading of this section is: 'What Is Your Attitude towards Muhammed?' The point is, you have to have an attitude.

You cannot preach to a Muslim so that it makes sense, without one. But remember: you never need to speak of it. Actually it is wiser not to speak of it. You are to speak of that one name under heaven whereby men must be saved. Let the Muslim draw his own conclusions regarding your attitude to Muhammed. On the countless occasions when Muslims have asked me what I think of their prophet, I have answered in this fashion: 'What in the world has that got to do with it? What we want to talk about is whether God has revealed himself in the Quran or in Christ. In this connection my private and personal opinion of Muhammed has no bearing or interest whatsoever.'

9. I would therefore not even think of discussing my attitude towards Muhammed in these chapters. It would take a book to begin with, and I would probably not end by saying anything that has not been said and contradicted a dozen times! All I want to do, if possible, is to put first things first, as regards the man. Let me illustrate: Suppose the uppermost thing in our minds when we thought of King David or read his Psalms was the despicable trick he used in stealing Bathsheba from her husband by first having him killed. Of course, I know there is a difference. David repented when the prophet Nathan lashed him with words like barbed wire. That, however, does not alter the fact that David was capable of such a trick. Yet, if we were to confine our attention to that side of David's character we might as well destroy the Book of Psalms as far as they are related to him! He was—remarkably enough—in spite of all, 'a man after God's own heart'. Likewise, if we can only get first things first in regards to Muhammed, then the real issue between Christianity and Islam will become sharply defined—and that is what we want.

10. After this introduction, we can now turn to the subject of this particular chapter, namely, Muhammed's conception of God in relation to yours.

11. Theoretically, against the background of Christian thinking, Muhammed's conception of God can be made to look, on the one hand, like something rather gruesome (see Zwemer's *The Moslem Doctrine of God*; and Hughes's *Dictionary of Islam*, article on God, section by Palgrave). Or on the other hand it can be made to look like something very beautiful and closely resembling Christianity (compare 'Operation Reach', Sept. – Oct. 1957). Regarding the first, one can say that a case can be made out for that presentation, but that among ordinary worshippers God is not the God of the theologians; he is actually more 'human'. Regarding the second it can be said that, while a Christian may put Christian ideas into the

words of the Fatihah, the stupendous fact that this ‘worship’ of Allah is actually carried out in Arabic, overwhelmingly spoken parrot fashion by the great majority of Muslims, who learn the words but have not the faintest idea of what they mean, tells its own story. Nor is knowledge necessary, for worship is, strictly speaking, *ada* (that is, payment). The importance of such worship lies in the outward act of doing, not in the attitude of the worshipper. If God really demands worship under the category of law, then as far as the Christian is concerned the recitation of the Fatihah (although it is unquestionably a beautiful poem) can never constitute worship.

12. Let me make one point clear from the start: The Holy Trinity is NOT identical with Allah. This statement needs some clarification, for there is much confusion in the minds of both Muslims and Christians. It is often said that since both believe that there is only one God, and that He is the Creator, they must be talking about the same God. Likewise one often hears people say that the first half of the Muslim Creed (‘there is no God but God’) was taken from Christianity.

13. What we need to keep in mind is this: No man has at any time seen God, and no man knows God. Man has certain ideas, doctrines and convictions about God; he has faith in or about God. Even the atheist has faith about God, in that he believes that there is no God. But no man can say that he knows on the basis of empirical or sensuous experiences that there is reality behind his ideas, doctrines, convictions and faith. So when man says, ‘God’, he is actually only talking about certain ideas, doctrines and convictions, without knowing whether or not there is reality behind them. St Paul says he knows in whom he has believed, and he is persuaded of this and that. A Muslim could use exactly the same terms.

14. When a Muslim says, ‘Allah’, he is talking about a supposed entity about whom certain ideas, doctrines, convictions and faith have reached him through the agency of the Quran, as interpreted in the kind of Islam he knows. When the Christian says, ‘Holy Trinity’, he is speaking of a supposed entity whom the Church has taught him has been revealed in the Eternal Logos, Jesus Christ. He therefore has an entirely different set of ideas, doctrines and convictions, and a radically different faith from that of the Muslim.

When the Muslim predicates about Allah—that he is one—and the Christian predicates about the Holy Trinity—that it is one God—there obviously cannot be a corresponding Reality behind both these predicates. In the same manner, when Allah is also called the almighty Creator, and the Holy Trinity is also called the same, reality cannot be behind both.

Therefore when the Christian says that the Holy Trinity is not identical with Allah, he means that the ideas, doctrines, convictions and faith which are related to the word 'Allah' are not in any way identical with those which are related to the name 'Holy Trinity'. The Muslim and the Christian each postulates that reality lies behind his ideas, doctrine, convictions and faith. Neither can do more than postulate, that is, simply to lay down or proclaim the assumption without proof, that reality lies behind his ideas, doctrines, convictions and faith. Either may give his life, but that is no proof of his assumption: it remains a postulate. The Christian is therefore justified in maintaining that there can be no identity of reality behind the two sets of ideas, doctrines, convictions and faiths. If reality is one God, the Creator, then it must be behind either the one or the other, not behind both.

15. If you feel inclined to quarrel with this statement then try studying—for example—what the creative activities of Allah are, and how they are motivated, and you will see that they do not even faintly resemble what we have learned about God the Creator through His revelation, Jesus Christ.

16. In your contact with Muslims you will want to be extremely careful when using words common to both religions; otherwise these words will confuse the issues and muddle your thinking. You will probably be made aware of this as you work through this chapter.

17. Here is something which may startle you. Try studying the ninety-nine names of Allah, as they are found in Islam. (These can be found in Hughes's *Dictionary of Islam*, Zwemer's *The Moslem Doctrine of God*, Stanton's *The Teaching of the Qur'an*, SPCK, New York, 1919, and many others.) The Muslim rosary is divided sometimes into two sections, sometimes into three, according to the division of the ninety-nine names. The two are The Awe-inspiring (terrible) and The Glorious; and the three are Power, Wisdom and Goodness. Whichever way you may want to take them, they include all the attributes of God. Actually twenty-six of them are found in the Quran as attributes and not as actual names. I know that some leading Muslim theologians have tried to prove that those ninety-nine names, in the setting they now have in so much popular Muslim thought, do not reflect the thoughts of Muhammed nor those found in the Quran relating to Allah. While we are not competent to settle this question, we may still be justified in accepting this rosary of names as indicative of nearly all orthodox and conservative thinking in Islamic theology.

18. Now look at each one and see if you can find anything that corresponds to it in the Bible. Perhaps there will only be five with which you

would want to quarrel. The rest you probably let pass as names you also could use about God. Here are the five:

- (a) The Proud One
- (b) The One Who Leads Astray
- (c) The Avenger
- (d) The Abaser
- (e) The One Who Harms

Let us take them in that order:

(a) *The Proud One*. The Bible tells us more than once that God has said: 'I the LORD thy God am a jealous God'. Although the words for jealous and zealous are more or less the same, you will see from the context in several places that the idea of zealous is not applicable where jealous is. Jealousy has its roots in pride. So you see the jump from the one word to the other (that is, from proud to jealous) is not as great as some would like to think.

(b) *The One Who Leads Astray*. Compare this with Romans 9:17, 18, and God's treatment of Pharaoh.

(c) *The Avenger*. Compare 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord'.

(d) *The Abaser*. In the first chapter of Luke, Mary in her hymn of praise says, 'He hath put down the mighty from their seats' (v. 52), and 'the rich He hath sent empty away' (v. 53). And in Romans 1, St Paul says that God gave certain people up to uncleanness and gave them over to a reprobate mind.

(e) *The One Who Harms*. Isaiah 45:7, 'I make peace, and create evil'; Amos 3:6, 'Shall there be evil in the city, and the LORD hath not done it?' See also Jeremiah 6:19 and 11:11.

19. As you will discover, if you compare attribute with attribute, you will find it difficult to distinguish between Allah and God. If, however, on that basis you maintain that the Muslim and Christian conception of the Divine Being is practically identical, you could not be further from the truth!

Just take one look at the presuppositions. Muhammed uses certain words about Allah in the Quran, but since Allah is totally different from man, these words as applied to Allah cannot have the same meaning as when they have been applied to man. In other words, when you have finished your comparison of attributes you have accomplished just nothing.



20. Muhammed himself used three names of God very frequently, namely, Allah, Rabb, and Rahman. Allah is essence, origin, that which is in itself. It is not included in the ninety-nine names, because all of these are part of this one name. In this respect, this name has some resemblance to what the Christian means when he speaks of the 'Father' in the Holy Trinity. Let there be no doubt about it. Muhammed's driving passion in life was to get this idea of Allah across as the essence, the origin, the all in all; thus people would believe in Allah and worship him and him alone. Pre-Islamic Arabia knew for the most part only some form of henotheistic idolatry. But Muhammed thinks of Allah as being unknown in essence. He calls discussion about the nature of God, blasphemy. For him, as for St Paul, God lives in a light unapproachable.

21. The name *Rabb* is used more than 30 times in the earlier Surahs. It has practically the same meaning as LORD in the Old Testament and *Kyrios* in the New Testament. Since Allah is the origin and Creator of all, he is naturally the Lord and master of all: the one who rules supreme. When Muhammed wants to get his faith in Allah across as 'the all in all', it is not only theoretically—in a passive way, to satisfy the intellect—but also practically. Allah is Rabb here and now; and on the day of judgment he is the great, unrivalled ruler or master.

This very present supreme ruler developed two qualities in Muhammed. First and foremost; fear. I see no reason for supposing that this fear ever left Muhammed. Fear was a natural and rational reaction. Any conception of God that does not instil fear in the hearts of its followers is not worthy of the name.

But the other thing this Allah–Rabb conception of God led to was legalism. Allah is the Ruler, the Master, the Owner. The owner's word is law. And the owner is always right. There is no higher court of appeal. Therefore the most important thing in life is to do just what Rabb says. And what he says is right, not because it is right in itself, but because he says it is right. Because he says it is right, it becomes right in itself.

22. The name *Rahman* indicates the quality of mercy. So does *Rahim*, in perhaps just a slightly different way. The Muslim is constantly talking and thinking of Allah as ar-Rahman-ir-Rahim. His idea of God's mercy is, however, more or less the same as that found in Exodus 20:5, 'visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.'

23. What are we to say about God, as Allah—Rabb, and ar-Rahman-ir-Rahim? Probably only this, that Judaism and Christianity between them have supplied most of the details in the picture!

24. One thing which puzzled and worried me when years ago I started studying this subject was that, although it is hard to find very many violent clashes between Christian and Islamic theological and philosophical thinking about the concept God, yet the types of religious experience which have developed in the two empirical forms of religion are at complete variance with each other. How can that be possible? Obviously the answer to this enigma does not lie only in theological and philosophical thinking about the concept. There must be something else about God, which has evaded us.

25. Let us go back to the start. Taking all things into consideration, there must be a radical difference between Allah and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The question is, how are we to arrive at the source or origin of that difference?

26. Let us take natural theology as our starting point. When I say natural theology, I mean a theology which is purely a natural product of man's thinking, a theology which borders on philosophy. Generally speaking there are two categories of natural theology: anthropocentric and theocentric, meaning that one has man as its centre, the other has God as its centre. Hinduism, in which all truth is relative, is typically anthropocentric. Islam, on the other hand, is a natural and rational theocentric religion.

27. Now—St Paul, St Augustine, Luther and Calvin were all theocentric in their theology. Augustine, Luther and Calvin could accept Romans 9 seriously without blinking. So could Muhammed. And he would feel himself justified in going on to the rational conclusion that God is the author of sin and that submission to God is in reality fate ('Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?', Rom. 9:20). Why is it, then, that St Paul himself, as well as the others, and the Christian Church as a whole, never accepted and never can accept that logical conclusion?

28. Augustine, Luther and Calvin would, however, be the first ones to protest against the Muslim doctrine of God as the author of sin, against legalism and against fatalism. Why? Luther gives his answers in his usual dramatic way. He says he will have nothing to do with 'a naked God', but only with God, as He is 'clothed in Christ'. In other words, all the theological thinking of these great men (as well as that of all other Christian thinkers, of course) was constantly being confronted with Christ. Like the angel with the flaming sword in the garden of Eden, Christ stands there

and blocks the way, so that our every thought about God breaks up before we can carry it to its rational conclusion. For example, while the Christian agrees that God is all in all, the Creator, the Doer, yet no Christian dares carry that thought through to its logical conclusion, which would be that God is also the creator of sin. The conclusion is logical and natural for the Muslim, because his thinking is not confronted with Christ.

We would rather say that the origin of sin is a metaphysical problem for which we have no answer, excepting the negative one that it cannot be God.

29. Actually Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan, founder of Aligarh University, has—unwittingly perhaps—given us the touchstone. He said words to this effect: A Prophet is a man who has a deeper insight into nature than men ordinarily have. All that Muhammed had to say about God was such that man's intellect could and would comprehend it if he had that deeper insight into nature. All natural theology is such that it makes sense: a plurality of gods makes sense, if you work it out as Hindus have done; one god makes sense, if you work it out as Islam has done. Both these systems, as well as systematic Christian theology, break down when confronted with Christ. I do not care where you start in theology nor what your theology is—Christian, semi-Christian, non-Christian or anti-Christian—every line of thought will break down before it reaches its natural and rational conclusion if it is confronted with Christ.

30. Here is a point where I think Western theology often is very weak. After admitting that every theology should be made captive to Christ, its tendency is to fall into the temptation of avoiding a genuine confrontation with Christ. The tendency is to work with the concept God, philosophically, as though it really were within the sphere of our competence to do that. The result is often an unbroken, dazzling exhibition of man's ability to think logically and rationally, that is, to think about the 'naked God', whom Luther said did not exist, except in the minds of man.

31. Now the really remarkable thing is this: that all theocentric religion is based more or less on its conception of the otherness of God, and yet, in the final analysis, this otherness of God is relative, for man has arrived at this conception of otherness through his own thinking. It is not an absolute otherness. Let me illustrate from one of the most obvious qualities. God is almighty, they say. By a thought process the concept Power is projected into the illimitable. Mightiness becomes almightiness. Although no man can really conceive of 'almightiness', yet he can think mightiness and project it until it becomes almightiness. In other words, the thought is

not broken, it just loses itself at a certain stage on its way out into infinity. This almightiness is therefore relative, the concept of man's mind.

32. In Christ, on the other hand, men's thoughts are dashed against the rock of absolute otherness, and broken. And that is because God's otherness, as expressed inside the realm of man's thinking, is revealed in its opposite. Wisdom is revealed in foolishness, almightiness in infirmity, love in wrath, care in the capriciousness of natural law, holiness in 'becoming sin', transcendence in immanence, and so on. It can be said in another way. Allah is not involved, not committed. Man's philosophical thinking is therefore capable of clothing him with a relative otherness. The Christian God 'clothed in Christ' is definitely involved and committed. Human thinking can therefore not conceive of Him as real godhead. If He is to be accepted as God, it is because He is known as revealing Himself by means of His opposite, but then His otherness becomes so absolute that it thwarts all man's thinking. No finite thought can be projected into the infinite and be used as a predicate to God.

33. Let me try to show you how this basic thought applies to the whole picture of Allah in Islam and of God in Christianity. The Muslim thought is: Allah has nothing at stake. Philosophically speaking, if God is GOD, then the thought that he has something at stake would be blasphemous. Allah created all people good, and gave them all fair treatment. Each people received a prophet, and in many cases also a book of guidance. If they accept and believe, he is merciful and quick to forgive; if not, they were destined to hell beforehand. This has to be true, otherwise Allah would fail in the purpose of creation, and failure cannot be predicated to a god. Those who go to hell have proved themselves worthy of that destination. Therefore Allah is vindicated. All must admit, even those in hell, that he has done all things well. No God worthy of the name can plan, desire, love or redeem. All of these are sure signs of finiteness, imperfection and lack of absolute power.

34. The God of Christianity, known only as He is 'clothed in Christ', has something at stake, that is, mankind, His creation. He does not desire the death of a sinner. He literally (in Christ) throws Himself into the struggle to rescue man. He had a plan of salvation even before the foundations of the world were laid, in His own eternal counsels. Through Christ He pleads with men to be reconciled. He becomes Immanuel, takes form in Christ so that He can carry on the struggle here in our flesh and in our human nature. He is not, and never could be, the origin of sin, for as Redeemer He rescues His creation from sin and eternal death. He suffered

and (in Christ) He died and was buried, and arose again on the third day.

35. Anyone with just ordinary philosophical common sense can see that absolute otherness must be predicated of the Christian God, if Christianity is to make sense at all. But then all our high philosophical thoughts about God are dashed to the ground. Here we can say nothing, here the deepest insight of man is like a child looking into a well and seeing a blurred image of its own face.

36. So in conclusion let us ungrudgingly admit that Muhammed was a genuinely religious personality, with deep insight. Let us admit that he saw a glimpse of the majesty, the greatness, the power, the unity of God. He did without a doubt think and say many appropriate and beautiful things about God.

37. The whole emphasis of our proclamation is that, unless a man is confronted with Christ, and his thoughts broken, he can never know God. Relatively, in his thinking, man may emphasise a relative otherness of God, but is an utter stranger to the absolute otherness of God, for it is known only through its opposite, as revealed in Christ.

This, then, is the radical difference between Muhammed's Allah and the Christian God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the author's view that a Christian cannot be objective about Islam, or a Muslim about Christianity? Give your reasons.
2. Enumerate several outstanding differences between the Muslim concept of Allah, and the Christian doctrine of God.
3. Are Allah and God synonymous terms? Comment.

## CHAPTER 28

# Muhammed's Conception of Preaching in Relation to Yours

1. We have already worked with some of the ideas connected with preaching in chapters 5, 6 and 9. If you will re-read them it will help you to form a picture of the whole subject in your mind. In this chapter we are definitely not interested in the homilies or orations which Muhammed used to deliver to believers in the mosque after prayers, nor in your preachments in the Church to Christians. I do not say these have no importance—they have—but we have to limit ourselves to something definite. Muhammed's proclamation of truth to non-believers, and your proclamation of truth to non-Christians—are these basically and conceptually the same thing? That is the question.

2. The world is full of preaching. You preach, the Muslim, the atheist, the politician, the Communist, the moraliser—in fact everybody preaches. And yet—in the final analysis—no-one really believes in preaching. This statement may sound contradictory, but if actions speak louder than words, I hope before we have finished this chapter to show you that my statement is true.

3. First, let me ask you this question: Just what is preaching? How do you define preaching? I am not now thinking of what the dictionary may tell you, but of the psychology behind preaching. The definition which probably would cover the greatest part of preaching, whether it be by Christian ministers, Muslim maulvies, politicians, Communists, or atheists, is this: Preaching is the impact of one personality on others through the medium of oratory, by means of which the preacher tries to influence others to believe something or to act in some specific way, or both.

4. Will you stop here just for a moment and decide whether or not you accept this definition as far as your own preaching is concerned? If you

do, then I urge you to pay serious attention to this chapter. You have evidently forgotten, or else you do not know, that at this point as everywhere else, Christianity has a paradoxical duplexity of nature that makes it unique.

5. It is not our job to try to analyse the efforts of the swarms of preachers who are loose all over the earth in our day. We must stick to Islam and Christianity. You will probably see for yourself how all the others fit in.

6. Here is the problem: I hope not oversimplified. A person gets an idea, a thought, which he is persuaded is truth. He may even believe it is revelational truth. Truth constrains him to communicate the idea to others, so that they also may accept and confess this truth and join him in living and acting in accordance with it. Now—how is he going to go about communicating the truth to others in order to succeed in getting adherents? That is the question to which every religion, every philosophy, and every ideology has to find an answer.

7. Of course the first and the most fundamental answer is that the impact of a personality generating white heat invariably communicates its purpose to others by means of oratory (preaching). How often do we hear it said that, unless the preacher himself is on fire, he cannot hope to win others! And that is precisely the difficulty. If the 'cause'—whatever it is—is to succeed, it depends on the constant generation of white heat in magnetic personalities, which is difficult to sustain. And that is where preaching fails in the long run. For while a man may make a thousand disciples, it does not follow that he necessarily succeeds in making such disciples as are capable of carrying on the cause. There is no cause on earth which has succeeded in making enough devotees, generation after generation, who are capable of generating the fire necessary to communicate to others, by means of the impact of oratory, the basic idea of the cause.

8. Naturally, the first step towards degeneration is the use of force. The sword is of course the surest and quickest means, but by no means the only one. Boycott, ostracism, political pressure, and fear are all weapons of force. It is astounding to note how, throughout history, a cause has grown strong through preaching, and how the very strength it has derived from preaching is quickly used in the application of force in one way or another.

9. Wherever humanitarianism has worked its way to the foreground the use of force has been frowned on and discredited. Then service is substituted for force. The argument is, of course, that while pure force may make people bow their necks it can never make them bow their hearts. Selfless service, as it is so beautifully called, will, on the other hand,

endear the person who serves to the people whom he serves, and thus open their eyes to the truth of the cause that constrains him to serve. That is just as true of politics as it is of ideological wars and of religious propaganda. Service has also a tremendous advantage over both the persuasion of preaching and the use of force, as it is much less demanding of the person serving. It is easier to serve and be popular simultaneously than it is to burn at white heat or to suffer under the use of force. For all suffer when force is used, both the people who are being forced, and the ones forcing them.

10. Service, however, very quickly degenerates into enticement. The service is offered as an enticement to vote for this or that party, or to get nations to join a block of 'free' states, or to accept the Communistic way of life, or to make a change of religion.

11. I am sure that anyone who knows Church history will see that the Church has gone through all these changes in many places and at many times. It also happens that in the larger Church groups all of these stages are present, each in its own environment.

12. Everyone knows how rapidly the Roman Church developed the doctrine of the two swords, the spiritual and the temporal. The Roman Church has worked itself into the position where it justifies itself theologically for making use of the temporal sword, while it quite simply ignores preaching in the sense of proclamation. The Roman priest has vowed that, so far as is humanly possible, he will celebrate the Holy Communion every day, but his commissioning does not include the pledge to preach. He is not ordained as a *keryx*, a herald, but only as a priest, who is responsible to teach catechumens, to give moral admonition, and to administer the Sacraments.

13. This lack in the Roman Church is very obvious on the mission field. Through its numerous institutions it practices what appears to the people to be an innocuous infiltration.

In many of these institutions the employees have been told that it is forbidden them even to try to preach. Their job is mute service. In the schools they gladly agree to refrain from teaching or preaching religion to the children of non-Christian parents. On the other hand they show surprising alacrity and aggressiveness whenever they are able to induce Protestant converts to accept 'full salvation' at their hands. Furthermore the term 'rice Christians' was first coined at a time when famine was killing off people by the thousands, and the Roman Catholics made Christians by daily supplying them with a bowl of rice. Force, service and enticement are



regular methods used by the Roman Church, but proclamation, heralding, preaching just does not fit into their theological system. All they can do is to ignore it. (During the 1970s there has been a shift in some areas from this position. Ed.)

14. The Churches of the Reformation put great emphasis on the Word and the Sacraments, although it must be admitted that before long the Word was given pre-eminence and the Sacraments were tied on like a trailer. When pietism broke out in the Corpus of Protestant Churches it was, naturally enough, soon followed by rationalism, enlightenment, and liberalism. The irony of the situation is that while pietism would now like to destroy its great-grandchild, liberalism, in actual fact pietism sits at the feet of liberalism and learns of it. This is not remarkable since they both are of one blood. Liberalism defines preaching as: The action of the stronger on the weaker; or else as: Self-impartation for the benefit of the community. Now if the liberals would take preaching to mean speaking, oratory, then those definitions would be fairly close to the one I have given. This, however, they do not do for:

*Verbum* is more than *oratio* (that is, word is more than just speaking). *Verbum*, the word of revelation, may be in everything in which spirit expresses itself, even in the work of Society and Law. And therefore the Church must be able to speak in all these forms. All of them are symbols of the word of revelation.

You may change that wording a little and say it this way: 'Christ is for the whole man in every phase of his environment, and therefore the Church must serve him in every phase of his environment'—and you have the pietists' and fundamentalists' way of saying exactly and precisely the same thing as the liberals, when they insist that 'the Church must be able to speak in all these forms'.

15. What it amounts to is this: To identify preaching with service by means of theological subtleties, and then slowly to eliminate preaching altogether. A couple of decades ago, when the liberals started 'Rethinking Christian Missions', they came to the natural and expected conclusion that it was high time to stop preaching, and that missionaries should, instead of that, serve and share religious experiences. And the pietists and fundamentalists naturally enough objected vehemently with this. 'No', they said, 'Preach we must, but it is not only with words we must preach. Let the good life in selfless service speak the language of the heart, the language all understand. When we preach also by means of service, we give to

others the essence of Christianity in that we are showing them the love of God.’

Tacitly, all three groups draw the same conclusion, which is that preaching, in the New Testament sense of that word, is foolishness.

16. Let us now look at Islam. The Maulvis usually call their prophet *Paighambar*, one who brings a *paigham*, that is, news or information; *Rasul*, a messenger, and *Nabi*, one who foretells. The idea behind all three of these words is that of Hebrews 1:1, that at sundry times and in divers places in times past, God has spoken by the mouth of His prophets. Now, however, for the Muslim, all this is gathered up, not in His Son, but in the final universal prophet, namely Muhammed. Whatever his adherents may make of these three words, there is not the shadow of a doubt that Muhammed thought of himself primarily as a Warner. The 74th chapter of the Quran is almost universally accepted as the real beginning of his revelations (if you ignore 96:1–5, which are supposed to have come six months previously). Muhammed here begins in this fashion:

Oh you who are clothed, arise and warn  
and magnify your Lord.

17. Muhammed’s warning usually referred to three things: the Day of Judgment; the Unity of Allah; and the need of repentance. The whole Quran testifies to the fact that the long line of prophets, no matter whether you call them *paighambar*, *rasul*, or *nabi*, were sent as Warners, they heralded and proclaimed a warning. Almost without exception the references Muhammed made to historical or pseudo-historical events were intended as illustrations of what happens to people who do not heed the warning brought by prophets. A tradition from Jabir says of Muhammed himself that when he preached, ‘his eyes used to be red, and his voice high, and his anger raged so that you would say he was warning a tribe of the approach of a hostile army and frightening them with the apprehension of its arrival thus: It is at hand! In the evening or morning it will come down upon you and plunder you. And the prophet would say: I have been sent . . .’

A better picture of a great personality burning at white heat, communicating his ‘truth’ to others by means of oratory, could hardly be penned. Here is the ‘stronger acting on the weaker’, here is ‘self-impertation for the welfare of the community’.

18. But what happened? In an incredibly short time Muhammed became strong enough to pull the sword out of the sheath. I am not thinking of the few actual battles he fought; they have no relevance here. No, I am

thinking for example of his treatment of the Jews; of his capture of Mecca; of the fact that a great number of the Arab tribes were won, not by his preaching, but in other ways. I am thinking of the time when he died. Abu Bekr, following in his footsteps and precepts, had to swing the sword mightily to prevent a complete disintegration. If those tribes had been won by the persuasion of preaching, the death of Muhammed would not have been for them a signal to revolt. And later when the great Caliph Omar, the most fanatic disciple of Muhammed, went forth with the Arab hordes to conquer, he did so in the name of Allah.

19. It is all very well for Arnold and others to write about the 'Preaching of Islam', but the fact still remains that Omar was dedicated to the idea that the theocratic state of Islam must conquer the whole world, for therein lay the glory of Allah. And that thought is not far from the minds of not a few sincere Muslims even today. Suppose we readily agree that, according to the international ethics of the time, the Arab tribes, welded together into a nation, subjugated other nations and took over their governments by right of conquest. That does not alter the fact that the purpose of the conquerors was to make Islam supreme in all the world. Omar differentiated meticulously between Christians and the heathen. There was room for the Christians in the realm of Islam, although it was a narrow, humiliating place, always subject to the capriciousness of the local authorities. For the heathen, however, there was no room. When a country had capitulated, swarms of teachers, preachers and catechists were sent out to convert the people or else!

20. I am perfectly aware of the fact that in our day many modern Muslims would hotly contest what I have said here, and try to prove that Islam was spread through peaceful penetration; that Islam is a democratic religion which does not condone aggressiveness, and that the sword was used for political purposes and never for compulsion in religion. That is the kind of propaganda that is pouring out from the English press into the English-speaking world. It would be absolutely out of order to contend that the Islam of these modernists is not Islam. But one does have the right to point out that the majority of their Muslim brethren, among whom there are many learned theologians, do not agree, neither in their interpretation of the Quran, nor in their understanding of Islamic history. More often than not, Muslims with whom I have talked maintain that the Muslim is not obliged to propagate his religion, unless the state is capable of backing it up. This idea is really only another version of the doctrine of the two swords, as held by the Roman Church. Even in our day, Pakistan, Egypt

and Saudi Arabia agreed at one time to combine forces in order to convert all of Africa to Islam. Pakistan was to supply the teachers, Saudi Arabia the money, and Egypt was to watch over the political developments. They blandly told the Western powers that this effort of theirs to eradicate all heathenism from Africa and replace it with faith in the unity of God should please them!

21. Actually the only organised effort to preach Islam is being made by the Sufi brotherhoods, and by a few rationalistic sects.

22. Humanitarianism has so far not developed sufficiently in Muslim lands to make Muslims think of service as a substitute for preaching or for force. On the other hand, there are many fervent individual Muslims who offer enticement of one kind or another to win converts.

23. If you will study Communism and modern Buddhism, you will see how readily they also fit into this picture.

Every 'cause' in the world has the selfsame trouble with preaching. No one can believe in it as the method which in the long run is the best, the most efficient, or the only permissible one.

24. Why? Simply because preaching is looked upon as having its origin and its goal in man, and that is perfectly true outside Christianity. The tragedy is that when this idea gets inside Christianity it quickly degenerates into camouflaged propaganda, vapid moralising, sheer hypocrisy, or a bid to gain popularity, power or riches. Language, as such, the use of words, then goes off the gold standard, so to speak, and is devalued. There was a time when a man paid the price for what he said, and he weighed his words. Now we have freedom of speech, the word is 'free'—indeed so free that many give it up entirely as not worth thinking about, as it has lost its value and power. 'We refuse to join our voices in the torrent of words already pouring forth over humanity', they say, 'We prefer to do something useful, and to let our actions speak for us'.

25. Very well—and yet: Isn't there another possibility? Undoubtedly, on the human level, all preaching looks alike—yours and Muhammed's as well as that of the Communist or the Buddhist. But remember, everything in Christianity has a duplex nature, which is paradoxical. I brought this point out clearly in chapter 25 about the Eternal Sonship of Christ and therefore I only want to remind you of it here in regard to preaching.

26. This paradox is indicated in a rather startling use of language among Christians. We speak one minute of Christ as the Word of God, the next minute we say the Bible is the Word of God; and ordinarily we also call preaching the Word of God. And yet the Word of God is always

in the singular; we never speak of three words of God. Theologians define that one Word of God as revealed, written, spoken.

27. Obviously this means that in the Church the divine Word and the human word are somehow united, so that the divine Word becomes human (without losing its divinity) and the human word becomes divine (without losing its humanity). This duplexity in the nature of the human word in Christian preaching is what differentiates it from all other preaching. For example the Quran is called the Word of God without qualifications. The Muslim, when speaking of the Quran as the Word of God, makes what he regards as a simple statement of fact. For him the Quran is the Word of God and everything else is human speech or writing. Just how the language of Arabia can be equated with the Word of God, without some kind of duplexity being involved, is not easy to understand. The Muslims even maintain that Arabic must be the language of heaven, since the Quran is written on the 'preserved tablets' in heaven in that language. Yet they stoutly contend that not one syllable of the Quran is human. Superficially that solution looks easy and simple; actually it does not make sense at all. But the Muslims' conception of the nature of preaching is certainly determined by their conception of the nature of the Quran. Preaching cannot be other than 'the action of the stronger on the weaker', a purely natural activity.

28. When we speak of Christian preaching we tie past, present and future all into one, so that Christ who came in the spoken Word, comes in the written Word and will come in the spoken Word. Christian preaching, as an act of obedience, means that we believe that that which once occurred still occurs and will occur. The Christian preacher who knows what he is about believes in the possibility of that occurrence, of that event.

29. We are obliged to say 'the possibility of', for we know of no inherent necessity in God because of which the event always must accompany the preaching. God in His absolute and free sovereignty, through the working of the Holy Spirit, creates the event in relation to preaching when and where it pleases Him. But Christian preaching presupposes belief in the possibility, the possibility of Christ, who came as the Revealed Word. When and where that happens, you have an EVENT, namely present revelation.

30. The possibility of this act, this present revelation, does not exist in itself, nor does it exist because of the burning constraint of the preacher, nor because of the action of the stronger on the weaker, nor because of the self-impartment of a man for the welfare of the community, nor because of

the impact of a magnetic personality at white heat. The possibility of this event exists ONLY when the preaching, the spoken Word, is a true proclamation of the written Word which attests the Revealed Word.

Put in another way, Christian preaching is an act of obedience, creating the possibility of the revealed Word being revealed anew, now, in the present. Therefore Christian preaching rests solely on the belief that there is a possibility of the divine Word uniting with the human word, thereby causing an event in which that which is true becomes true. For example, when the divine Word unites with the human word spoken to a Muslim, that becomes the event in his life whereby the Word which was in the beginning, and which was God, becomes—in the event—revelation for him, although it always was and always will be truth in itself, and therefore always truth for him whether he believes it or not!

31. When you in this manner lift preaching out of the psychological sphere and place it squarely in the theological, you discover the necessity of preaching. No impact of personality, no use of force, no human service, no enticement can create the possibility of an event in which revelation becomes present, simply because that possibility is created only when the spoken Word is correctly related to the written Word attesting the revealed Word. That present revelation is revelation only because it is past revelation that is being revealed.

32. Then we also understand that preaching can never be superseded by any other method, no matter how cheap words are, no matter how badly they have been devalued and misused.

33. The Christian preacher may be likened unto the Virgin Mary. The revealed Word was made possible through her: through him, the preacher, the revealing of the revealed Word is made possible. In that event, the revealed Word, the written Word and the spoken Word all become one and the same—the Word of God—the first in itself; the second and the third in their becoming, that is, in the union of the divine with the human in the EVENT.

34. One can then say that, in spite of all, Christian preaching is the essential service of the Church. What greater service could the Church give to man than ‘creating the possibility for the event’, in which God reveals Himself to man and speaks to him? This theological aspect of Christian preaching, that makes it unique in a world full of preaching, has all too often been forgotten by the Church when men, overzealous in their ‘attempt to do great things for God’, have forgotten that God wants faith and obedience, not spectacular attempts at heroics.

35. I hope you have now seen what the difference is—or should be—between Muhammed's conception of preaching and yours. While Muhammed, in relation to his entire system of religion, had to accept preaching on its psychological basis as the effort of one man trying to influence others, you, on the other hand, base your conception of preaching on a theological basis where the value of preaching rests in the purpose and will of God to reveal Himself in the present as He has in the past.

### QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the author that no one really believes in Preaching? Why?
2. What is the essential difference between Muhammed's Preaching and yours?
3. What is your conception of the divine and human, in relation to the Word of God?

## CHAPTER 29

# Muhammed's Conception of His Book in Relation to Yours

1. In a bygone age Western orientalists and students of Islam usually worked on the presumption that Muhammed was a fraud and his Quran was a fake. It is by no means difficult to find in the Quran contradictions, historical inaccuracies and passages of a very trivial or banal nature. One can therefore easily understand why they worked on that presumption. The reason why scholars in those days so unreservedly rejected both the man and his book was that they were working on the basis of a localised, restricted background.

2. Nowadays those who specialise in this field of study have a new conception of psychology, as well as a comparatively new fund of information about other religions. The tendency now is to conceive of Muhammed as a sincere and honest person, who sought to reach his own people (and later the world at large) with what he believed to be a divine message.

3. There are in this connection three dangers that we as the Church militant have to keep in mind, especially in our day and generation. The first is this: The objectives of orientalists as scientists and the objectives of the Church militant are not, and cannot, be identical. The orientalists may succeed in digging up a great variety of knowledge about the older as well as the very ancient religions. In them they find thoughts and ideas that correspond closely to some of Muhammed's utterances and actions. Thereby they wish to prove, or at least indicate, a likeness in the psychological pattern or, in some cases, the influence of the one on the other.

4. When they take Muhammed's sincerity for granted and then run up against a contradiction as, for example, his teaching on the one hand that the Quran is the eternal word of God, written on the Preserved Tablets,



and on the other that verses can be abrogated or changed, and can even have been forgotten by Muhammed himself, they search in his background for a justification for such an obvious contradiction. Or when they stop at such a trivial thing as an utterance about the correct conduct of Muhammed's wives, they try to find something elsewhere which indicates a plausible reason for Muhammed genuinely believing that a revelation from God on such a subject need not be considered banal or untrue.

5. While any one of their suggested solutions may be correct, nevertheless its correctness proves nothing as far as the Church is concerned. Either the Quran is or is not from God. If it is from God it really makes very little difference whether Muhammed was influenced by this or that idea which was current in his day; nor does his psychological type make any real difference. And if his book is not from God, well—that is the end of it, as far as the religious aspect of the matter goes.

6. It is good always to remember that the true scientist's methodology is such that he neither can nor will try, as a scientist, to answer the ultimate questions of the Church.

7. The second danger is that we are apt to take plausible suggestions from scientists as the last word in solving the many intricate problems which arise out of a serious study of the subject. The plain fact is that we can only really know what Muhammed's conception of the Quran was from the book itself. And it tells us precious little, because there is no chronological order in these utterances, which would enable us to understand the situations and environments. Rodwell's chronological Quran may be of some help, but also it is based for a large part on suppositions, many of which are not universally accepted. In this connection there is one other great question mark, and that is Muhammed's knowledge of Christianity. Just how much did he really know? This question will come later in the chapter, but there seems to be no doubt that Muhammed knew that some of the things he said about the universal religion of Islam (which included Christianity) simply did not fit the facts as far as Christianity was concerned. Therefore, while arguing about how much he knew, we have to keep our minds open to the probability that Muhammed, like so many other religious people, could, on occasion, close his eyes to facts which did not fit into his scheme of things. Enthusiasm for religion often makes people do things they never would do when unaffected by it.

8. The third danger is that of separating parts from the whole. Without doubt there are parts of the Quran which a Christian could gladly accept and enjoy reading—if they were not parts of a whole. To see these parts

honestly and judiciously is to see them as integral parts of the Quran. As such they are flatly rejected by the Church, however beautiful and true they may seem out of that context. Some modern authors love to take bits of the Quran and dilate on the crystal clear and beautiful truth contained in them and then to go on from there to show how Christianity really puts vitality etc., into them. Such a procedure is a tacit acceptance of the parts concerned as revelation and, by implication (since they are parts of a whole and must be understood as such), acceptance of the Quran.

9. A person might easily reject portions of the New Testament and accept others, for the New Testament itself makes no claim regarding canonicity. But the Quran craves unqualified acceptance of it just as it is. Ever since the 4th century AH<sup>1</sup> no Muslim has dared to express any doubt about the text of his holy book. You either take it or leave it; you cannot pluck it apart. The scientist remains neutral on this point, for his approach is not the approach of faith or unbelief. But a missionary does approach it precisely on the basis of acceptance or rejection. He must therefore accept the conditions which the book itself lays down.

10. In short, when approaching the question of the Quran, we have to do it, not as scientists, but as the Church militant. We have to work on actual facts, few as they may be, and we have to take the Quran as a whole and not piecemeal.

11. What was Muhammed's conception of his book? The first and most important answer is that he thought of:

## **THE QURAN AS REVELATION<sup>2</sup>**

You have already heard that statement a thousand times. Have you ever thought of what it implies? Did St Paul think of his writings as revelation? Or St Luke? Or Daniel? The Old Testament prophets felt that they were sent by God on special occasions to deliver certain messages. But did they write books which they claimed were sent down from heaven as revelation?

12. The usual procedure in religious communities has been that a man wrote one thing or another because he felt there was a need for his

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<sup>1</sup> AH—in the year of the Hegira; of the Muslim era.

<sup>2</sup> Sura 97: the night of revelation; 77: revealed by degrees; 26: revealed in Arabic; 43: revealed by a spirit; 10: revealed to mere man; 53:4: verily the Quran is none other than a revelation.

comments or instruction at that time or in that place. Later—sometimes centuries later—the community gives such writings canonicity because it sees a truth—an eternal truth—in this writing that is greater than any time or any place. St Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians because there was a certain number of Christians, at a certain time and in a certain place, who needed help. What he had to say proved to be so essential and so clearly in keeping with genuine Christianity that the letter was circulated to other Churches, and ended up by being included as one of the documents in the Christian Scriptures. The community of believers sees something which gives form and expression to its faith in a way that is universally applicable, quite apart from the particular situation which was in the mind of the author.

13. This procedure is found not only in Christianity, but also in Judaism and other ancient religions. Here and there, both in ancient and modern times, a man of Muhammed's kind has arisen, who has presented his own sayings as being the very words of God, but they are few and far between. In effect Muhammed says: 'These utterances of mine are not mine. I am only God's mouthpiece, his agent. You must accept my words as being eternal in the heavens, as attributes of God. But they are in plain, understandable language and they are meant for you. Those who reject them are in danger of hellfire; those who receive them will enjoy the beauties of Paradise everlastingly.'

14. Do you see where this leaves us? Before we (as the Church) ever open the Quran, we have to take our stand and say that it cannot be revelation, simply because God does not reveal Himself in books. The idea that God reveals Himself in books is a heathen idea. It can be found in heathen religions as far back as 2,500 years BC, it can be found in Jewish tradition about the Torah, but not in the Torah itself, and it is, as you see, the basis on which Islam is built.

15. Muhammed may have thought that both Jews and Christians had this conception of books in relation to revelation, because the Jews do have a tradition to the effect that the Torah was pre-existent in heaven, and the Christians do talk inaccurately about the Bible as revelation, when they really mean that it is the inspired record and explanation of revelation.

Years ago a young Muslim who had never seen the New Testament before took one home to read. Later he jeeringly said: 'There is nothing divine about this book. It only tells us what a certain number of men have to say about Jesus and his teaching. I want the genuine *Injil*, the one that came down from heaven.' I told him that in the whole history of mankind

there never was a book that came down from heaven, and I referred him to the prologue to St John's Gospel, and to the first verses in Hebrews.

16. In short, regardless of what the contents of the Quran may be, you cannot accept Muhammed's contention that his book is revelation, simply because the Church teaches that God reveals Himself through the living Word, related to specific acts in history, and not through the medium of books. The books can only tell us of his Word and of the related specific divine acts in history.

17. Since Muhammed conceived of his book as revelation, he had to fight a battle on two fronts. Not only did he have to defend the contents of the book as being divine, but he was also forced to defend the idea of the book as being revelation. This twofold struggle is obvious throughout the Quran.

18. You would have to search long and hard to find anything in the Quran that an intelligent person, somewhat conversant with the religious ideas of Jews, Christians, Arabs and Manichaens, could not have written without any special inspiration or revelation. Nor does Muhammed ever take the position that his ideas are inconceivable unless divinely inspired. On the contrary, he says that his religion is simply that of Adam and Abraham, adapted to Arabian conditions. On the other hand he maintains that:

### **THE QURAN IS A STANDING MIRACLE**

*(Sura 4:94; 9:16; 46:7; and many others)*

19. Muhammed challenged the poets, the seers and the soothsayers to produce anything comparable to the Quran. Who could possibly use such pure Arabic, and produce such beautiful and perfect rhythm as that of the Quran? The book, as a literary production, is, he maintains, a miracle that proves or points to its divine source.

20. Maulvis tell us that every prophet had a specific sign, some miracle or power, that was a divine proof of his prophethood. This sign was always one that had special significance in the time of the prophet concerned. For example, the Egyptians revelled in magic, so when Moses stood in the court of Pharaoh he had to have a magic that was stronger than that of the Egyptian magicians, if he were to be accepted as a prophet. In the age in which Jesus lived, great stress was laid upon supernatural healing, so the sign that was given to Jesus was the power to perform bigger and better healings than any of His contemporaries. Muhammed lived

at a time when rhetoric and literature were the rage. Naturally therefore his literary production had to outshine anything anyone else could do.

21. For us it is quite immaterial whether the claim which he made can be substantiated or not. Muslims, at least modern Muslims, say yes; others (for example the Mu'tazalites) say no. The question we have to ask is this: Is it true that God in some outward, supernatural way, quite distinct from the message itself, coerces the intellect of the hearers so that they will be predisposed to accept the contents of the message, whatever it may be, as well as the messenger? Or is just the opposite true, namely that the message carries its own 'proof', and that the messenger is as often as not man-handled and even done to death?

22. Our Lord said that no sign will be given to unbelievers, except the sign of Jonah, which meant that in His case the messenger would be killed, buried and rise again. In the Beatitudes you find our Lord recognised the fact that messengers from God have a rough time of it.

In other words, any 'sign' of the kind Muhammed makes use of would in itself be a flat contradiction, both of the history of Israel and of the words of our Lord. We would have to say that a book whose authority has to be buttressed in this way cannot possibly be the revelation it claims to be.

23. There is still another problem to be raised about this miracle proof for the Quran. How can perfection or near-perfection in the human realm ever prove divinity? Let us suppose for a moment that the Quran is the most perfect piece of literature ever presented to mankind. In the final analysis it is still inside the human realm. Its perfection must be proved by comparing it with other human products. Its words, sentences and the flow of its rhythm are all human products, which may be compared with other human products. If it were true, that the Quran is the finest piece of literature in all the world, it could still only prove that Muhammed was a literary genius—nothing more.

24. By way of illustration let us think of our Lord. The Church has always held that the manhood of Jesus Christ was perfect. According to Muhammed's line of reasoning we could argue that this perfect manhood was the reason for our accepting our Lord as divine. Even a Muslim could see that such an argument would be fallacious.

So here again Muhammed's conception of his book clashes with ours. No miracle is needed, nor can it prove the genuineness of the divine character of revelation.

25. The most probable reason why Muhammed conceived of the book as miraculous was that he believed that:

### **THE QURAN IS VERBALLY INSPIRED**

Anything that comes directly from heaven must be perfect. As an attribute of God it had to be without fault or blemish. Muhammed was far from fighting for a pre-eminent position as a poet or a literary genius. He was struggling to make people acknowledge the genuineness of his prophethood. Actually he was saying that the fact of the literary perfection of the Quran proves that he could not be its author, but that he was the messenger, the prophet, to whom it was entrusted for communication to the Arabs.

26. Psychologically, any theory of verbal inspiration indicates insecurity. Man thereby wishes to guard himself against the vagaries of human nature. This is just as true of Muhammed as of those Christians who hold the same kind of doctrine. What the doctrine really says is that while these ‘revelations’ unquestionably have come to us through the agency of human nature, human nature nonetheless has had no more effect on them than a pipeline has on the water which runs through it.

27. Our Lord wrote no book, nor did he give his Apostles orders to write one. He created a living faith in them and then told them that later the Holy Spirit would guide them to the truth, when occasion arose. His orders were: Preach—evangelise the whole world. They had no book at all when they first began, except of course the Old Testament. But by means of preaching alone, Christian communities sprang up round about in different places.

28. It was a converted Jewish theologian who had never seen our Lord in the flesh who became the first Christian author, as far as we know. St Paul tackled both the theological and practical problems of these new communities, and wrote some letters to his friends and fellow believers, trying to help them in one way or another. There is no reason whatsoever to suppose that the original recipients of those letters accepted and read them as ‘Scripture’. The aliveness of Christianity was in the faith, created by Christ, common to the community, and not in any book. Therefore Christianity was and always will be so completely bound up with human nature that the kind of security or guarantee that the Quran would give is diametrically opposed to one basic fact of Christianity: namely, that we live by faith and not by sight. Put it this way: In Islam the life principle is in the Quran; in Christianity it is in the togetherness of the community with Christ as its head. The New Testament itself—humanly speaking—is one of the results of this togetherness of the community. It does not therefore perturb us overmuch if some plausible line of reasoning is brought

forward to show, for example, that St Paul did not write 2 Corinthians, or that several portions of the Gospels are spurious. But as soon as the Muslim authorities grasped the fact that various contradictory editions of the Quran were being stabilised at various centers they ordered a *textus receptus* to be made, and from there on it was as much as a man's life was worth to ignore this compiled text and refer back to one of the older ones. It would be dynamiting the very foundation on which Islam is built if a variety of texts were tolerated.

29. There is another, a secondary consideration. Verbal inspiration tends to ignore history. Muslims themselves are often puzzled to know why the revelations are not in order. Of the 114 suras, probably 92 were revealed in Mecca and the remaining 22 in Medina. Suras are often made up of revelations which 'came down' years apart. In many cases it is impossible to know for sure what set of circumstances was the occasion for a certain revelation. Looked at realistically the Quran is now a long string of passages more or less isolated from human events.

30. There is a great deal of difference of opinion as to how it happened that the Quran was collated in its present form. While it would undoubtedly be interesting to know the answer to that question, that interest can only be an academic one. The kernel for us is this: Neither Muhammed nor his immediate followers had any feeling for history; there was no need to tie up these passages with events. On the contrary, Muslims maintain that precisely because these revelations are independent of the events that were the immediate cause of their 'coming down' from heaven, they can be universally applicable.

31. Christianity on the other hand knows nothing of revelation that hangs in the air between heaven and earth. It says that the living Word was spoken into a concrete situation, and that all of God's acts relating to that Word are acts within the framework of history. Although this emphasis in the first centuries of Christianity was over against the mystery religions, nevertheless it is just as applicable over against the claims of Islam.

32. Muhammed believed, at least during one period of his career, that:

### **THE QURAN WAS IN THE SUCCESSION OF SCRIPTURES**

Noone can avoid the conclusion that at one time Muhammed only claimed that his Quran was a book like the one given to Moses, to David, to Jesus

and to many others. Muhammed's idea was that God gave Adam his religion. It was extremely simple. He was to worship and obey the One God, and avoid polytheism—idolatry; he was to remember that there was a life after death, and a Day of Judgment, and therefore he should be good and kind to all of God's creatures and pay every man his dues. But as mankind spread over the face of the earth, things went wrong, and God had to send Warners, some with, some without books. These Warners were sent to all nations in time of need, and although the revelation they brought was essentially the same as that given to Adam, nevertheless each was focussed on the specific errors of the people to whom it was sent, and it was in their mother tongue, so they had no excuse. But till the time of Muhammed the Arabs had not received either a Warner or a divine book. Now, however, he—Muhammed—had been called to be their Warner, and the book he brought was the Quran. At least half a dozen times he says the book is in Arabic, clear and understandable, and made easy for them. So they, just as other nations, are without excuse. The times of ignorance were past.

33. The origin of this conception of a succession of scriptures for all nations, each in its own language, is a real puzzle. Muhammed knew that there was an Abyssinian Church, a Syrian Church, a strong Church in South Arabia and two and a half tribes in North Arabia were Christians. Some of these Christians spoke one language, some another, and yet they had one book and one 'prophet'.

34. Let us suppose that it is true that Muhammed got this idea from the Manicheans, who taught that all religions fit together to make absolute truth, just as all the colours of the rainbow combine to make light. It would then be easy to think of the Quran as one of the many books which, combined with the rest, would make the true light of God for mankind.

35. That doctrine could work out well in theory, but in actual practice Muhammed was confronted by Judaism and Christianity. He wanted to include the books of these groups in this doctrine. How could he do that, when the actual facts known to him contradicted the theory?

36. In any case the whole idea of a succession of Scriptures is contrary to what the Church teaches. From the very beginning God chose, localised and channelised. And this process continued right down to the time of the Apostles of our Lord. From then on the Church was told to go into all the world. If you start with Adam and work on, you will find that Scriptures play a much smaller and certainly a much more recent part in God's plan than most people realise. What the Church has seen of God's plan is not



the bringing back of people to the religion of Adam through the medium of books, but the preparing of them for the coming of the Son of Man, through events of history.

In other words, here again, the Church cannot accept Muhammed's conception of his book.

37. A subtle change of thought is, however, evident when Muhammed says that:

### **THE QURAN IS A CONFIRMATION OF PREVIOUS SCRIPTURES**

Just what does he mean by such a statement? Obviously the relationship of his book to the other books in the succession is hereby changed. Before this, every country had its own Warner, and also probably a book. In reality, all the books brought the same message, although with varying emphasis. Now one of them, the Quran, sets itself up as being able to confirm what has gone before. Just how is this done? When Muhammed speaks in generalities he says 'books', 'nations'; but when he is specific he mentions only the Torah and the Injil. Is his Quran a confirmation of all the books including those which he never mentions by name? If so, how? Is it just the idea, the doctrine of 'sent-down books', that is being confirmed? If so, why should they be confirmed hundreds of years later? Or does confirming the previous Scriptures simply mean that Muhammed, in yet another way, is trying to say that his book is in the succession? Naturally it could not confirm the other unless it was related to them.

38. Muhammed does repeat a lot of folklore and traditional material which has its origin or inspiration in the Old Testament. He claims these stories were dictated to him by Allah. Is this the way in which his book confirms the others? Actually in most cases it contradicts them, at least in detail.

39. There is no possible way in which anyone, Muslim or Christian, could answer these questions which could reconcile the Church to the proposition itself, namely, the idea of one book confirming the other. Let us suppose for a moment that revelations are *nazil* (sent down) and bring the truth of God in book form, then they must all be equally *nazil*, and either all of them need confirmation or none needs it. But since no extraneous human device can confirm the truth of God, the inescapable conclusion must be that no book can confirm the others, and that they are not in any case in need of such confirmation.

40. If, on the other hand, you look at the matter from the point of view of the Church, which holds that books are only the inspired record and explanation of God's living Word and of His specific acts in history, then it is not within the competency of one book to confirm another.

41. Muhammed made the claim that:

### **THE QURAN IS THE FINAL, ABSOLUTE TRUTH**

How anyone can ever reconcile this point with the two previous ones is beyond me. Many attempts have been made. But when Muhammed made this claim he knowingly or unknowingly repudiated the whole doctrine of the succession of Scriptures, as well as that regarding the confirmation of previous Scriptures. His idea in calling the Quran the final truth evidently was (or so at least the Muslims say nowadays) that whatever there may have been of everlasting truth in previous books was gathered up and republished in the Quran. Only that which had to do with such local situations as no longer exist was dropped. Very well, but two questions at once suggest themselves: (i) Up until the time of Muhammed there evidently were nations and people who needed a Warner along certain lines. What has happened to mankind which would make us believe that such situations do not constantly recur? Are people then to rely only on guidance that was given to the Arabs 1,300 years ago?; and (ii) As mentioned earlier, the Quran repeatedly reminds the Arabs that it is in their mother tongue, and a clear, understandable guidance for them. How about the millions of people now inhabiting the earth whose mother tongue is not Arabic? How is the Quran to become a clear, understandable guide for them? Some say: Let them learn Arabic. One in a thousand may do so, but even for him it would not be his mother tongue, and therefore not a clear guide. Others say: Translate the Quran. But that is just what they will not do. As late as this year (1958) the Dean and Faculty of Al-Azhar decided to make translations of the 'meaning' of the Quran in several languages, but they tolerate no literal, verbal translation. That has of course been done by Europeans and by a few unorthodox Muslims, but not with the approbation of the Muslim community as such.

42. The irony of the situation is that what Muhammed repeatedly emphasised, namely a clear and understandable guidance in the mother tongue of the people being addressed, has become for the overwhelmingly great majority of Muslims an unintelligible, parrot-like repetition, the only

value of which lies in the reward to be obtained from this form of piety. And the tragedy of the situation is that educated Muslims are working day and night, trying to apply the guidance which was given to desert Arab tribes 1,300 years ago to their own specific economical, social, political and religious problems. That development is unavoidable when a book full of revelations given to a definite people goes through the metamorphosis of becoming the universal guide for all people everywhere and at all times until the end of the age.

43. However, let us not forget that we speak of our Lord in precisely the same terms as Muhammed spoke of his Quran. Christ is for us final, absolute truth—the Truth. There cannot be two final, absolute truths. And certainly they are not identical in the sense that that which may be said of the one may also be said of the other. Therefore a choice is necessary. Why choose Christ? Why not the Quran?

Simply because the Quran and its contents are presented to us in the same way that other general knowledge is presented. Let me illustrate. You buy a map which is intended as a guide for motorists. Having studied the map you know what roads to avoid and which to use in order to get quickly and conveniently to your destination. You trust the person who made the map, you use your intelligence, memory and will, and you get to your destination. The Quran purports to chart out the way to heaven on exactly the same assumption, that is, trust in the author, intelligent study, committing it to memory, and the will to use it are the essential things.

44. But absolute Truth (that is, truth that is not dependent on its relation to other truths in order to be truth) is completely outside the capabilities of finite man. Every truth we know and understand is a relative truth, that is, dependent on other truths. Man knows only one absolute, and that is death. No truth of mankind is final in itself except death. It is therefore an obvious contradiction of terms to present one and the same thing as a clear and understandable guide to heaven, and also as final, absolute truth.

45. On the other hand, the Church has always held that Christ, as the Word, the Revelation of God, the final, absolute Truth, is incognito. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the Holy Trinity, which makes recognition of it possible for man. And even then this recognition is not a mental activity by which spiritual illumination comes. On the contrary, it is a recognition of Christ as Lord and Master, and only thus, indirectly, as the whole person and personality is involved and committed, does man recognise Christ as absolute Truth—Truth which we do not and cannot comprehend. Put in other words, it is through discipleship that we

apprehend the fact that Christ is final, absolute Truth, and not because we have studied Him, comprehended Him, found Him, to be absolute Truth.

46. One might go on to point out that Muhammed indicated that the Quran should be used liturgically, that the very recitation of it could result in success on earth and reward in heaven, as well as in cleansing from sin, and that it could on certain occasions be used as an instrument of magic. But as these points are not necessarily relevant to our subject, and since they would have to be proved more on the basis of tradition than through the Quran itself, and since this chapter has limitations of time and space, they are not touched upon here. (A. Jeffery's monograph *The Quran as Scripture*, printed by Russell F. Moore & Company, New York, 1952, is a book well worth serious study.)

In conclusion let me say that, whether Muhammed was aware of it or not, the fact remains that his assumptions on every basic doctrine regarding Scripture were contrary to, and a contradiction of, the Truth as it is known in Christ and recorded in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, just as surely as we preach that there is no salvation except in Jesus Christ, are we constrained to maintain that there is no true knowledge of God except in Him. If we could only show the Muslim that the reason why we reject his Quran in toto is not prejudice, nor narrow-mindedness, but simply because our knowledge of God in Jesus Christ makes it utterly impossible for us to accept it.

## QUESTIONS

1. What does the Muslim believe about the Quran as Revelation?
2. How does the Muslim conception of Revelation differ from the Christian?
3. On what basis do we consider Christ the final, absolute Truth?

## CHAPTER 30

# Muhammed's Conception of Ethics in Relation to Yours

1. Please note that the subject of this chapter is Muhammed's conception of ethics, and not the ethical conduct of Muhammed. What you want is an idea of how Muhammed thought of right and wrong. The ethical conduct of Muhammed is none of our business, or at least not until we know how he thought of right and wrong. Even then it serves no useful purpose to sit in Judgment on his ethical conduct. If psychology is your fad or hobby, you will know that it is good policy to lavish praise wherever possible, and to tone down all adverse criticism. You thereby avoid antagonising the person you are trying to reach. The Church Militant, however, comes with the message of the Cross, which is the message of a stumbling block. Any psychological approach which aims at bypassing that stumbling block must in the nature of the case be a false approach. It is, therefore, not because of the psychological aspect of the matter that I say that it serves no useful purpose to talk about Muhammed's own ethical conduct. The reason is this: Every man's criterion of ethics is a thing extraneous to ethical conduct as such. If you ask him why this or that is wrong, he will almost invariably make use of a standard of judgment which is outside of and quite distinct from the thing itself. Ordinarily it is not the thing in itself that harms a man, but what he thinks of it. Let me illustrate. A European bigamist is ruining his character because he thinks he is doing something wrong; a Muslim bigamist speaks as freely and openly about his two wives as he would of his two daughters, because he thinks bigamy is a perfectly honourable condition or state.

2. I have made a point of this distinction between Muhammed's own ethical conduct and his conception of ethics because I am convinced that it is both unfair and harmful to indulge in tirades against Muhammed's ethical conduct. On the other hand I am sure that it is necessary for anyone

who wishes to preach the Gospel to Muslims to know how their prophet conceived of ethics. To know this is to understand what to us, with our conception of ethics, seems at times exceedingly strange.

3. The first point you want to keep clearly in mind is this: Muhammed conceived of Allah as being the direct source and reason for every judgment about right and wrong. Community morals, community dictates, community conscience were not decisive factors in Muhammed's conception of ethics. Actually it was not until the clan discovered his lack of loyalty to the practical aspects of tribal worship that persecution began in earnest. Undoubtedly the Meccans pestered this eccentric by putting thorns under his prayer mat and by making sport of him; but no one got terribly excited until they realised that he was dishonouring the 'fathers'.

4. It is also enlightening to remember that Muhammed's first converts had to swear loyalty to him above loyalty to the clan. Such an idea was revolutionary in the pre-Islamic set-up in Arabia. Through the years Muhammed showed that he would not compromise with communal conceptions of what was right and what was wrong.

5. This idea—that right and wrong, that is, ethics, are conceived of as having their source and reason in Allah—became so integral in Islam that even now after more than 1,300 years the overwhelmingly great body of orthodox Muslims maintain that the code of ethics of Muhammed is right, good and sufficient for all, both for individuals and for the state, because its source and reason are in Allah. Although it probably was an innovation in Arabia at the time, the idea itself is as old as religion. Thousands of years before Muhammed was born, kings proclaimed their laws as having come from the gods, or else that they themselves were gods.

6. You will realise that this point is very important when you recall that Muhammed was a revelation-bearer, who told people what was right and wrong. The result is that for the orthodox Muslim everything that was revealed as Right in the Arabian desert 1,300 years ago is right today; and everything that was revealed as Wrong in that desert at that time is wrong today.

7. The second point of importance is this: Right and wrong are known, not from the nature of Allah, but from his will. Muhammed saw clearly that any direct knowledge of the nature of the Almighty is outside man's competence. To discuss the nature of Allah was blasphemy. His will, however, could be made known. Therefore Muhammed conceived of ethics as being related to the will of Allah, not to his nature. To some of you this distinction may sound like theological hairsplitting. Not so. It has

far-reaching significance. Allah, the Creator, is also the Creator of righteousness. He is the Lord of righteousness. Nothing is right because it is right, inherently, in itself. The attribute or condition of rightness is created—Allah speaks and by his word, right and wrong are created. He says: 'This is right' and it is right, 'that is wrong' and it is wrong.

8. If you find it difficult to understand this idea the following illustration may help. One country has a traffic law which decrees that it is right to drive on the left side of the road; another country has a law that one must keep to the right. So what is wrong in one country is right in another. Supposing, now, that a country changes over, so that the flow of traffic which used to be on the right is now on the left. That would mean that what was right yesterday is wrong today. Today you can be arrested for doing what was right and lawful yesterday. Obviously there is nothing intrinsically right or wrong in driving on either side of the street. It is the will of the ruler, expressed in his laws, which defines what is right and what is wrong.

9. Another relevant illustration can be given. In Islam the teaching has developed that all prophets are without sin. This doctrine is quite different from what we mean when we talk about Jesus as being sinless. Prophets are quite capable of doing what ordinary people would do in the same situation. The Quran bears witness to this fact. The prophets are without sin only because they enjoy a distinction: the ordinary laws are not applicable to them. In one of the hill stations of Pakistan there is a sign stating that a certain road is closed to all motor traffic. But underneath it says that the president, the governor, the commander-in-chief and a few other high-level officials are exceptions. In other words, certain persons, on the strength of their high office, are decreed to be above the normal traffic laws that regulate the lives of all ordinary motorists. And I have never heard anyone grumble about it or say that it is not fair. Similarly, if it has been decreed by the Supreme Ruler that prophets, because of their high calling, do not sin when they do what would be sin for ordinary people—no one should take umbrage at that!!

10. On the basis of the two previous points the Muslim conception of sin becomes clear. Their idea of what sin is puzzled me for many years. Time and again I heard them acknowledge happily and cheerfully that they were 'God's sinners'. At first I thought it was a kind of bravado on their part or else a lack of seriousness. It is neither. It is their conception of what sin is which makes that attitude possible. Allah is *Rabb-ul-arbab*, the King of kings. His laws are the laws of his kingdom, that is, the

universe. The Muslim shariat is of the same category as the laws of any country. Those laws express the will of the ruler for his people. A citizen's basic relationship to his country is not his relationship to its laws, but his citizenship. Likewise in Islam the basic relationship to Allah is not the basic relationship to the shariat, but the relationship to the prophet and to his *ummat*, his people. A man may commit almost any crime and still be an American, British, Pakistani, etc. Even if he is hanged for murder, he is hanged as a national of the country to which he belongs. The same idea holds good for the Muslim in relation to Islam, for he may break the shariat and still be a good Muslim. In other words, crime and sin are identical in Islam.

11. When, therefore, a Muslim smiles and calls himself 'God's sinner', his attitude is more or less the same as mine would be if I were driving a car at 60 k.p.h. and read a warning saying that the speed limit was 40 k.p.h. Technically, I am committing a crime, and the authorities could fine me for it, but I could also smile and say, 'What a crime I committed!' It is a matter in which no moral issues are involved. Now think of treason in this connection. Ordinarily, high treason, betrayal of or revolt against one's own country, is regarded as the gravest of all crimes, and is punished with loss of citizenship, and banishment or death. Likewise in Islam the sin of *shirk*, that is, associating anything with Allah, and repudiation of the prophet, are the crimes which put the Muslim outside the pale of Islam and make him worthy of death and hellfire.

12. I cannot see how we can avoid the conclusion that in Muhammed's conception of ethics morality is not involved. Let me explain what I mean by that peculiar statement. Morality is the conception of conduct as having an inherent quality of virtue, justice, or rectitude, because of which a standard of right and wrong can be established. In other words, morality, the very idea of morality, is based on the assumption that one action has a quality in it which makes it right in itself; and that another action lacks quality, and therefore makes it wrong in itself. No extraneous criteria are possible, nor are they needed. Men may and do disagree among themselves as to what is right and what is wrong—that is beside the point. The pivotal problem is whether any conduct or action is right or wrong in itself. Muhammed's answer is No! Conduct is right or wrong according to the will of Allah as expressed in his commands.

13. Now you will be able to see why I said in the beginning of this chapter that it was futile and unfair to argue about Muhammed's ethical conduct. If *you* were the Muslim, and you sincerely believed that God



rules the universe more or less in the same manner as a king rules his kingdom, if you accepted Muhammed as the prophet, the revelation-bearer of Allah, if you believed that the shariat was God's law, God's will for you, then with that background you would find it utterly impossible even to question any word, act or revelation of Muhammed. You would suppose that the Christians were only being cantankerous, nasty, and even blasphemous when they speak disparagingly of your prophet's ethical conduct. My contention is, then, that we should leave Muhammed's conduct out of the debate, neither praising nor condemning him. But we are obliged to show the Muslim why we necessarily baulk at Muhammed's conception of ethics.

14. To explain our disagreement is not as easy as some may suppose. It is perfectly correct to say categorically and without conditional clauses or reservation: There is no shariat in Christianity. Period. No rules of ethics can be codified and labelled 'Christian'.

But—having said that, you have actually said that, as far as ethics are concerned, we are in exactly the same boat as all the rest of the world. Said in other words, just as we baulk at the idea of the divinely given shariat, or code of ethics, in Islam, Judaism, or any other religion, likewise we take the position that there is no clear statement of what is ethically right and what is ethically wrong in the New Testament which we claim to have been revealed by God, as such. Are you ready to take that position? If not, you should be. Otherwise you will end up with having nothing left but religious legalism or empirical philosophy.

15. All you can say is that the categories of right and wrong are proper to human nature, just as the power of speech is proper to human nature. Neither philosophers nor legalists can get back of this human quality and prove how it came or how it developed. The most primitive man on the face of the earth calls some things right and others wrong. So does the most highly educated and civilised man. The same is true of children also; they have an innate sense of right and wrong before ever being taught communal or religious conduct as right conduct, every child conceives of some things as being right and others as being wrong. Never mind what they call right or what they call wrong; in this connection, that is immaterial.

16. There are several lines of development clearly seen in history, all of which spring from this innate quality or attribute in human nature.

Philosophical ethics have tried in a great variety of ways to show that men's categories of right and wrong are either purely pragmatic or else

idealistic. Experience has taught the race that this, that, and the other thing are harmful, therefore man got to thinking of those certain things as wrong. Other things were highly desirable, although all too often unattainable, and therefore man labelled them as right—and strove to reach them. As the body of knowledge grew it was systematised, and ethical codes were developed.

17. Idealistic ethics are somewhat the same, according to which goodness, beauty and truth became the greatest values in life. Naturally anything which tends to lessen these values is wrong; anything which helps one to attain them is right. So it is claimed man came to think along the lines of right and wrong.

The conscience, they maintain, which not only determines right and wrong, but also condemns wrong, grew up together with the terms right and wrong.

18. Under these two general headings of philosophical and idealistic ethics there are a variety of philosophies, but they all have one thing in common. They all presuppose that man is slowly developing from an animal state into a highly civilised state. But as a matter of fact, all the data on which that presupposition is based can just as easily and perhaps more correctly be interpreted to show the very opposite, namely, that man in a great number of cases has fallen from a high civilisation to the low state of barbarism. So the arguments of philosophical ethics are worth just what their presupposition is worth. The serious defect in all such ethics is that they ignore God entirely in that they suggest, or take for granted, that man lives in a world where God has no effect upon his life and thought.

19. Historical ethics differ from philosophical ethics in that they only try to interpret facts of history. Those who follow this line of thought fall short simply because the facts of history in themselves say nothing, and have no meaning except insofar as they point to that which is outside of and beyond history. For example, the saying that there is honour among thieves says nothing in itself, except that certain people have an ethical code of their own, which does not agree with the communal code of ethics.

20. Religious ethics. There are as many different religious systems of ethics as there are colours in a Persian rug. The most common is, without doubt, legalism. It is the ethics of the Pharisees, of the Muslims, and of all too many Christians. Duns Scotus, the great scholastic theologian of the late Middle Ages, formulated the theory in Christian theology, going to the extent of saying that if God willed murder, then it was right and not

wrong. Although few would go to that extreme among Christians today, nevertheless the idea is that when the book says: 'Thus saith the Lord', then to do that is right, not because it is right inherently in itself, but because God says it.

21. Because man has this innate knowledge of the categories right and wrong, he always develops a craving for legalism. Man wants laws—written or unwritten—to make the choice between right and wrong which he himself should make. Every person of every community does innumerable things without ever reflecting about right or wrong, simply because those things have the sanction of the community or group to which he belongs. By allowing the community or group to decide for him he is building himself up as a respectable and an honourable man. Thus he finds security for himself. This is true of people belonging to highly civilised communities as well as it is of the wildest barbarians and cannibals. We speak of the law of the jungle, meaning that might is right. Accordingly, to secure and establish oneself in a jungle society, brute force alone is needed. And that is accepted without reflection on the part of the individual.

22. Now when people are religious their one great dream is to establish themselves before their deity as respectable and honourable devotees, thus obtaining security for themselves. This can be done by letting the deity decide what is right and wrong and then following that decision. You have a good example of this in the Christian Church. When Protestantism repudiated the Bishop of Rome as the pope, that is, as the authoritative head of the Church, it also lost its sense of security. Now who was to say what was right and what was wrong? The answer given was the infallible book. Fortunately the Church has never settled down to any legalistic system such as the Jews and Muslims have. Every generation of theologians keep the pot boiling, arguing for and against all that was written before. It is obvious that on the question of ethics, especially of the science of ethics, the theologians have been extraordinarily weak when facing Islam, with the result that they have talked a lot more than they should about ethical conduct, and a lot less than they should about the science of ethics.

23. Now I would like to make a few suggestions about our approach to the Muslims on this subject of ethics. The first suggestion is this: The concepts right and wrong must be held as being proper to human nature. Just as God created in us the ability to see, hear and speak, so also He created us with the ability to choose between right and wrong. There is no way of getting behind this ability or quality in order to prove that it rests

on something empirical or in any way on something outside of and apart from man himself. Man sinned, and confusion, degeneration, disruption, corruption set in; now man does not know what is right and what is wrong. True! But do not let that fact blind your eyes to the other fact that even in his fallen state, without mercy and grace, man still knows and freely uses the terms right and wrong. It is very probable that this is what St Paul means when he says that the heathen have the law written in their hearts (Rom. 2:14–15).

In other words we cannot accept the Muslim view that right and wrong have their source and reason in Allah, except in so far as he is the Creator of man, who created man with this attribute inherent in himself.

24. The second suggestion is that we should stress the fact that we know absolutely nothing of the naked will of God. We only know the will of God through our knowledge of the nature of God. Previously I said that Muhammed was correct in saying that man knows nothing of the nature of God, it is outside man's competence. That is perfectly true. Hence the necessity of the Incarnation. If and when we know the will of God, it is because in Jesus Christ we have been taught something about the nature of God. Knowing His nature, we know His will. You may think this distinction is unnecessary. On the contrary, unless you make that distinction the ordinances of God lose their moral quality. If what God calls for in man emanates from His naked will, then the Muslim could be right in his contention, that God labels this right and that wrong. If it emanates from His nature, then it is not a question of labelling things right or wrong, but understanding that wrong is in itself the opposite of right, and will be so eternally. For example, when it is written that God willeth not that any man should perish (2 Pet. 3:9), we understand this because we know that God so loved the world; that God is long-suffering; that where sin is, there the grace of God abounds; and so on: all of these are indications of the nature of God.

25. We find glimpses of this thought far back in the history of Israel. Ye shall worship no other gods before Me, for I am a jealous God. We understand these and other Old Testament passages more perfectly because we understand them through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, God—NOT the naked will of God, but God Himself, God in His nature—is revealed to us. This knowledge can never be codified in a shariat or in a code of ethics.

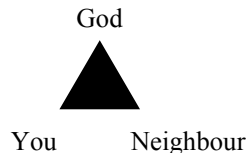
26. When we know God in His nature through Jesus Christ, we become aware of the fact that our nature was created to answer to and agree with

God's nature. Then we realise that sin is not merely transgression of a law, or of an ethical code, but is something deeper, something exceedingly more gruesome; it is the perverted condition of man, in which his nature no longer agrees with or answers to God's nature, but in which he flees from God just as Adam did in the Garden of Eden. When man is not holy, the difficulty is not primarily that he has transgressed a law, but that in his unholy state he is isolated from God Who is holy; when man is unloving, the daily expression of that lack of love is simply the outward manifestation of his hatred of God Who is love; when man's deeds are the deeds of darkness, they show that he is hiding from God in black darkness, because God dwells in a light unapproachable. The same thing applies to all the attributes of God.

27. The crucial point in all this is that even in cases where men can conscientiously say that they have fully surrendered their right and responsibility to choose between right and wrong, and have allowed a shariat or a code of ethics to do that for them (as both St Paul and Muhammed did!) and therefore felt completely secure, yet on being confronted with Christ, and in Him with God, they are disillusioned through the effective working of the Holy Spirit. Supposing that they were building up security and 'respectability' before God, they were in reality shielding their alienation from God behind a facade of outwardly correct conduct, as decreed by the community or the group to which they belong. St Paul saw this, and in consequence threw his own righteousness on a dunghill. Muhammed did not realise it. St Paul and Muhammed resemble each other greatly if we compare them at the time before St Paul was converted. After his conversion he differs greatly from Muhammed. It is therefore worth the effort to take them together and compare and contrast their lives and their teachings.

28. One difficult point remains. If we allow that no code of ethics and no shariat can rightly be labelled Christian, because Christianity is concerned with that deeper relationship between God and man, which can in fact only be imputed to man because of the grace of God in Christ, then the question of an ethical life for Christians still remains unanswered. Have ethics no relationship at all to Christianity? I have put the question in this form because that is how it is often put to me.

29. Of course they have. There will always be the great triangle of relationship between God and you and your neighbour.



The problem is: which way does the movement in the triangle go? If you think it goes from you to your neighbour, and through him to God, you are a legalist, no matter whether you explain it as Muhammed did, or as some Christians do. If your conduct towards your neighbour is the deciding factor in your relationship to God, then you build up a shariat, or a code of ethics, or a body of written or unwritten laws, which you make yourself believe are either eternally valid in themselves or else that they have been revealed by God. If you are subject to and disciplined by those rules (in whatever form they may be) the movement continues through your neighbour to God, so that you can be well-pleasing in His sight.

In actual fact, in any system of legalism, as far as you are concerned, your neighbour becomes a medium, an agency which you use, so that your movement towards God may have prospects of success or culmination.

30. Suppose you are converted from legalism. Then you see that the movement is from God-to-you-to-your neighbour. A complete revision of all your previous attitudes becomes imperative. First of all you are made aware of the fact that the manward movement of God is due to His nature, in relation to man, as it has been revealed in Jesus Christ. This initial awareness does not pivot on your own ethical relationships, but on this manward movement of God who was in Christ reconciling man unto Himself. Thereafter when you look at your neighbour, you discover or are made aware of the fact that that manward movement of God is also towards him. This knowledge then becomes the divine factor in your attitude towards your neighbour.

31. We have now a converted person who knows instinctively that right and wrong exist. He believes that there is that manward movement of God towards him, and therefore also toward his neighbour. He accepts the fact that as God brings his nature into alignment with His own, it will result in a corresponding movement from him toward his neighbour. The burning question for him then becomes: How is he to determine what is right and what is wrong in the movement that brings him into contact with his neighbour? What ethical code is he to follow?

32. It is not enough to say that since God loves him, he must also love his neighbour, for that does NOT answer his question. That is of the nature of a postulate; it says nothing of the 'law' or of 'what' in any concrete situation. For example, a militarist and a pacifist may each conclude that he is putting into practice the implications of this postulate about neighbourly love. 'My neighbours', says the militarist, 'are the people of my family,

my clan, my tribe, my country. Charity begins at home. I am bound to fight against an alien enemy.' 'The neighbour state', answers the pacifist, 'is also our neighbour. The killing of the flower of their youth and the destruction of their homes can never be construed as love of any kind. Thou shalt not kill is the unconditional command found in the decalogue.'

33. If you ignore for a moment the fact that both these arguments are spurious, and only take into consideration that each of the two persons is trying to find the 'how' and 'what' of right conduct, which one is successful? Either? Both? Neither? Work it out, if you can. That is only one illustration of the tension between two (or more) possible, conflicting solutions to every concrete, specific moral problem.

34. We have now reached the core of the matter. In definite contrast to all religions and to all pseudo-religions, Christianity, and Christianity alone, puts a man completely on his own. It sweeps away every shariat, every code of ethics, every written or unwritten communal law. It leaves our converted man nothing whatever behind which he can shield himself, nothing which can or may decide for him what he is to do in each concrete situation, nothing by which he can build himself up as respectable and honourable simply through obedience to its dictates.

35. This is true not only in relation to man, but also in relation to God. Christianity sets a man free, but it is a dangerous freedom from which the great majority of men shrink. It not only sets a man free, but it makes him—directly and individually—responsible. No revelation from heaven, no divinely inspired shariat, no code of ethics (labelled 'Christian' or otherwise), no written or unwritten communal law may deprive him or relieve him of that freedom and that responsibility.

36. Paradoxically, Christianity gives this dangerous freedom only by binding a man to Christ. Augustine said: 'Love God and do what you like'. Certainly. Do what you like—at your own risk, on your own responsibility. The man who says: 'I know I'm doing right because it's written in the Bible', or the one who says: 'I'm doing what the shariat says, and that must be right', or the one who maintains: 'I have prayed and the Holy Spirit has assured me that it is God's will that I should do this', or the one who says: 'Our Church or community has always done this, so it can't be wrong', each one is both arrogant and cowardly; arrogant in that each presumes that his is the only right solution, and cowardly in that he does not take the responsibility for his conduct, but places it elsewhere. By all means read the Bible, seek help and guidance in prayer—that is legitimate, proper and essential, but having done that, do not throw your God-given

freedom away, do not arrogate infallibility to yourself, and do not get under the illusion that you have any guarantee for the rightness of your conduct. In every age and in every place, each man has to work out his own ethical conduct with fear and trembling. In every age and in every place, he will be hemmed in by the general conditions of his time and by the culture of his own people. He can therefore only walk by faith in the shadow of the Cross. In this manner the free man is the bondservant of Christ.

37. Finally, just one other thing. I am convinced that man generally has talked too much and too flippantly about the will. Whether it be in philosophy, in Christianity, or in Islam, and whether it be in relation to God or to man, I hold that this singling out of the will as the basic principle on which man decides what to him is right and wrong, is fundamentally false. It is the sum total of man, the nature of man, either as it answers to and agrees with the nature of God, or as it is in rebellion against God and therefore in isolation from God, that makes the choice for this or against that. The will is only the mechanism through which the choice is carried out—that is, unless man is a robot.

I am sure there is no need for me to recapitulate for you to see that the two conceptions of ethics—Muhammed's and yours—are as different as day and night. Even if Muhammed had all the virtues of a canonised Roman saint, we would still have to insist that his conception of ethics is diametrically opposed to what the Church teaches on the basis of the revelation of God's nature in Jesus Christ.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to distinguish between the ethical conduct of Muhammed and his conception of ethics?
2. In what ways does the belief that God's nature is revealed in Jesus Christ cut across a legalistic conception of religion?
3. How would you describe sin, and how does your conception of sin and its results differ from that of a Muslim?



## SECTION TEN

# WHY HAS CHRISTIANITY NOT DEVELOPED A SUNNAH?



## CHAPTER 31

# Just What is Sunnah?

1. It has often occurred to me that missionaries who really aim at getting the Gospel across to Muslims are not nearly interested enough in the doctrine of Sunnah. There may be two reasons for this attitude. Firstly, that when the traditions are spoken of among Westerners, some of the most trivial ones or the most shocking ones are mentioned to show how non-sensical or how gruesome they are. That was often the attitude of an earlier generation. The other reason is that sociology as a science is a comparative newcomer, so that missionaries have not been aware of the importance of the sociological aspect of a religious community in relation to its theological thinking.

Sunnah is the orthodox Muslim answer to the sociological problems of the Muslim community, as may be clearly seen from the following quotation, taken from a pamphlet in English called 'The Importance of Hadis', printed and published in Pakistan:

The Sunnat of the Prophet is, therefore, the main source of Islamic ethics and social law next to the Quran. In fact, we must regard the Sunnat as the only valid explanation of the Quranic teachings, the only means of avoiding of dissension concerning their interpretation and adaptation for practical use. Many verses of the Holy Quran have an allegorical or metaphorical meaning and could be understood in different ways unless we possess some sure system of interpretation. On the other hand, there are many items of practical importance not explicitly dealt with in the Quran. The spirit prevailing in the Holy Book is, to be sure, uniform throughout but the deduction of the practical attitude which we have to adopt is not in every case an easy matter. So long as we believe that this Book is the Word of God, perfect in form and purpose, the only logical conclusion is, that it was never intended to be used independently of the personal guidance of the Holy prophet as embodied in the system of Sunnat. Our reason tells us that there could not possibly be a better arbiter as regards the interpretation of the Quranic teachings than he through whom these teachings have been revealed to humanity.

2. To the best of my knowledge the Muslim's method of trying to answer the problem of sociology through a full-fledged science and doctrine of

imitation (that is, Sunnah) is unique in the history of religions. Nearly all the more prolific writers on Islamic subjects have expressed their opinions about the reliability or unreliability of the traditions. Hardly anything more can be said on the subject unless perhaps new material comes to light. Moreover, although it is true that acceptance or rejection of the traditions may be important when studying other aspects of Islam, yet in our practical approach to the Muslim we must recognise the fact that, for the great body of orthodox opinion, Sunnah is the answer to the sociological aspects of that community.

3. Recently, while I was talking to a Sunni Muslim, he made the startling statement that: 'The traditions are more important than the Quran'. When I protested he continued: 'The thousand details of our daily lives are regulated by Sunnah, not by the comparatively few direct revelations regarding correct conduct which are to be found in the Quran. When we go to a maulvi and ask for Islamic guidance about some problem we face, he seldom quotes the Quran, but usually relates some Hadis or other. And that is just as authoritative as if it were the Quran itself.' There can be no doubt that this is the general practice in the great majority of cases.

4. If you were to ask the ordinary man in the street what Sunnah is, he would almost invariably tell you that it is imitation of the prophet. You keep your beard trimmed in a certain fashion because Muhammed kept his beard trimmed in that way; you cut and clean your fingernails in a certain way because Muhammed did it that way; your sons are circumcised because Muhammed was circumcised; you marry your daughters off at a certain minimum age because the youngest girl Muhammed married was that age. And so on, in all the details of Life.

5. Actually, however, every detail of Muhammed's life could not have been so public that others could observe his actions and thereby have a complete guidance for each and every thing in the numberless varieties of situations that arise. Nor is it possible that Muhammed could have taken so active a part in all the states and conditions of community life that his activities alone could become complete guidance. The theologians of Islam have therefore a more perfect definition of what Sunnah is. They say that it is not only what Muhammed himself did that constitutes Sunnah, but also what he allowed to be said and done in his presence or with his knowledge, without contradiction on his part or injunction against it, that constitutes Sunnah.

6. However, for the purposes of this chapter we may include the more detailed in the simpler and shorter one, namely, that Sunnah is imitation of

the prophet. We can do this because no one can doubt that although the implications of Sunnah have been made to include more than Muhammed's actions, nevertheless the basic idea in Sunnah is without a doubt just that: imitation.

7. Now there are two questions to which any thoughtful person would want an answer:

- (a) Why should anyone wish to imitate the prophet?
- (b) How does the Muslim know what to imitate?

Let us consider these two questions carefully.

8. Why should anyone wish to imitate the prophet? Muslims constantly claim that their religion is the natural religion, that is, it copes with the needs of natural man on the basis of nature. We are justified therefore in asking the preliminary question: Why should anyone want to imitate anyone else, be he prophet or not? Obviously the answer is that he wishes to be like the person he imitates. There is always a big element of insecurity in being oneself. Only people who are very sure of themselves, or who are prepared to take risks and who can bear being alone, dare to be themselves. The overwhelming majority of mankind imitate either a certain individual or a group or clique of people. Their feeling of insecurity is lessened, and their fear of 'aloneness' becomes less poignant. That this is as true of Muslims in their daily lives as it is of almost all other human beings, is hardly debatable. And Sunnah is of course the mainstay in this imitation, so far as Muslims are concerned.

9. But imitation of the prophet has a deeper, a more religious aspect also. It is, I should say, the one of which people are most aware. The logic of it is as follows: since Muhammed is Allah's prophet and Allah's friend, he must be well-pleasing to Allah; therefore to imitate him as closely as possible should make the devotee pleasing in the sight of Allah. In other words, by imitating the prophet you not only gain security for yourself in the community and drive away the fear of being alone, but you also secure yourself in the presence of God, and drive away the fear of being left alone on the Last Day. Undoubtedly all of this is very natural in natural man.

10. This urge towards imitation is, without doubt, as old as Islam itself. The abovementioned pamphlet says:

It was as much from the Master's example as from the Quran that his Companions derived their beliefs and their rules of conduct . . .

and in another place we find this:

The dynamic element which has forced innumerable millions of men to submit to the guidance of the Quran is to be found in the overwhelming personality of the Last Prophet who communicated it to the world. For so great was the spiritual strength of this holy personality that it forced all those who were around him to believe in the truth of the Book because it was he who brought it to the knowledge of man. The Word of God was, in those earliest days of Islam, an abstract proposition; but the personality of the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) endowed it with real flesh and blood. In the words of A'ishah, the Mother of the Faithful, 'his character was the character of the Quran'—that is, the Quranic teaching was perfected in his personality into a reality of life. It is an historical fact that many of the greatest Companions came to believe in the Holy Quran—nay, in God—because they first believed in their Prophet.

11. From the stories that are told we have a basis for believing that the Companions were very strict about Sunnah. For example, Omar is supposed to have said something to the effect that he would never of himself kiss the black stone in the wall of the Ka'aba, had it not been that he had seen Muhammed do it. It is said of another Companion that he used to ride back and forth at a certain place, and, when questioned, answered that he did not know why anyone should do it except that Muhammed used to do it. Another Companion would never eat watermelons because he did not know whether Muhammed used to eat them with or without the rind. There are many stories of this kind, some sensible, some otherwise, which show how Islam from the very start grew up as a 'religio imitatio'.

12. There is another angle, the community angle, that needs to be considered, if we are to understand why Islam has developed Sunnah as it has. Wherever you have a primitive society dependent upon unwritten tribal laws, you will find that these laws are very strict and very comprehensive. They are interpreted by the 'spirit', since they have no 'letter'. There are no courts and no lawyers or advocates. There are no arguments pro and con. The answer is either: 'It is not done', or else: 'It is done'. And that is that. As I have mentioned before, one of the first things Muhammed demanded of new disciples was loyalty above, or even contrary to, their clan loyalty. One Implication of this would have been that the old unwritten tribal laws were no longer valid. But it did not—could not—mean that the new devotees had a change of mentality. When people switched their allegiance to Muhammed and his revelations, they needed a substitute for the old unwritten tribal laws, if they were to have a ballast in the boat to keep it on an even keel in the turbulent sea of life. The most natural thing in the world

for them was to find the answer to: 'Is this done?' in the life and actions of Muhammed. If he did it, it was done; if he did not, it was not.

13. You must also remember that from the very start Islam was conceived of as a theocracy, that is, government by direct action of God—in this case through the agency of Muhammed. That naturally meant that people were trained to look to Muhammed, not only for religious beliefs, or for hopes of the future, but also for direct guidance in day-to-day living. In other words, his prophethood was a 24-hour vocation. He was a prophet, not only when he proclaimed a new revelation, but also when he was telling a joke or taking a bath. His infallibility was not the ex-cathedra infallibility of the pope. Whether he ate, or whether he drank, or whatever he did—it was, so to speak, ex-cathedra.

14. In other words, the Quran—coming, as it did, piecemeal, and containing, as we know, comparatively few direct practical laws—was only a segment of a much greater whole, the 'whole' being Muhammed's life, through 24 hours of the day. In this way Sunnah was very quickly able to supersede and supplant the older, unwritten tribal law.

15. The strength of unwritten law lies in the fact that it is formed in the hearts and the habits of the community. Private or personal initiative is always frowned upon and discouraged, because it endangers the solidarity of the community. Sunnah would, therefore, at least in the beginning, have been very strictly and firmly enforced. And that strictness is still found among the orthodox Muslims. For example, when Mr Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was working himself to the top, the fiercely orthodox hill tribes of the northwest frontier would have nothing to do with him—because he was clean-shaven. 'If a man does not follow the prophet in so minor a thing', they said, 'how can we trust him to be loyal to Islam in the major spheres of life?' From their point of view, it was a logical argument. When you remember that Islam is very definitely a sociological religion as well as theological, you can understand that to weaken or destroy the sociological pattern of Muslim life is invariably to cause serious theological repercussions, and thereby to weaken the community as such.

16. Now, there is another problem to which it would be interesting to find a solution. Did Muhammed himself teach the doctrine of Sunnah? Naturally, the fully developed doctrine of Sunnah and the science of traditions grew up later, but are the implications of this doctrine found in the life, attitude and teaching of the prophet himself? There are several things which directly or indirectly indicate that Muhammed agreed to and even encouraged this phase of Muslim piety.

17. Muhammed pointed out that he was a 'mere man'. He wanted people to realise that although he was the bearer of revelation, he was nonetheless of the same essential humanity as all other people. He knew nothing of the doctrine of the 'character indelebilis' of the Roman Church. Although this emphasis on his humanity may have had other connections in Muhammed's thought, the fact remains that Muslims make a great point of it when stressing the fact that imitation is logical, sensible and right. Had he been a demigod, an angel or a superman, Sunnah both as a doctrine and a practice would be an impossibility. Therefore one cardinal point in the doctrine of Sunnah is the essential humanity of the prophet.

18. When the Quran says: 'Verily, in the Apostle of Allah you have the excellent example' (The Allies, v. 21) it certainly gives the Muslims a peg to hang their doctrine on—whether Muhammed meant it in that way or not. Again, when the Quran says: 'Obey Allah and obey the Apostle' (The Light, v. 64) it obviously does not mean that both are identical, so that when you are obeying the prophet you are also obeying Allah, although it works out that way in the end. Obedience to Allah can only mean to follow the laws and precepts of the Quran, his revelation. Obeying the prophet, however, must mean that even when no revelation on any subject has been given, the prophet in his own right as the apostle of Allah can demand obedience. This is indeed a very strong substructure on which to build the doctrine of Sunnah. There is also a tradition to the effect that Muhammed has said that anyone who perverts his words will suffer in hell fire. This could hardly mean the words of the Quran, so it must mean that Muhammed felt that his own ordinary words were of such great importance that the perverting of them should be very severely punished.

19. Finally, I think it fair to say that the traditions themselves very definitely give the impression that Muhammed knew that he was being imitated in every possible way, and that he not only allowed it but encouraged it as one phase of Muslim community life and piety.

20. The second question was: How does the Muslim know what to imitate? Naturally any order or command which is found in the Quran calls for obedience and not for imitation. For example, if the Quran said clearly: You must pray five times daily (which it does not), then no matter whether Muhammed did this or not, it would still be a command that called for obedience. Likewise if Muhammed did pray five times daily, his action in this respect would not call for imitation, because he, like his followers, would all be obeying an express command of Allah.



21. In other words, Sunnah must have its source outside the Quran. Therefore the whole body of traditions, as well as the science of traditions, grew up in the Muslim community. Ordinarily when westerners think of tradition, they think of some custom or other which has grown strong and taken root in the lives of a group of people over several generations. This is NOT what is meant when the word 'Hadis' is translated as tradition. Here it simply means a story about Muhammed which supposedly can be traced back to Muhammed himself. For example, Muhammed was asked if certain verses of the Quran could be used as an amulet to protect one against caprices of the jinns. Muhammed gave his consent. A, who heard this (or perhaps was the very one who asked) passed it on to B, then B passed it on to C, and C to D, and so on down through the years. All this was oral until many generations later the school of traditionalists sprang up, who reduced all of these sayings to writings.

22. There are really only two important principles in the science of Hadis. The first is that they must not contradict the Quran. The second is that the evidence of the reliability of the Hadis must be more or less perfect. Not only must it be possible to check it back to Muhammed himself, but each man in the chain must have had the reputation of being a sober, godly and good man in his day. It was, of course, a stupendous piece of research to establish the reliability of each and every story that was floating around. Hundreds of men gave the whole of their lives, and many gave their fortunes to trace these stories:

Of all compilations of Hadis, none has ever attained to the extraordinary esteem in which the work of AL-BUKHARI is held throughout the world of Islam. None of the scholars before or after him has ever succeeded to reach that critical insight into the problem of Hadis which has made Imam Bukhari the highest authority wherever and whenever Hadis is discussed. His work is, in the consensus of all Muslim scholars, the most perfect book after the Holy Quran. From his childhood to his death he had one aim only: to collect the authentic records of the Holy Prophet's sayings and doings, to sift them with all the faculties of his great intellect, and to leave to posterity as faultless as possible an account of the life and the teachings of the Greatest Man (*The Importance of Hadis*, by Mohammed Asad).

It is also said that Al-Bukhari interviewed 1,080 transmitters of stories in about twenty centres all over the Near East.

24. There is one thing about the value of these stories that makes one wonder. On the one hand Muslims always insist on the complete historical reliability of the most perfectly authenticated Hadis; on the other hand,

they tell us that there were at least 600,000 of these stories in circulation when Al-Bukhari went to work. By the end of his life he had discarded 592,700 as not being correct or sound (sahih). And of the 7,300 he kept, more than half were repetitions of the same story, only related by different people, so in the end he really had only 3,000 left. All the others were downgraded as second or third class or completely unreliable. When the great mass of these stories were rejected, it would seem that the assurance for the reliability of the 3,000 which were retained rests almost exclusively on the judgment of one man. That is why non-Muslims, and not a few Muslims, reject the traditions in toto. I have mentioned this not as a value-judgment on the question of reliability, but just to show where any thorough-going science or doctrine of imitation must end. The details of one man's life never have been and never could be so accurately preserved that they could become a foolproof and perfectly reliable guide in a doctrine of Sunnah.

25. Let me also remind you that although this tremendous task was carried out on the basis of scientific method, nonetheless the goal of the work was not scientific research, but was an effort to establish a true and solid foundation for Sunnah. To that end even the most trivial and intimately private stories were recorded. Here are a few examples of these, from *Selections from Muhammedan Traditions*, trs by William Goldsack, The Christian Literature Society for India, Madras et. al., 1923. One might wonder why they were recorded.

It is related from Ayesha that she said, 'I had a girl of the helpers, and I gave her in marriage. Then the Apostle of God said, "O Ayesha, will you not sing, for verily this tribe of the helpers loves singing"'. It is related from Abu Hurairah that, 'The Apostle of God said, "When a fly falls into a vessel belonging to any one of you, then let him immerse the whole of it. Afterwards let him throw it out; for verily in one of its wings is healing, and in the other disease"' (from Al-Bukhari).

It is related from Abu Dharr that, 'The Apostle of God said, "When anyone of you gets angry while he is standing, then let him sit down. Then if the anger leaves him (well); otherwise let him lie on his side"' (from Ahmad at-Tirmidhi).

In the same English edition you will find the words 'not fit to print' in many places. Vernacular editions will, however, show you that they are concerned with many aspects of sexual hygiene and sexual relationships.

26. It must be obvious to all who know anything about the Muslim community today that tradition in the sense of Sunnah is now tradition in the

Western sense. Millions of Muslims now do things daily which are Sunnah, but which for them have become mere custom, and which they think of as such, if they ever think about it at all.

27. So long as environments, culture and technical developments are related to and correspond with the traditions and customs of a people, then a doctrine of Sunnah or imitation holds a strong position also in the religion of the people. Even when the Muslims were for the most part living under foreign or non-Muslim rule they were sociologically closely knitted together because Sunnah, as custom, was as strong as it was. But what happens when environments change, when culture is influenced from the outside, and when new technical developments are introduced?

28. Let me give a few examples which are more obvious than others: Among the Muslims the month of fasting ends when some reliable witness testifies to having seen the new moon. In Karachi the maulvis hired a plane on a cloudy evening when they knew from astronomical calculations that the new moon must be visible, and flew above the clouds, took a good look at the moon, came down again and gave their sworn testimony that they had seen it. There was, of course, great rejoicing in Karachi, but in other places, where they had to fast a day longer because the cloudy weather had hidden the face of the moon, feeling ran high. These others thought that the Karachi maulvis somehow or other were cheating, in that there was no tradition saying anything about spying out the moon above the clouds!

29. In Africa a few years ago, it was cloudy over one city and clear over another. The officials of the cloudy city got a telephone message that so-and-so in the clear city had seen the moon, so they could start feasting next day, although they themselves had not seen the moon. The idea of receiving the testimony of a person by telephone was like dropping a bombshell in the camp of the orthodox. The quarrel took on such great dimensions that they decided to send a deputation of learned men from both sides to Bombay to get the judgment of the still more learned men there. And the judgment was that the message by telephone was NOT valid.

30. When loudspeakers were first installed in a mosque in Delhi, there was a minor riot. While writing this chapter, I am listening to—or rather, having to hear—the blare of a powerful loudspeaker installed in the mosque of a nearby village. It started at 9 p.m. and will continue until well past midnight. Anyone can always start an argument by speaking either for or against the use of loudspeakers in mosques. Although the common people have given up their active opposition, there is still an uneasy feeling that this is an innovation, bringing in something new.

I was travelling in a public bus during the fast once some years ago, in the heat of summer, and the driver fainted from thirst and heatstroke. The Muslims on the bus got to quarrelling vociferously, some maintaining that the driver was a true saint, who in spite of great hardship had kept the fast; while others held that his fasting was criminal for he might easily have killed us all.

31. On the economic side, let one illustration suffice. Every Muslim country now has its own state bank. And yet the Hadis says:

It is related from Jabir that he said, ‘The Apostle of God cursed the taker of interest and the giver of it, and the writer (of the bond) for it, and the witness to it; and he said, “They are all equal” ’ (from Al Muslim).

It is related from Abu Hurairah that, ‘The Apostle of God said, “Interest is composed of seventy parts, the least of which is that a man marry his own mother” ’.

Remarkably enough, although the masses have accepted the banking system, nevertheless they definitely disapprove of the individual banker who lends out money at interest.

32. One example on culture will do: The Muslims are just as enthusiastic about the cinema as other people, and cameras are sold and used in Muslim countries, but in the Hadis these words of Muhammed are recorded:

It is related from Abu Talhah that, ‘The Prophet said, “The angels do not enter the house in which there is a dog or pictures” ’ (Muslim, Al Bukhari).

It is related from Ibn Abbas that he said, ‘I heard the Apostle of God say, “Every maker of pictures is in the fire. God will appoint for him, for every picture which he has drawn, a person who will punish him in hell” ’ (Muslim, Al Bukhari).

33. It is a well-known fact that the theology of a group can be changed with comparative ease, but that the sociological changes you would expect from the change in theology simply do not happen. The theology of sabbath-keeping, for example, may change, but people will not readily give up their custom of having Sunday off. The interesting question for us is: what happens to theology when the sociology of a group has been changed due to extraneous pressures and influence? The traditions say that if a man steals an egg or a length of rope, his hand should be cut off. Due to the 20th century humanitarian conception of the law, probably no Muslim country in the world would accept this tradition at its face value. The traditionalist tries to get around it by saying something to this effect: ‘Muhammed means this to be the extreme and final penalty for an incorrigible thief, certainly

not for a first offence. After all else has been tried, if the man still insists on stealing, no other punishment would prevent him from constantly despoiling other people.' The Muslim who wishes to ignore Sunnah and 'get back to the Quran itself' says that while such a severe penalty no doubt was needed for the wild desert tribes of Arabia, to follow such a tradition today would violate the spirit of the Quran, which is all for progress.

34. While both of these attitudes towards Sunnah may in themselves seem quite sensible and reasonable, yet the fact remains they are bound to have repercussions on the theology of Islam which may be startling, for the doctrine of Sunnah is far too much an integral part of the whole system of theology to be cut off and discarded with impunity. I do not mean to imply that Islam is headed for the rocks, but I do believe that Islam's life and death struggle will be caused by the Muslims themselves, as they fight for and against a religion of imitation and all that it implies.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between Sunnah and Hadis?
2. Why do Muslims imitate Muhammed? Give the natural and religious reasons.
3. In what way was Muhammed's prophethood a 24 hours-a-day vocation, and how did this strengthen his cause, particularly in his day?

## CHAPTER 32

# Is a Christian Sunnah Possible? If Not, Then What?

1. In our previous chapter we saw that Sunnah in Islam means imitating the prophet. Naturally the question arises: Is there Sunnah in Christianity? Are we taught to imitate our Lord? Probably a great number of Christians will think of two well-known religious books, namely: *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas á Kempis of the 14th century, and: *In His Steps* by Sheldon of this century. Thomas á Kempis's book is often expurgated for Protestant readers, and Sheldon does not actually use the word 'imitate', but 'follow'. Basically, however, both books propagate the same idea, that is, a Christian Sunnah. Others will think of the many songs and choruses sung by Church people about being like Jesus:

Be like Jesus, this my song,  
In the home and in the throng;  
Be like Jesus, all day long!  
I would be like Jesus.

2. The great majority of Protestants who read writings on the subject of imitation or who sing songs about following in the footsteps of Christ probably do not take them seriously enough to cause an upset in their normal way of life. Nevertheless some sediment does drop down into the subconscious mind, and this can and does cause much muddled thinking and gives rise to an unfortunate or incorrect emphasis. If a Muslim were to ask about Sunnah in Christianity, a great number of Christians would in all probability say, 'Yes, we are taught in the Bible to imitate Christ, or to follow in His footsteps'. And they could, of course, find a few verses which could be used to prove that they are taught to imitate—not only Christ, but God Himself! It is therefore necessary to approach this problem theologically, and to decide whether or not any imitation-piety really is Christian.

3. In order to avoid getting lost in a maze of detail, I have divided the subject into three distinct sections.

### **SUNNAH IMITATION**

4. Have you ever thought of what would have happened if our Lord had come just a few hundred miles to the south of where He did come, that is, in Arabia? To begin with, there would be the complete absence of the Old Testament background, and therefore the four Gospels would have become Hadis, mainly, the Traditions: the words and deeds of our Lord observed and recorded by others—not of course in relation to the Old Testament, but in relation to their own tribal customs and religion. On the other hand Christ would have left nothing behind to correspond to the Quran so there would have been Hadis and nothing else. On the basis of the four Gospels taken as tradition (Hadis) we would now have many interesting or startling doctrines. For example, the story of the wedding in Cana would clearly teach us that the use of intoxicating drinks is lawful. It would also show us that at a proper wedding feast wine must be freely available. The episode of the cleansing of the temple would be proof positive that the use of force is legitimate in the service of religion. The parable about the labourers who were hired at different times during the day would teach us that all labourers should be paid daily, and not weekly or monthly. The woman washing the feet of Jesus would be the basis of a doctrine about women's relation to men. The story of the rich young ruler would tell us clearly that only a faqir (ascetic or hermit) can be a true disciple of our Lord.

5. These are just a few examples, taken at random, to show you what would happen in the Christian Church if we had any kind of Sunnah imitation in the Church. History shows us that nowhere has the Bible—whether the Old or the New Testament—been used to establish a Hadis like that of the Muslims. For that matter no material extraneous to the New Testament has been collected for the purpose of Sunnah. Admittedly, any number of verses are plucked out of the Bible and used as a spur to imitation piety, but that has never been the purpose for which the Church has kept, guarded and propagated those verses. So whatever we may or may not tell the Muslims this much is certain: his type of Sunnah piety is not found anywhere in the teachings of Christianity or in the actual practice of Christendom.

### ABNEGATION IMITATION

6. I have given this kind of imitation that rather heavy name in order to emphasise the fact that the imitation piety of the monks of the Dark and later Middle Ages was supposed to be an imitation of the humility of Christ, especially as seen in Passion Week. Actually it was pure oriental heathen ascetism—a doctrine of negation or negativism. The ideal was other-worldliness, and could only be developed by spurning and despising everything and anything that has to do with this world.

7. The above mentioned book by Thomas á Kempis reflects this ideal. There one reads:

Know thyself to be unworthy of Divine consolation, and worthy rather of much tribulation.

When a man has genuine compunction for sin, then the whole world is burdensome and distasteful to him.

A good man finds matter enough for mourning and weeping.

For whether he considers himself, or thinks of his neighbour, he knows that no man lives here without tribulation; and the more thoroughly he considers himself, the more he grieves.

The subjects for just sorrow and heartfelt compunction are our vices and sins, in which we lie so enrapt that we are seldom able to contemplate heavenly things.

... whatsoever may become of others, neglect not thyself... The greater violence thou offerest thyself, the greater progress thou wilt make.

Again you read that in solitude and silence the soul finds floods of tears:

... with which she may wash and cleanse herself every night; that she may become more familiar with the Maker, the farther she live from all worldly tumult.

8. Especially in the Near East these monks lived in caves, ate anything or nothing, clothed themselves in sackcloth; they howled throughout the night like animals lamenting their sins; and indulged in various kinds of self-torture in order to mortify the flesh. In the West the whole movement was more highly organised, and the three cardinal points of the monastic system were poverty, celibacy and obedience. The basic idea, however, both in the East and in the West was the same.



9. The reason why the Reformers broke away completely from this whole system of abnegation imitation was not because it degraded man almost to the level of animals, nor because they considered penance a useless thing. They broke away from it because the whole idea behind it was that man must strive and make sacrifices in order to be worthy of grace. In the 15th chapter of the Fourth Book, Thomas á Kempis says:

Whosoever, therefore, with a single heart shall raise his intention upwards to God, and purge himself of all inordinate love or dislike of any created thing, he shall be the most fit to receive grace, and worthy of the gift of devotion. For the Lord bestows His blessings there where He finds the vessels empty.

And the more perfectly a man renounces things below, and the more he dies to himself through contempt of himself, the more speedily grace cometh, the more plentifully it entereth, and the more highly it raiseth the free heart.

10. Actually, the imitation of Christ, taken in this setting, means that the more violently you disregard, humiliate and crucify your humanity, the more you merit God's free and sovereign grace. Although twisted and distorted out of all recognition, yet in the end, abnegation imitation is nothing other than a revised form of the works of the law, mainly, legalism. It is shariat—not instead of grace, but in order to obtain grace. And like all works of the law, it degenerates into hypocrisy and extreme Pharisaism.

11. Anyone can see that what I have called abnegation imitation is a form of piety which has nothing whatsoever in common with Sunnah imitation. While the former thinks only of crucifying humanity with poverty, self-torture, weeping, emaciation, celibacy and repudiation of everything good in this world, the latter is precisely and particularly interested in the living of a normal and healthy life in this world. Both are undoubtedly forms of piety, for the former is trying to merit grace as a free gift, and the latter seeks to follow the precepts of the law. It should be obvious to any non-Roman Catholic that the one kind of piety is just as far from Christian truth as the other.

### **SPIRITUALISTIC IMITATION**

12. My use of the word 'spiritualistic' is meant to indicate a kind of loose universal spirituality, and has no connection with spiritualism. This is a modern and rather popular kind of imitation piety, although the word

'imitation' is seldom used, for there is a feeling that somehow or other it has a Roman Catholic connotation. Of course we must be like Jesus, it is said, but that does not mean imitating His style of clothing, His genuflexions at prayer, nor His style of haircut. All of that is just externalism which only kills the spirit. The poor monks were, of course, only degrading human nature with their strict ascetism. Imagine wearing sackcloth instead of nylon! If you would follow Jesus you must develop your God-given personality, so that you can be like Him spiritually. You must teach your children to be sunbeams for Jesus, little candles burning in the night; they must learn to brighten the corner where they are. Then they are being like Jesus spiritually. You must learn to ask yourself: 'What would Jesus do?' If He would smile, you should smile; if He would forgive, you should forgive; if He would be patient, you should be patient, and so on.

13. The usual tendency in this present day Jesus-idealism is to over-emphasise the softer or feminine virtues of mankind. Spiritualistic followers of Christ lean so far over backward to be nice, kind, loving, forgiving, gentle, patient and full of good deeds that the whole performance loses the sense of genuineness and reality. I have heard it said that if you should smile and cannot, learn to say 'cheese'; that will bring the muscles of your face into position and help you. Or if anyone offends you, you can forgive him in your heart, and thereby escape from the tasteless task of having to talk to him about it, if that is what is bothering you. You can rest assured you radiate the Gospel, and others can see Jesus in you and therefore you can soft pedal the plain speaking essential to the preaching of the Gospel.

14. Of course, it is a matter of taste, but personally I would prefer the monks in the caves who howl throughout the night to these modern imitators, who go pussyfooting through life, proud of themselves for imitating Christ spiritually.

15. Occasionally you find a person (among the puritans) whose attitude is diametrically opposite. He seeks to imitate Christ with a whip in his hand, cleansing the temple. His approach is full of such remarks as, 'Ye whited sepulchres, full of dead bones', 'ye offspring of vipers'. His preaching and teaching is all wrath and judgment. His hell is filled with those who oppose him. The result is arrogant dogmatism which is no more an imitation of Christ than the howling of the monks or the pussyfooting of the less virile spiritualistic imitators.

16. Every attempt to imitate Christ degenerates into an unworthy caricature of him. There is a definite reason for this, which I will explain later. It is sufficient here to note that only the hand which can bless can carry a

whip; only the eyes which can weep, truly weep, can burn with wrath; only the soul which can love perfectly can hate perfectly. The opposite is also true. Only the hand which can carry the whip can bless; only the eyes which can burn with wrath can truly weep; only the soul which can hate perfectly can love perfectly. In other words the two entirely opposite extremes have to be united in one person, if he is going to succeed in imitating Christ. In reality that degree of perfection is found only in Christ. Not in any man.

17. Hence our final answer to the Muslim is not only that we have no Sunnah imitation in Christianity, but that all imitation piety is contrary to the truth of our religion. If you then get a chance to explain to him why we cannot accept Sunnah or any other form of imitation, you will have an opportunity to get the Gospel across.

18. In this connection there are three things to take into consideration:

The first requirement in genuine imitation piety is that a fundamental element of likeness must exist between the imitator and the one being imitated. A boy will naturally imitate his father, a girl her mother; a young preacher will imitate his professor or an older colleague, but will not imitate a truck driver. A respectable sinner will imitate a saint, but not a drunkard. Christian devotees of imitation piety think that this first requirement of likeness exists between them and Christ. The monks thought that there was a likeness between their ascetism and the humility of Christ; the moderns think their spiritualistic imitation follows the pattern of Christ's spiritual life. St Peter thought there was a similarity between him and Christ, when he wanted to imitate Christ and walk on the water (Matt. 14).

19. St Peter discovered at the last moment that a very definite dissimilarity existed between Jesus and himself! One of the vital mistakes of all imitation piety on Christian grounds is found just here; the absolute uniqueness of Christ is forgotten or ignored. The Eternal Logos, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, is in every activity, in every word, in every phase of life, one complete and perfect Eternal Logos. He is just that and precisely that, both when He has the whip in His hand, and when He weeps over Jerusalem; both when He in wrath condemns the Pharisees, and when He gently tells the woman in John 8 to go in peace; both when He calls on men to believe, trust and obey Him, and when He hangs helpless on the cross and prays for Himself and His enemies. The humility and sufferings of Christ were NOT the humility and sufferings of a man, but those of the Eternal Logos. Therefore, no attempted imitation in any form of abnegation or ascetism can be true imitation, for the fundamental likeness

is lacking. The spiritual life of Christ was NOT the spiritual life of a man, but of the God–man, the Eternal Logos, therefore imitation of Him becomes caricature. In any sphere of life, anything that purports to be an imitation of Christ is fallacious. For example, if any man or woman deliberately chooses celibacy as an imitation of Christ, he or she is simply misrepresenting Christ. His celibacy had absolutely no relationship to marriage as such. Marriage was, according to Jesus, instituted by God Himself, and our Lord considered it the normal and right relationship between man and woman. That Christ could not enter into this relationship is natural for Him, for He is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Eternal Logos incarnate, and the Lamb of God. Therefore not only His function but also His nature makes the marriage relationship impossible for Him. No-one else is ever in a similar position.

20. We must insist, therefore, that because this first requirement cannot be fulfilled in Christianity, we cannot imitate Christ in any way. We believe, trust and obey Him; we worship and adore Him, just as we do the Father and the Holy Spirit. Sunnah is fundamentally possible in Islam because Muhammed claimed to be ‘mere man’. He is neither to be worshipped nor is he the object of faith. Here there is a clear distinction between the Eternal Logos and the Prophet of Islam.

21. The second requirement in true imitation is that there must be some genuine reason for wanting to imitate. If this reason is lacking the action becomes mimicry. The mimic ridicules that which appears ludicrous in another person’s way of being, acting or talking; in the mimicry, the mimic shows that he does not want to be like the person he is mimicking, or else that he is just having a little fun. Imitation, on the other hand, is consciously or subconsciously an effort to measure up to some standard of excellence. One wishes to be like the person being imitated.

22. In the sphere of religion, imitation piety either openly relates itself to the law, as in Islam, or else it develops a camouflaged relation to legalism, as in Roman Catholicism and spiritualistic Protestantism. You see clearly in Islam how the first, simple efforts of the Muslims to do as Muhammed did, developed into an important part of the shariat. It is more difficult to see the camouflaged legalism when people loudly proclaim the sovereign grace of God as the free gift of God, and then in a footnote, so to speak, add: but of course you have to merit it. That is what Rome does. Likewise in modern spiritualistic Protestantism, they sing and shout and praise God for His gift of grace. But here, again, God gives His grace only if you accept the taboos of the particular group to which you belong.

In one group grace is free if you do not get divorced; in another if you, as a divorcee, do not marry again. In a third it is free if you do not smoke, do not go to the theatres and if you are a teetotaler; in a fourth grace is free if you do not work on Sunday—and so on in a hundred variations. These taboos are often propagated and accepted as indications of the devotees' love for Jesus, just as the strictest Pharisees kept the law for the love of God. Jesus saw through that illusion and pointed it out more than once. In the final analysis the truth is that just as the basic idea in Islam is to imitate the prophet, so likewise the basic idea among these Christians is to follow Jesus and be like Him. And this wish to imitate drives the imitator—whether Christian or Muslim—right back into bondage to the law. The very thought of imitation is therefore a denial of that cardinal doctrine of true Christianity, that God's sovereign grace is absolutely free; there is no way in which any man can merit it or earn it. The sharp contrast between Christianity and Islam could be clearly seen also at this point, if only the Christians were knowledgeable and would be firm in the faith 'once for all delivered to the saints'.

23. The third requirement in genuine imitation piety is that one strives towards an ideal. In fact, imitation piety is just as much idealism as any nonreligious idealism. In saying this, I am not thinking of philosophical, but of practical idealism, in which an archetypal idea or pattern exists, and the idealist strives to approximate it in his daily life.

24. At this point one runs into two snags as far as Christianity is concerned. Christ is not an ideal you strive to imitate, but a Master you obey. There is a vast difference between these. The one is an abstract idea about something high up, out of reach, and ways and means are devised for striving towards it; the other is an everpresent reality, bidding you to do this or that in your own particular concrete situation, here and now. That is precisely why an outsider finds it difficult, if not impossible, to see or understand how any kind of imitation—whether that of abnegation or that of spiritualistic piety—has any relation whatever to the historical Jesus of the New Testament. Whatever the imitators do, whether it be to wear sackcloth and weep throughout the night, or whether it be to wear nylon and smile because they think they should, or whether it be to crack the whip and threaten doom and destruction, they all have devised their own ways and means for striving towards the ideal, and have ignored the command to do this or that here and now.

25. The other snag is what the leaders of the Reformation talked so much about, namely, that striving just does not get you anywhere. What

God does for you *God* does, and all your striving is useless. And that is the stumbling block in our relationship to God, over which Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists—in fact, all religious people—stumble and fall. The Muslims avoid the offence of this Christian truth by clinging to their Sunnah and law; the Roman Church vitiates it with its teaching about meriting grace; spiritualistic Protestants nullify it with their multitudinous taboos. If you yourself can see what the idealistic striving of all religious people actually amounts to, then you have arrived at the very heart of the issue as far as Sunnah is concerned. From there on, your difficult task is to present it so that the Muslim will also be able to see it.

26. During the Reformation, instead of the phrase *Imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ) they used the term *Conformatas Christi*, meaning conformity to Christ. This expression may sound synonymous with imitation of Christ; but if you will study the use the Reformers made of it, you will find that it is definitely not just saying the same thing in a different way. The entire frame of reference is different. The decisive element in conformity is God's action, that is, through the effectual working of the Holy Spirit we are made to conform to Christ in His death and in His resurrection. In baptism we have the first fruits, the sign and seal of this act of God. It is God who appears as our enemy and kills us in His wrath, so that all our idealism, all our striving, all our imitation, all our efforts as good, religious people, all our law righteousness—everything that we are and have—is killed, killed outright. Being made conformable to the death of Christ is not just a theory, not a manner of speaking, not a symbol. It is just as real and actual as was the death of Jesus, when He cried: 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!' In the abyss of dark doubt and black despair, when all that we have and are is killed and perishes—then we are being made to conform to the death of Christ. And this is a continuing experience of the Christian. He, like St Paul, says: 'I die daily', for daily he is being made conformable to the death of Christ. And this death is not imitation, not something he achieves by working out ways and means of accomplishing it, or something that might look like a close imitation of it. It is the God of wrath Who passes the death sentence.

27. Death, however, won no victory over Christ; it could not hold Him. Likewise death cannot hold him upon whom the God of wrath passes the death sentence, for that same God of wrath is in Christ a gracious and loving Father, Who makes the Christians conformable not only to the death of Christ, but also to His resurrection. He is made conformable to the death of Christ for the very purpose of making him conformable to

the resurrection of Christ. But this new resurrection life is hidden with Christ in God. It has nothing to do with putting some delightfully coloured, attractive patches of imitation piety on the clothing with which we cover our old Adam. It is new life, created by God, attuned to the nature of God.

28. As baptism is the first sign and seal of this action of God in making us conformable to the death and resurrection of Christ, so likewise Holy Communion signifies the selfsame thing. In the Holy Communion we do not in some mystical way receive Christ, but we partake of the mystery of His body and blood. This is to say, we are being made conformable to His death. To eat that body and drink that blood is to receive a deathblow to all that which is not attuned to the nature of God. That is what the forgiveness of sins really means. Then it is that we rise from our knees as being made conformable to the resurrection of Christ—by faith, that faith which no man can take, but which God alone can give, and we die daily and live again in the covenant of our baptism.

29. Whatever other effect this may have on your earthly life here and now, one thing is certain: it will make you abhor and flee from every kind of imitation piety, no matter how subtle or spiritual it may seem. And in your approach to the Muslim you will never try to compare his Sunnah piety with anything belonging to Christ.

30. To my mind this is one of the most vital points in our effort to get the Gospel across to the Muslim, indeed not only to Muslims but also to religious people the world over.

## QUESTIONS

1. How is 'abnegation imitation' different from Sunnah imitation?
2. Why is imitation of Christ a denial of the cardinal Christian doctrine that God's sovereign grace is free?

## CHAPTER 33

# Why Does the Muslim Object to Our Principle of Ethics?

1. We have touched on the problem of ethics many times in our previous chapters. Here we are to come to grips with the problem itself, as it is related to our work of approaching the Muslim. The problem of ethics is one of the most thorny and puzzling problems we have in our practical approach to Muslims, not only for them but also for the Christians themselves. Obviously one chapter cannot cover all the possibilities nor can it answer all the questions that may arise. A line of study can, however, be indicated.

2. I want to start by giving you some examples from real life, so that you can see how the Muslims react:

(a) Some years ago there was an unhappy affair in a congregation, which finally necessitated the excommunication of several members. A friendly, fairminded and inquisitive mullah visited the Reading Room in that place. He said, ‘Your Injil bids you forgive those who sin against you. You accept that as the command of God, and yet you turn right around and excommunicate the sinners. How do you explain that?’

(b) Another case. In a village where we had gone to preach, a young fellow who had studied in a Christian college said, ‘Before you say anything to our simple village people about your Christianity, I want you to answer just one question. Do you live according to the Sermon on the Mount? If you answer “yes”, I know you are a hypocrite, for nobody does and nobody can; if you answer “no”, then I will tell you to go home and practice what you preach before trying to teach it to us.’

(c) Still another incident. During the war a Muslim officer said to me: ‘I believe we are fighting a righteous war. But your Bible does not justify righteous wars. It says: “Resist no evil”. Even Ghandi, whom so many



Christians admire, is not doing what the Bible says, for he advocates passive resistance, which is differing only in kind. Christian nations together with their Churches and pastors are all involved in supporting this war. Actually in your ethics you are Muslims, and not followers of Kalimat Ullah (the Word of God).’

(d) Hear also what a modern, well-educated, cynical Muslim once said to me. ‘The bishop of such and such a place lives in a palace, while his servants live in one-roomed huts. His children are getting the best education money can buy; his servants’ children are growing up illiterate. A few Sundays ago I heard him preach a sermon on the command of Jesus that you should love your neighbour as yourself. It just didn’t make sense. You Christians say our Shariat does not make sense in a modern world, and while that may be true, your ethical teaching does not make sense anywhere at any time. No society could exist on the basis of what your Injil teaches.’

(e) Again: Three young men in Government service said bluntly at our first meeting: ‘Tell us why Christianity has failed. We know of no country or nation in the world where the ethical teachings of Jesus are taken seriously. If such a nation does not exist then Christianity has had no influence on “Christian” nations as such. We studied civics at a Christian college, and never once were the civic laws of the Injil even mentioned. There must be some reason for such a failure.’

(f) Finally: A young college student who fancied himself as a philosopher argued that according to Jesus good and evil in history have no significance, for if evil is not to be taken seriously, combated and suppressed, then by contrast goodness has no value. If you reward a thief by giving him more than he came to steal, what sense is there in being honest?

3. These are only a few examples, taken at random, which show how the Muslims think about the ethical teachings of our Lord. I am sure any person with practical experiences will be able to recall dozens of similar cases. In many of the books written by Muslims you will find practically all the ideas expressed in the above few illustrations.

4. As you will have noticed there are two points at which Muslims balk. They say first that our ethics are not realistic but idealistic, and since the ideal has been placed so high above the normal capabilities of man living gregariously, they actually stifle or kill any ambition man might have had to live up to the ideal. By contrast they say that Muhammed’s ethics are down-to-earth, reasonable, and capable of being carried out. The second point they stress is this: If a considerable number of people in a

community did succeed to any practical extent in living up to the Christian ideal, the result would be the dissolution of regulated, orderly, community life. Again, by way of contrast they maintain that Muhammed's ethics tend to consolidate and build up society.

5. The question we have to ask ourselves is this: Is there any truth in these objections, or do they only indicate obstinacy in the face of genuine demands for self-discipline and self-sacrifice? Undoubtedly every person who understands the ethical teaching of our Lord will find a certain amount of obstinacy in his own heart; but until a man does understand that teaching, his objections must be accepted and answered as being honest and real ones.

6. In order to answer such objections, we must first look at some of the principal elements in our Lord's teaching.

### FORGIVENESS

The uncompromising absolutism and perfectionism of our Lord's ethical teaching can be most clearly seen in his conception of forgiveness. The right 'to have and to hold' is considered one of the most fundamental rights of mankind, the recognition of which is necessary in any civilised society. It is expected of men that they will protect and defend their honour and their property. Any man who does not do so is not contributing to the regulated orderly life of the community. But Our Lord says that if a person insults you by slapping your face, let him do it twice over. If he steals from you, give him more than he was trying to get away with. If he uses force against you, give him twice as much voluntarily, go the second mile. It could of course happen, as in 'Les Miserables', that the person sinning against you would be touched by your nobility in forgiving him, and repent. It is more likely, however, that he would exploit you to the limit. Our Lord does not give us reason to believe that the purpose of his teaching is utilitarian. His ethic is not optimistic social law-giving. Actually, in His parable about the steward whose debt was forgiven but who refused to forgive, there is an indirect indication of what may be expected. The right 'to have and to hold' is not a sacred thing, as some say, but it is an egoism, developed and maintained by man in order to regulate life in a sinful society, where aggressive egoism constantly leads to excesses, and needs to be checked. Our Lord's teaching about forgiveness is therefore, in fact, asocial, for He ignores the requirements of gregarious living in our present imperfect, sinful state.

The same is true of His teaching for those inside the ‘brotherhood’. If my brother sin against me, how often shall I forgive him? Seven times? If he wants your forgiveness give it seventy times seven, that is 490 times. Aggressive egoists in the brotherhood could soon make forgiveness a farce on the basis of that teaching!

### **POSSESSIONS**

Look at the idea of ‘to have and to hold’ simply as the possession of wealth, legitimately acquired. Society has always honoured and respected men who have acquired wealth, but our Lord is very outspoken in His condemnation. A rich man’s chances of getting to heaven are like the possibility of a camel going through the eye of a needle. Do not lay up wealth on earth: ‘You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you’. You cannot serve two masters: God and wealth. ‘Give all to the poor and follow Me’ is the supreme test for a certain pious and rich young man. In stressing this idea, our Lord goes the length of encouraging people to take no thought for tomorrow but to live as carefree as the birds in the air. They have no wealth and yet they get what they need. Even the most primitive people on earth would reject such teaching as irresponsible, and in our complex modern society a person who tried to follow it would be condemned as a bad citizen—first of all, of course, by the Church. But there it is. The teaching of our Lord on this point is as clear as it can be.

### **NEIGHBOUR-LOVE**

Now let us consider the bishop’s palace and costly education of his children. This illustration is symbolical of all life. Every society—and more especially complex modern society—has the unenviable task of trying to regulate conflicting claims, so that no group transgresses the rights of other groups. A man in any position has a responsibility towards his family, congruent with his position. But his servant has rights also, for which the servant in his position is responsible. When these responsibilities clash, society tries to regulate them. A man has a duty towards his family, his relatives, his clan or tribe, his religion, his political party, or his nation, and, finally, international relationships. There are currents and cross-currents in all of them, as well as between the different ones. For example,

families who believe only in divine healing have had their children taken from them on the ground of neglect, and sent to hospitals for medical treatment. Other families have contested wills in which they have been ignored while huge sums have been bequeathed to philanthropic purposes in distant countries. Men have been jailed for refusing to fight for their clan or nation. No one would expect a bishop to live in a one-roomed hut, nor a servant to occupy a palace. A balance has to be struck. Aggression, mismanagement and prejudice have to be kept under control. If the bishop were to love his servants' child as he loved his own, the result would probably be that he could not afford to give any of them a proper education—proper, mind you, according to his conception of what is proper in his position. Ethics which deal with all these complicated problems are called prudential, meaning that what is prudent is best for all. Philosophers of all ages and theologians of all religions have tried to solve these problems and to find a universally applicable law, either in nature, in history, or in religion. Some have been conservative, others revolutionary: but all have striven toward the same goal, namely, the stabilising of relationships in an ethical code, which can be accepted as authoritative. Our Lord, however, cared nothing about prudential ethics; He was not trying to tell the bishop how to live in his relationship to his servant, nor yet how the servant could get his rights from the bishop. He is simply saying to you—not to any third person—that the will of God is that you should love your neighbour as yourself. What impossible consequences this may have does not seem to enter the mind of our Lord. Nor does He say how it can be reconciled with the conflicting claims made upon you in any concrete situation.

### **RESISTING EVIL**

My Muslim friend was perfectly right when he said that passive resistance and civil disobedience are just as truly resistance as active resistance. Passive resistance and civil disobedience are the weapons of a people who have been denied the opportunity of building up armed forces. It is therefore fallacious to assert that people who could follow this precept of Christ can get around it in this way, and by this means accomplish whatever they wish. Resist no evil simply means that, regardless of where evil crops up—in personal or national conflicts, in class or race warfare, or in international disputes—the man who would love according to the teaching of Jesus Christ cannot combat it, even though the evil should crush him. It

is not so very long ago that sovereigns could speak of domination ‘by right of conquest’. That expression is out of favour in our age, but who can say that cold war, secret diplomacy and the struggle for world markets are not, in their own way, wars of conquest? Is it possible, therefore, when a war does break out, to say categorically that it is a just war? The point here is that even if one could say without the shadow of a doubt that a war was *just*, it would mean that here people were striving against evil with armed forces. In other words, they would be doing just precisely what Jesus said one should not do. On the other hand the pacifists, who prefer to go to jail rather than join their fellow citizens in war, enjoy all the benefits which others have bought by shedding their own and other men’s blood. Jesus seems to be singularly unconcerned about the complications which would arise if men were to follow his ethical teaching.

### **THE RELATIVE VALUE OF GOOD AND EVIL**

The sum total of our Lord’s teaching seems to be just what the young Muslim philosopher said, namely, that if there is no sense in resisting evil, then there is also no sense in encouraging good, for neither has any significance in history. If, for example, it is wrong to resist the communist effort to dominate the whole world, then it is useless to strive for the ideal of personal and national freedom.

7. I have only touched on some of the basic ideas in the ethical teaching of Jesus in order to show you that if His words are to be taken as they stand, and not twisted one way or another to suit the purposes of any group or community, religious or otherwise, then we face an extremely vexing problem, one with which the Church has been struggling ever since its inception.

8. Church history shows two clear trends in theological thinking about ethics. Both presuppose that there is a prudential social code of ethics to be found in the New Testament. The one trend is to emphasise those precepts which apparently are intended to regulate the conduct of individuals, as distinct from those which seem to aim at society as a whole. For example, matters like adultery and divorce are treated as though the group judgment concerning these matters were identical with acceptance of a divine command, while the question of governmental authority was answered (in England) by propounding the doctrine of the divine right of Kings, and (on the Continent) with the teaching of the divine authority of Governments.

So, while the morals of the people were constantly under supervision, kings and governments could be evil, despotic and tyrannical, and social inequalities could be established or maintained, with impunity. When governments were bad and social inequalities were harsh, people were told that these corruptions were also a manifestation of God's will—either as a proper punishment for the waywardness of the people in general, or else as fiery trials sent to cleanse and strengthen the faith of all true believers. The result was a certain amount of personal ethical living joined to quietism in regard to the political and economic issues of community life.

9. When people, however, got tired of waiting for 'pie in the sky' as the saying goes, they did one or other of two things. Either they broke away from the Church entirely, or else they turned their thoughts anew to the teachings of our Lord. The trend that developed in the Church was towards rationalisation and superficialisation, that is, they claimed to have found an interpretation of the letter that brought out the significance of the spirit of the matter. In other words, they interpreted the precepts of our Lord so that they could be accepted as practical possibilities, if only Christians—and all others—could gain a fresh vision of the beauty and truth of the personality of Jesus. When people accepted these practical possibilities (which actually are as far from the absolute perfectionism of Jesus' teaching as the east is from the west) and worked along those lines, a halo was made to shine around them, so that even the grossest imperfections were hidden or ignored. For example, it is easy to interpret the spirit of the words: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour' as philanthropy or humanism, so long as you conveniently forget the words: 'as thyself'. But the moment you take those two words seriously as a part of the command, the imperfections of philanthropy and humanists become glaringly obvious.

10. Both of these trends can be found side by side in all countries where Missions are working. But the astonishing thing is that many people who think of themselves as fundamentalists and thoroughly orthodox have—unwittingly perhaps—on the question of ethics absorbed so much indirect liberalistic teaching that, whatever doctrine they may hold, their way of working and thinking is definitely liberalistic. Ask any missionary you meet how he or she understands the words of our Lord: 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'. And his answer will in all probability show you where he fits in. If he says he does not know how it could be applied in practical life since none of us can be perfect, he is orthodox; if he says it means that you should strive to be perfect inside your limitations and your natural scope as a human being, he is liberalistic.

11. The one uniquely important lesson to learn from Church history in this connection is that the Church has never been able to detach itself from nor ignore the ethics of Jesus. It has always been attracted, challenged and defeated by the teaching of our Lord at this point, and yet it has never done the sensible and logical thing, namely to recognise the absolute perfectionism and otherworldliness of this ethical teaching, and then simply state that it has no practical relationship to the daily life of any person or community. This has, of course, been done by some people like Albert Schweitzer in his book on the interim ethics of the New Testament; but for the Church, as such, our Lord's ethical teaching, impossible as it is, has always had the magnetic power of drawing the Church back to it, so that every generation of Christians is attracted, challenged and defeated at this point.

12. Why is it that, although we wholly recognise the authority of the Apostolate, yet we calmly decide for ourselves just what ethical guidance we are prepared to accept from St Paul, St Peter, and the other New Testament writers as being relevant to our times; but we cannot take this attitude towards the words of Jesus as found in the Gospels? Is it not because we believe that Jesus reveals God to us, not particularly in one thing or another but in all that He was, said and did—including His ethical teaching? We can therefore say that the ethics of Jesus show us what man is NOT and what God is—not, of course, in His fullness, but at this particular focal point. Our Lord's teaching does not relate man to man, but it relates God to man. Put in another way: when a man stands in the presence of God, after having had Jesus as his Teacher, he realises that his prudential and relative ethics, which were designed to help and protect man against man in the cross-currents of conflicting social claims and in the explosions caused by aggressive egoism, are not the ethics of pure love and absolute and infinite perfection, but the makeshift of a corrupt humanity in its effort to control and suppress the grosser forms of evil. The man standing in the presence of God then understands that he will be judged, not by the standard of his own very best efforts, but by the standard implied and expressed in the ethics of Jesus.

13. In a previous chapter I used the illustration of a triangle, where the movement started with God and went manward, and then from man to man. One integral part of that primary movement from God to man is the ethical teaching of Jesus. When God moves towards man in and through Jesus Christ, then ethics are inherent in that movement. To deny this truth would be to deny that Jesus Christ in His totality is the revelation of God. But the important point—the very important point—is this: That manward

movement of God does not go in an unbroken line through man to his neighbour. God relates Himself in that manward movement to every man in that the Gospel is preached to every man. But that manward movement of God to every man, when it is apprehended by faith, becomes the source and origin of, and strength behind, the movement of each believer towards his neighbour. When a man's movement towards his neighbour receives its impetus from God's movement towards him, then that man's movement towards his neighbour has both the direction and the strength needed for him to deal with all the possible relatively good choices in any concrete situation, and to carry out his choice on his own responsibility. In this manner the absolute ethics taught by Jesus always have relevancy in relation to the prudential ethics of the Church.

14. Understood in this way, the teaching of Jesus can never result in a quietist acceptance of the status quo in any sphere of life, private or public. The fact that man cannot attain to the absolute perfectionism of the ethics of Jesus is actually the spur that urges him on, so he makes his own relatively good choice and acts upon it. On the other hand, it is also clear that any effort that pretends to carry the manward movement from God to man through man to his neighbour in an unbroken line is to pretend that our relative choices are absolute, our sinful perfection is divine and infinite perfection, and that our choices and actions are in reality God's choices and actions.

(I would like to make a parenthetical remark here in order to avoid the possibility of this whole argument about movement being misconstrued as a philosophical or Utopian conception of divine pervasion. That movement is not the result of some natural [or for that matter, supernatural] law of cause and effect; but it is the movement of God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit, Who moves and works according to the eternal counsels of God, when and where it pleases Him.)

15. To sum up: The absolute ethics of Jesus belong in God's movement towards man; the relative prudential ethics of man belong in man's movement toward his neighbour, but the latter has its impetus, source and strength in the former. Therefore, although the absolute ethics of the former is always outside the scope and sphere of historical achievement, it is organically related to the latter and gives it direction. On the one hand, therefore, no man can twiddle his thumbs and murmur that the status quo is God's will; and on the other hand, no man can by rationalisation and superficialisation surround his imperfections with a halo of sanctity.



16. In trying to relate all this to the Muslim who objects to the Christian principle of ethics, the first and most important point to keep in view is the fact that the Muslim necessarily presupposes that Muhammed and Jesus were both working along the lines, and were on the same level. He loudly and proudly proclaims that the ethical teaching of Muhammed and of Islam is practical, attainable and a perfect guidance for solving all the conflicting claims gregarious living forces on men. In other words, he believes that Muhammed's religion provides the perfect, prudential, social, ethical code. He then assumes that Jesus, like Moses before him, was also trying to give His disciples a workable code of ethics for their daily life.

17. This mistaken idea of what Jesus was doing is not new. In the earliest centuries of Christianity, Marcion and his followers did exactly the same thing—only in a different way. Marcion held that the Mosaic law no longer had any validity since Jesus the new Lawgiver had come. Jesus was for him simply a new Moses, and any part of the New Testament that contradicted that theory was cast aside as a forgery. Even in our day people all over the globe are prepared to accept the Jesus who gave the (wrongly) so-called laws of the Sermon on the Mount, but they are not prepared to accept Jesus, the Lamb of God, on the cross. Each measures the ethics of Jesus with a yardstick of his own making, and while some conclude that the Sermon on the Mount is the ideal for a workable, prudential, ethical code, others, like the Muslim, find it fantastic and impractical.

18. Therefore our first task is to help the Muslim to see that Jesus was NOT working along the same lines, and that He was not on the same level as Muhammed. Jesus was revealing God and relating man to God in every way—also ethically. So this whole problem is really only another spoke of the wheel of which revelation is the hub.

19. Without being unnecessarily unkind to the Muslim the Christian can point out that, although the Church and every Christian is far from claiming that Christian prudential ethics are acceptable in the presence of God, yet he can truthfully say that the Church has always felt the impetus, the urge, that comes from the absolute ethics of Jesus in God's movement towards man. There is hardly a generation of Christian theologians who have not studied the question of ethics and written new books on the subject. And they are constantly taking a new stand on old issues. We need but to think of questions like slavery, capital punishment, the severity of penal laws, planned parenthood, suicide, divorce, and social inequalities. Whether all the new views expressed are closer to the absolute ethics of

Jesus is not the point. It is the urge, the impetus, the will, the restlessness of the Church which shows its organic relationship to that absolute teaching of Jesus. This urge, this restlessness is not to be interpreted as the conscious striving of the company of all faithful to be obedient, nor is it to be understood as an effort at imitation. It is neither; it is the spontaneous expression of life-movement. On the other hand, although Islam is certainly not lacking in ethical demands upon the will of its adherents, yet these demands have fossilised in certain forms more than a thousand years ago. Muslims from all parts of the world admit that there is an almost complete apathy among their co-religionists towards the ethical demands of Islam.

20. There is today, however, a very small minority of Muslims in Islamic countries like Pakistan, Egypt and Syria who are gravely concerned and who are struggling desperately to awaken a sense of ethical duty in the Muslim masses. I do not pretend to be speaking as a prophet when I say that they are doomed to failure. I only say it because their own effort is not sparked by that movement of God towards man in Jesus Christ. Any movement of man toward his neighbour, be it ever so idealistic, which does not have the absolute ethics of Jesus as its origin, source and strength does not have the impetus nor the direction it needs, and degenerates into quietism and indifference, or else into the false sanctity of divine law, or, as in Communism, into brutality. This is certainly just as true in our so-called Christian countries of the West as anywhere else in the world.

21. The great stumbling block, which only God Himself can remove, is, of course, the fact that he who accepts the ethics of Jesus for what they really are, has to accept Jesus in toto. He has to be accepted as the Son of the Father, the Revealer of God, the Eternal Logos, the Lamb of God, God's sacrifice for us. Then, in the final analysis, we do not project the result of even our finest prudential ethics and ethical living into the sphere of that which has eternal value; but with St Paul we say that we throw our own righteousness on a dunghill so that we may not be found with that righteousness, but with the righteousness of Christ.

## QUESTIONS

1. What are the two Muslim objections to Christian ethics?
2. What is the relation between the relative prudential ethics of man in man's movement toward his neighbour, and the absolute ethics of Jesus in God's movement toward man?
3. How can we go about correcting the Muslim idea of comparing the basis of the ethics of Muhammed and of Jesus? What is the result of accepting the ethics of Jesus as they really are?

## SECTION ELEVEN

# A FEW COMPARISONS

## CHAPTER 34

# **Belief in Allah— Belief in God the Father**

1. The last four chapters of this series are going to be comparisons. Admittedly, comparisons are usually unfortunate and often odious, since the person making the comparison has the advantage of manipulating it to demonstrate just what he wants to say. The purpose of these comparisons is not, however, to show that one thing is better than another. May I say it in this way: by comparison I want to bring out contrast and incompatibility.

2. In every generation there are writers, and occasionally some thinkers, who forget or are ignorant of the fact that words have a connotation as well as a denotation, and that words are therefore ambiguous. This unavoidable ambiguity has caused much unnecessary strife in the Church from the earliest days. We could learn a lesson from Socrates, of whom it is said that he often interrupted the orators of his day with a request for a definition of terms. There was a time when all serious authors defined the words they were using. Probably no one would ‘waste’ time in our day reading a book that was so slow and poky that it stopped to explain the terms used. The result is confusion on almost every issue.

3. I have heard both Muslims and Christians, both nationals and foreigners, say that in Islam as well as in Christianity there is only one God; therefore Muslims and Christians believe in the same God. Obviously this must be true, they say, since there is only one. That statement is a good example of what can happen when undefined terms are used.

4. When that idea has been accepted the rest is extremely easy. They then proceed to point out that, although the Muslims and Christians approach the questions and problems of faith differently, nonetheless they reach the same conclusions regarding fundamentals. For example, both agree that it is an oriental fallacy to suppose that by introverting the mind on itself ultimate truth may be discovered, for ultimate truth comes from

outside oneself. The Muslim knows this from his Quran, and the Christian from his Injil, but the conclusion they reach according to this reasoning is the same, namely that both believe in the fact of revelation. Furthermore, both believe that God forgives sin. The presupposition is that both have a conception of right and wrong, as well as a knowledge of guilt, so both feel the need of forgiveness. Again, it is said that both believe that God is a righteous Judge, Who on the Last Day will be scrupulously just in His judgments.

5. The argument is that varying natural and human philosophies will certainly lead to various methodologies. But the method used is not of supreme importance; it need not be taken into account. The important thing is that the conclusions reached are identical. Enthusiasts who prefer to bypass facts and realities are easily enticed by this line of talk, regardless of whether it comes from a Christian or a Muslim source.

6. To puncture this balloon you need merely insist on a definition of words in order to remove the ambiguity. When that is done you will see that on every single issue the conclusions reached are widely different, even though the words expressing the conclusions are identical. Let me give you one very obvious illustration (a definition of terms about which Muslims argue between themselves too). The orthodox Muslim says that the Quran and the Traditions teach him that man is created to be free. He may then go on to say that the Injil teaches the Christians the selfsame thing. Now pin him down to a definition of what he really means and he will say that every man should be free to be or to become a Muslim. The idea that a Muslim should be free to forsake Islam would appear to him to be just as impossible as it would to us if some one were to suggest that man should be free to commit murder. But when a Westerner defines freedom, he means that man is free to choose anything, insofar as it does not curtail or violate the freedom of others.

Obviously, while the words are identical the conclusions, at least in their relevancy to religion, are diametrically opposed to each other.

7. If we now go back to our starting point, namely, Belief in Allah versus Belief in God the Father, we see at once that although it is easy to say that Christians and Muslims believe in one God, and therefore the same God, yet even the limited amount of definition found in the heading of this chapter demonstrates at once that the conclusions are NOT identical. God, when defined as the Father of our Lord, can never be God, defined as the Allah of Muhammed. Our Lord is recorded as having said: 'he that hath seen me hath seen the Father' (John 14:9); and, 'No man knoweth the

Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him' (Matt. 11:27). The significance of these words is that in the Christian context God is only known as God if He is known through the Son, as the Father of the Son. In the first creeds of the Church (when the Christians were struggling to formulate the belief and confession of the Church theologically) God is confessed before anything else as Father. Although some Muslims might do as the Psalmist did, and speak of the fatherliness of God (Ps. 89:26; 103:13), nevertheless neither Jew nor Muslim could accept the connotation of the words: the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In like manner no Christian could accept, believe and confess faith in the Allah of the Quran.

In other words, as soon as you have a clear definition of terms (in this particular case the term 'God'), both Muslims and Christians will agree that, although we use identical words, the conclusions we have reached are as radically different as possible. They cannot be compared, only contrasted.

8. Now we come to the crux of the matter. After we have seen that by definition our two beliefs about God are incompatible in the extreme, nevertheless each maintains that there is only one God. Neither the Christian nor the Muslim could entertain the idea that a compromise could be effected by allowing for the possibility of there being two gods. Therefore we are up against a very plain fact: in the final analysis, either Muhammed's Allah or the Father of our Lord is a pure figment of the human brain.

By definition, therefore, it becomes manifest that, although the words used are identical, yet our conclusions are so radically different that a wider fellowship of worship, or a larger, more inclusive brotherhood of faith with each other, is completely ruled out.

9. It would be interesting to know just what the purpose of an approach is, when the parties fight shy of definition and hide behind a smokescreen of identical words. Regardless of what certain individuals may or may not do, as far as the Church is concerned the only purpose or reason for its approach to Islam is to proclaim the Gospel to the Muslims and thereby to give the Holy Spirit material with which to work, so that men everywhere may be convicted of sin and believe on the name of Christ and be saved. If a man honestly has this purpose in approaching the Muslim, he may still feel that there is a certain advantage in accentuating the similarities of identical words rather than the dissimilarities of contradictory conclusions. Actually he is emphasising the lesser at the cost of the greater. But, be that

as it may, what he is actually doing is accentuating and emphasising that which calls for no conviction of sin or change of faith, hoping thereby to introduce that which is essential and which does call for conviction of sin and change of faith. As far as I can see, those who proceed in this manner are making things more difficult not only for the proclaimer of the Gospel, but also for the Muslim who hears it.

10. Although I have taken up this question of definition seriously, it is by far the least important in relation to the topic under discussion. What is much more important is the attitude people take when talking about God and, generally speaking, about religion. Here is a point that is ignored and neglected all along the line.

11. Scientism. What is scientism? It is an attitude of the mind, which is supposed to be characteristic of scientists, scholars and philosophers. It is that so-called objectivity which research workers, investigators, spectators and observers, of necessity, must have. The value of any man's scientific or philosophical work is partially dependent on his ability not to get involved personally, but disinterestedly to probe, observe, compare and find facts of continuity or relationship. He must have a vantage point quite independent of and above that which he is investigating or observing. He cannot become involved and still do his work scientifically. For example, a man studying a murder sociologically would be hindered in his work if the murdered person were his own son, or other close relative. In that case he would be involved and involvement hinders scientific objectivity.

12. St Paul speaks of being spoiled by philosophies and vain deceits (Col. 2:8), and Luther and the other Reformers broke with the old scholastic tradition at the time of the Reformation. This attitude on the part of these men does not mean that philosophy and science and academic treatments of any topic are wrong or sinful in themselves. They are vain in the context of the Church. The reason is simply this: In the context of the Church no man is a spectator. No man can see God or see truth from a vantage point which leaves him unengaged, without involvement. A god seen from a vantage point is an idol pure and simple.

13. When a man propounds the thought as before mentioned, that the God of Islam and the God of Christianity is the same God, since there is only one God, then that man is philosophising. He is a spectator making observations. He has (or thinks he has) a vantage over and above both Islam and Christianity, from which he can observe, probe, investigate and draw conclusions. He presumes to have knowledge of God independently. A very clever man once said that the first half of the Muslim Creed is



eternal truth, whereas the second half is necessary fiction. Obviously that clever man was a spectator standing over and above both Islam and Allah, since he could, or thought he could, observe both without being involved, and describe what was what.

14. However, from the very nature of the case, God is only God the moment the person concerned is engaged by Him. Man only knows God when God points His finger at him and says: ‘Thou art the man’. There is and can be no other true knowledge of God except that which comes by the instrumentality of involvement and engagement. In other words, objectivity—the one strict condition of scientism—is, and must be, lost by the man who in truth has something to say about God, because whatever he may have to say is based on, or springs from, involvement with God.

But—and this is extremely important—the man whose life is formed by aliveness to the presence of God cannot speak about God as a philosopher, academic scholar or scientist who coolly discusses possibilities for or against his thesis. He is a witness. What he has to say is a testimony, a kerygma, a proclamation. His attitude is not that of scientism but of prophecy. The Christian kerygma and the testimony of the Christian relate to our aliveness to God as a gracious Father; they relate to our creedal confession of God as ‘the Father almighty’; they relate to our prayer to Him as ‘our Father which art in heaven’; they relate our aliveness to God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and as our Father.

15. When the Christian speaks of God in any other way, he is speaking of a dead God, or about an idea or a philosophy. At any rate he is not speaking about the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is precisely this very living God, the Father God, which the Muslim, like the Christian, cannot accept unless it be given him from above.

16. We saw in the beginning of this chapter that even in the preliminary realm of definition a deadlock in our approach to the Muslim is inevitable. It is, however, just as inevitable when the Christian proclaims God and not just ideas about Him, for He can only proclaim Him as the Father—God. Having done this to the very best of his ability, and in genuine relationship to local Muslim thought, the proclaimer can do no more. The deadlock MUST come. Neither Muslim nor Christian can produce irrefutable or absolute proof, nor can the logic of either one be so clear and overwhelming that the other is honour bound to accept the consequences.

17. In other words, we are up against this: If we proclaim the Gospel in the way the Gospel by its very essence demands to be proclaimed, a deadlock will come at one point or another. It may not be just at the point

of the Father–God, but it will and must come. This deadlock is a stumbling block for innumerable Christians who feel frustrated by this limited scope of their capability. Having planted the seed, perhaps courageously and tirelessly through decades, they want to do something to see the crop grow, ripen and be harvested.

18. Apart from institutionalism, which has been dealt with in several previous chapters, there are two very common ways in which Christians try to break the deadlock. The one is with spirituality; the other is with intellectuality.

*Spirituality.* One hears it said constantly; a spiritual life is a stronger argument than any amount of preaching. Actually that position is naive, because it presupposes that there is agreement beforehand on what spirituality is, and what value it has. But this is definitely not the case. In the East spirituality usually expresses itself in poverty and ascetism, and seclusion from the world of activity. Western spirituality often finds an outlet in activism.

19. What is far more important, and what one meets more in the East than in the West, is a genuine understanding of spirituality. In the East the man on the street is likely to admire any person making a real show of spirituality. This admiration is, however, entirely divorced from any commitment about the eternal truth or validity of that spirituality. A Muslim and a Christian may be equally ‘spiritual’ in the eyes of the ordinary man, without any correlated thought as to the truth of the two religions.

20. This statement may sound unbelievable to many westerners but, as a matter of fact, it is indeed the only right way of looking at the human phenomenon called spirituality. All it can ever prove is that this man is trying to make (what he conceives to be) spiritual things uppermost in his life. He may be a Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Sufi, or the adherent of any religion or religious leader. But his spirituality does not prove anything about his religion (except perhaps that it can produce that type of spirituality). While one side of the coin may be man’s spirituality, the question always remains: what is on the other side of the coin? Is there anything there that is correlated to this side? In other words, Hindus, for example, may be and often are, extremely spiritual (no-one can deny that), but when the other side of the coin is only an idol, what value has this spirituality? Except that it probably satisfied him for the time being. The New Testament shows us clearly that a lot of spirituality has no reality at the back of it (Matt. 7:14, 22–23; 20:16; Luke 18:14). The other side of the coin is blank.

21. What I am trying to get you to understand is that the Muslim will in all probability accept your spirituality as genuine and honest, and yet not even think of your Christian living as the instrument designed to break the deadlock caused by making both Christians and Muslims face up to what they really believe. The Christian's spirituality may be correlated to reality, but as no one is able to turn the coin over and see the other side, that spirituality still proves nothing about the truth of Christianity.

22. *Intellectuality.* The question in our age which is becoming more and more urgent is this: Can the deadlock be broken by an academic and scholarly approach? I would not like to be misunderstood at this point. Nothing is more important for the Church in its effort to get the Gospel across to Muslims than the spadework of qualified and keen academics and scholars. But let us not confuse the objects with a thorough study of the object. Nor should we confuse the study of the object for academic purposes with study for practical evangelistic purposes. A man may use all the approved methods of study in research to find out how mysticism looked in Islam before the time of al-Ghazali, and the results could be extremely interesting from an academic point of view, but for the man who is proclaiming the Gospel to Muslims it would be rather irrelevant and immaterial, except in a few individual cases.

23. Let me give one example. I have been subscribing to 'The Muslim World' for nearly 40 years. Go back and pick up, say, the 1921 volume and compare it with that of 1959. What do you see? First of all look at the title pages. 'The Muslim World' began as a 'Quarterly Review of Current Events, Literature and Thought among Muhammedans and the Progress of Christian Missions in Muslim Lands'. Now it is a 'Journal of Islamic Study and of Christian Interpretation among Muslims'. When you begin looking through the articles in a few volumes from then and from now, you soon discover that they correspond very well to the subtitle in each case. In the beginning it was openly a missionary periodical, dispensing present-day information from all Muslim lands, regarding both Muslim and Christian life and work, always in relation to the preaching of the Gospel. Now it is 'Islamic Study', that is, it has entered the field of academic oriental studies. It is difficult to see how the majority of these studies are vitally related to present-day kerygma. The journal also wishes to be 'Christian Interpretation', whatever that means. Interpretation can mean at least three different things. First of all it means simply translation. A second meaning is explanation or exposition. And finally it can mean a person's individual conception or construction of some object. One

‘interprets’ a poem, a painting, or a piece of music, by rendering it in the light of one’s own judgment—or belief. Not by the greatest stretch of the imagination can any of these definitions be synonymous with kerygma in the New Testament. When the journal wishes to be ‘Christian interpretation among Muslims’, just what meaning do the words convey? Interpretation of what? And interpretation meaning what? That title is a typical example of much present-day academic ambiguity. Is it possible that the deadlock will be broken, or even cracked open, because orientalist scholars on both sides of the fence write learned monographs about obscure facts or persons in bygone ages—Muslim or Christian? That may be interpretation, but that is all it is.

24. Any person who works with words knows that a change of vocabulary inevitably means a change of contents or direction or attitude. You simply cannot take the word ‘kerygma’ and replace it with ‘interpretation’ or ‘communication’ without altering some aspect of that which before existed as a whole. As an example of what I am trying to get across to you let us consider Dr Cragg’s book, *The Call of the Minaret*, and a review of it, written by a Muslim, which was printed in ‘The Muslim World’ for January 1958. In the review, Prof. Daud Rahbar comments happily on the non-polemical spirit of the book. Of course, enlightened westerners now realise the value of all religion as an institution within the human society. Politics have also played their part in making Christians more tolerant, for the Christians choose partnership with the Muslims against the Communists. The Professor says that Dr Cragg wants his book to be a manual for missionary expression today. Cragg never even implicitly mentions the superiority of Christianity over Islam, and he avoids approving or disapproving of this or that aspect of Islam. The book is not a methodology of debate with Muslims, but an introduction to Islam, as from within.

Part III, ‘The Call to Interpretation’, shows how Cragg conceives of a Christian’s duty. Rahbar thinks it should be translated into all major Muslim languages so that it might influence Muslims to do the same regarding Christianity as Christians have been doing in respect of Islam. In a true academic spirit, Muslim scholars must admit the urge to study the Bible as the greatest source of knowledge about Jesus, for the best course for each (Christian and Muslim) is openness of mind as to how the other conceives and receives the revelation he believes in. Mutual respect must develop through mutual knowledge. This chapter is an effort to get Muslims to see that ‘meanings of the Christian’s faith for a Christian are not wrong’. Even

the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not as impossible as some suppose, nor is it diametrically opposed to Islam's emphasis on Unity. Actually the Quran teaches a complex unity, although with a different conception of complexity.

Prof. Rahbar has a final word about conversion: 'Ours positively is not an age of conversion', and when it does happen as in India and Africa it is either a better social status the converts want, or else it is the influence of some loving or magnetic personality. 'The truth of the dogma of a religion is tested by standards of benevolent workability and its success.' It is greatly beneficial for downtrodden oriental people to be brought into the rich tradition of faiths like Islam, Christianity or Buddhism.

That is a short summary of relevant parts of Prof. Rahbar's review.

25. Apart from the above, he comments very academically on a few minor points in the book, and then he praises European orientalists for the great work they have done in trying to understand Islam. Conforming to the attitude of the book, this whole review is very objective, impersonal and scientific. The doctrines of salvation, resurrection, eternal life, and the last things are not even mentioned, not even by implication. The reviewer says plainly that, 'The successes of great faiths were not the freaks of nature. Their founders were the voices of their times.' The whole review is as flatly horizontal as the horizon itself. Professor Rahbar seems to have met a cool, well-written academic study of a 'human institution', to which men are drawn, not by the power of God, but by loving magnetic personalities or because of social inequalities. There is no indication whatsoever of perpendicularity in the review. Nor does the Professor even hint at having been stopped or annoyed by any concept of perpendicularity in the book itself.

I am not writing a review of Dr Cragg's book, which should be obvious from the fact that I am using a review already written, and written by a Muslim scholar.

26. There is the group known as 'American Friends of the Middle East, Inc.', which met for the first time in 1954. In their 'Statement of Purpose' we run across this:

The convocation has emphasised that there is a large area in which fruitful cooperation can be developed between the two faiths of Islam and Christianity. We both believe in one God.

Naturally enough, on that basis, G. E. Hopkins, in the convocational address says:

We who enter here as believing Muslims will leave as believing Muslims. We who enter here as believing Christians will leave as believing Christians. Else we finally fail,

and although the entire meeting was concerned with getting Muslims and Christians to work together in brotherliness (very symbolic I should say), the address ended with two quotations: one from the Old Testament, 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake' (Ps. 115:1), which was ineffectual in that environment; and the other from the Quran, 'By the Lord then of the heaven and of the earth, I *swear* that this is the truth, even as ye speak yourselves' (Sura 51:23; Rodwell), which is a cryptic or ambiguous denial of the Holy Trinity.

Remember, these meetings were attended by a goodly number of clericals both Muslim and Christian.

27. Again, recently I met the head of one of the cultural departments at an Islamic College. He was, he said, ready to give a person of any religion the right hand of fellowship, if he would work together with the group on cultural projects. 'Of course', he said with a smile, 'I know there is one great difference between you Christians and us Muslims. You are exclusive, believing that there is only one way to God; we Muslims know that all religions, sincerely practised, lead to God. Doctrinal differences are of less importance.'

28. Is the deadlock now broken? Has the Muslim seen and known God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Or has the Christian accepted the Allah of Muhammed? No. On the contrary. The deadlock is ignored while scholars discuss the beautiful names of Allah, the true complexity of unity, the origin of this or that doctrine in Islam, or some other point on which scholars and orientalistes legitimately disagree.

Or is the deadlock broken because some American Friends of the Near East talk about 'the unalienable rights of men, and protection of all mankind from exploitation and abuse'?

29. Strangely enough, this confused intellectualism seems to be centred in institutions of learning, or in groups of educated people who are prepared to try to break the deadlock at almost any cost, short of becoming actual Muslims. But as sure as God is God also in His revelation, this human deadlock is unavoidable. We have been commissioned to preach the Gospel everywhere, which includes Muslim communities. But we have NOT been told that the very words spoken or written have a power

innate in themselves to do that which they say. Every word spoken in kerygma must be used by the Holy Spirit before it can become effective. This includes also the very words of Scripture. Therefore it is not only conceivable, but the experience of the Church demonstrates, that a deadlock follows true preaching, which only the Holy Spirit can break. If we really and realistically believe that faith is the gift of God, we will do all in our power to keep the deadlock living as an issue, so the Muslim is never allowed to forget that the Church is waiting for, praying for, and hoping for the deadlock to be broken by the Holy Spirit.

30. Practically any other procedure at the point of deadlock would be easier than the one I have outlined here. But the word of God in man's mouth is either kerygma or witness, or both. Therefore there is no other way. The very essence of the kerygma or the witness is that the efficaciousness of the proclamation depends entirely upon the working of the Holy Spirit. No ambiguity, no spirituality, no scholarly treatise, nothing inside the boundary of man's capabilities, is competent to break the deadlock when rebellious man stands naked before God. Every attempt to do so is nothing but a smokescreen, showing that even the Christian feels and rebels against the irksomeness of having to wait upon God, of having to work without knowing what the outcome of his effort may be, of having to start something knowing that he is not competent to complete it.

And yet, in spite of all, he has to continue to preach God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ over against Muhammed's Allah, and let the outcome be in the hands of God.

## QUESTIONS

1. How would you distinguish between the connotation and denotation of any word?
2. Why are the two beliefs (Islamic and Christian) about God incommensurable?
3. How would you suggest trying to break the deadlock?

## CHAPTER 35

# Belief in Books and Prophets

1. Probably the best way of comparing the Christian and the Muslim belief in Books and Prophets is to describe each. We will work with the subject from two separate angles: first from the outward point of view, that is, what the Muslims and the Christians have in mind when they think about or mention their faith in Books and Prophets; thereafter what the inner theological differences are between the two.

### SECTION I

2. The following is the pattern of a conversation I have heard times without number. Details may vary, but in the main, this is it.

**Muslim:** ‘We Muslims acknowledge and accept four Books: Taurat, Zabur, Injil, Quran (the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the “Gospel” and the Quran). They are all Books which were sent down from heaven, and all are equally God’s Word.’

**Christian:** ‘In that case we Christians can take it for granted that you have read all four equally and are acquainted with the contents of each?’

**M.:** ‘Oh no. We don’t need to read the first three, for all that was of permanent importance in them was finally gathered up and revealed in the Quran.’

**C.:** ‘What sense is there then in saying that you acknowledge and accept four Books, when three of them have no permanent value and are now of no practical use?’



**M.:** ‘The Quran says that they are God’s Word, and as such should be revered.’

**C.:** ‘If you would try to study these Books, which you call God’s Word, you would soon discover that the law of Moses is in many ways radically different from the law of Muhammed, and that the Quran is constantly contradicting the Book you call the Injil. How can they all four be God’s Word then?’

**M.:** ‘The Quran says that both the Jews and the Christians have changed their Books to suit their own purposes.’

**C.:** ‘In other words you believe that the three previous Books are out of date and useless, and even then the Jews and the Christians have taken the trouble to corrupt them. You acknowledge and accept these three useless and degraded Books, and yet you have never even seen them, although they are available everywhere on earth. You wouldn’t waste your time reading them, and yet you enthusiastically maintain that they are God’s Word. Tell me, what sense does all this make? What benefit is there in it?’

**M.:** ‘You should know that we accept the original Books, not the corrupted ones you are in possession of.’

**C.:** ‘And surely you should know that irrefutable proof exists to show that at least 200–300 years before the birth of Muhammed those three Books were even as they are now. Nothing has been changed in them. So Muhammed couldn’t possibly have meant that the Jews and the Christians had changed their Books. Furthermore Muhammed himself can never have read these Books for they were not available in Arabic in his generation.’

**M.:** ‘Our prophet knew by revelation that the three previous Books had been corrupted. Therefore we accept the Quranic statement and are not interested in your historical proofs. The originals were God’s Word.’

**C.:** ‘What you mean is that the three originals don’t even exist on earth today. What is it then that you acknowledge and accept?’

**M.:** ‘We accept all four Books . . . etc. etc.’

3. And the merry-go-round whirls faster and faster until no one seems to know what it is all about. Everyone is dizzy. What probably disturbs the

inquiring Christian is that he cannot find an adequate reason for the Muslim's almost fanatical acceptance of these three Books together with his Quran. In reality it seems to be nothing but an abstract theory, having no positive relationship to either life or religion.

4. If the Christian pursues the subject further he is in for another shock. For the Muslim will tell him that, all in all, Allah has sent down 104 (the number varies) scriptures, beginning with those given to Adam, the first Book-bringer. With the exception of the four already mentioned, these smaller scriptures are called *Sahifa* or Pamphlets, and the great majority of these Pamphlets were taken back up to heaven again after they had accomplished that for which they were sent. But they are also included (whether the layman knows it or not) when the Muslim says that he believes in Books and Prophets.

5. If you then ask the Muslim why Allah has left precisely these three antiquated, corrupted and useless Books to languish on earth, after He had taken all the others back to heaven, you can expect that he will probably surprise you by saying that, since there still are Jews and Christians on earth, and these are 'People of a Book', and since Muhammed recommends that they should read and follow their Books, God could not very well take the three previous Books away!

6. So then you are back where you started. In other words, for the western mind at least, there is something incomprehensible in the Muslim teaching about Books. This makes me believe that the real, genuine reason for this tenet of faith in Islam is not centered in the Books themselves, but elsewhere, and that the doctrine about Books is made to fit in with something else.

7. In the meantime, one hears even Christians say that our position regarding the scriptures of the Jews is basically the same as that found in Islam regarding the Christian Scriptures. The only difference is that since Muhammed came about 600 years after Christ, the Muslim puts the Christian faith in the same category as the Jewish: for him both are antiquated.

8. Superficially this statement may appear to be correct. Actually it is not. We use the terms Old Testament and New Testament for the component parts, but the Book as a whole we call the Bible or the Holy Scriptures. We keep, protect, revere and propagate the Old as well as the New Testament. The *idjma* (concensus) of the Church has always been that the covenants old and new are originally and vitally connected with each other.

9. The Christian thinks of the Old Testament as the prototype, the symbol, the shadow thrown back from coming events, and as prophecy or promise regarding future fulfilment. These things have their efficacy in our day in being types, symbols, shadows and prophecy. When the substance, the reality, the thing itself has come, it is known, recognised and acknowledged to be substance and reality, because of the comprehension and understanding of the symbols and the shadows that were cast before. The New Covenant, not understood and accepted on the background of the Old Covenant, is not at all understood and accepted. The theologians of Rationalism and Liberalism made a complete fiasco at this stage of their thinking, in that they believed it was possible to pluck Christ out of the original picture and transplant Him as Reason or Personality on the background of various cultures. It cannot be done.

10. However, our Christian acceptance of the Old Covenant is implicitly conditioned by our relationship to the New Covenant. Having accepted the substance, the reality, we study it and try to comprehend it the better by acquainting ourselves more thoroughly with the types, shadows, symbols and revelations found in the old one. Then these things, in themselves, take on a new meaning, according to how we have been influenced or informed by the New Covenant. In short, the Church maintains that you understand the new on the basis of the old, and thereafter the old on the basis of the new; and when this interdependence is not disturbed God's truth is fully revealed in Jesus Christ.

11. That is quite a different position and attitude from that found among Muslims and their acceptance of the four Books. I have told many a Muslim that Christians print, publish and propagate the books of the Old Testament in a far greater volume than the Jews are capable of. When did you ever hear of a Muslim Society printing the Old or New Testament? That fact in itself proves that the position and attitude of the Christian is not parallel with that of the Muslim.

12. In other words, for us, our acknowledgement and acceptance of the Old Testament is definitely dependent on the fact that it has a necessary function in relation to Christianity. Were it not so, one need have no scruples about ignoring it.

13. Books and prophets are usually yoked together, so before we continue with the problem in hand we should stop long enough to bring in the Muslim and Christian teaching regarding the Prophets also.

14. The Muslim says that there have been 124,000 (more or less) Prophets, all of whom were of the same quality and essence, although

their offices have differed in importance. If there is any one thing the Muslim is, it is a systematist; he classifies and systematises everything, the Prophets in this case. About 313 are called apostles. Nine are called ‘possessors of constancy’. Eight are *rasuls* (that is, those having a separate ‘people’ for which they are responsible). Six are law-givers, six have special titles. Of all the 124,000 only about twenty-eight are mentioned in the Quran. And there are a few doubtful ones, like Alexander the Great.

15. These classifications, although adhered to rather strictly in the beginning, were taken less seriously by later generations, and in Iran they are nearly completely ignored as the one word, *Paighamber*, messenger, is used to translate the several Arabic words.

16. Of the 124,000 prophets mentioned in the traditions, the ordinary unlettered Muslim probably knows Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammed. What the ordinary unlettered Muslim knows about these great Prophets comes in the main from a Persian book of legends, called *Qisas-ul-Ambia* (the stories of the prophets), which has been widely translated in many Muslim countries. The book is not reliable, not even as a book of legends!

17. One would suppose that learned Muslims would go to the original sources in order to study and know more about the great men who, according to the Muslim frame of thought, have been honoured with offices in Islam. But not so. The only knowledge an orthodox Muslim needs about these great men of the past is what is found in the Quran and in Islamic books based on the Quran. It would be a tacit admission that the Quran is not all-sufficient if scholars were to follow such a methodology. This fact came out very clearly at the International Islamic Colloquium at Lahore a few years ago.

18. Succinctly, all the bother and trouble taken to acknowledge, accept, classify and give honourable titles to prophets adds up to this: That, in the end, it means nothing whatsoever—at least not directly. And so we are back again at our first question.

19. Now what about the Christian attitude towards prophets? We are without doubt utilitarian; we do not classify them and dress them in beautiful names, and then put them away in a corner or in a showcase. We confess that our faith is that of the Prophets and the Apostles. The Prophets and Apostles are usually bracketed together as the human repositories of the faith ‘once for all delivered to the saints’. This means for us that the Apostles were dependent on the teaching of the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament for their understanding and interpretation of Christ. The

number of direct and indirect quotations from the Old Testament prophetic scriptures in the New Testament is amazingly large. In this the writers of the New Testament have our Lord as prototype, for also He used the Old Testament scriptures in His witness about Himself (Matt. 22:42; Luke 24:27; John 5:39; etc.). God's relation and attitude to His people, His absolute holiness, His conception of and wrath over sin and sinners, as well as His forbearance and love for His own and His faithfulness toward them are revealed in the struggles His prophets had with the people of the Old Covenant in many various situations. All of this is prophetic in that it is brought to perfection and complete fulfilment in our Lord, just as the Apostles have taught us.

20. What I am trying to explain is that in Christianity no understanding of the Books and the prophets is necessary other than that which is inherent in the subject itself; whereas in the Muslim belief you have to search for the real reason for retaining the Books and the prophets as objects of faith outside the objects themselves. Anyone who knows the other tenets of Islam and the practices of Muslims would be justified in asking: Why not say: 'I acknowledge and accept Muhammed, the one all-inclusive prophet, and the Quran, the one all-inclusive Book'—and leave it at that? That is in reality what the Muslim means, and that is what Muhammed ended by preaching (cf. chapter 29).

21. I am convinced that the answer to the whole question lies in a much larger and much more complicated context. Muslims have a very great fear of anything that tends towards anthropomorphism. It is, therefore, extremely remarkable how Muhammed's conception of God's rule of the universe runs parallel with what he must have known of the methods by which rulers of far-flung empires kept their kingdoms intact and in subjugation. They were despots, who ruled by decree and edict, made known and implemented by messengers, wazirs, governors, petty kings and princes, and enforced by great armies whenever necessary. That is how Muhammed sees Allah ruling the world. He gives an edict on every subject, and angels carry out his orders in the realm of nature. It rains because Allah has decreed that it shall rain, and not because of any natural law. There is a plague, not because certain germs are being spread around but because Allah has ordained the plague. Muhammed believed also that when Allah gives his orders to his messengers, the jinns are nearby in hiding, and when they have gained information by eavesdropping they go down to earth and inform certain people who then can foretell the future—obviously the age-old espionage system.

22. Within this great administrative work Allah also uses prophets, nabis, rasuls, apostles, warners, and other human messengers in his direct dealings with mankind; and his edicts on religion and morals are contained in the various scriptures.

To think of Allah as an almighty Caesar ruling his empire well and efficiently is merely the reverse of thinking as the Romans did, that the mighty Caesar was a god!

23. My argument is that the Muslim acknowledgement and acceptance of Books and Prophets does not in the first instance say anything about the Books and Prophets themselves but it does say something about Muhammed's conception of how God administers the universe, or at least part of the universe which has to do directly with mankind and its sojourn here on earth. The actual number of Books and Prophets does not seem to have concerned Muhammed overmuch; nor was he really interested in what detailed edicts and orders came to earth through the agencies of these Books and Prophets.

24. The idea seems to be that this conception of Books and Prophets fits in with the fact that the King of kings rules his universe in a particular way. But when you go on from there, the next point is that Muhammed and his Book are not singular, isolated phenomena in world history. Muhammed and his Quran are naturally a part of the great overall picture of divine administration. The Arabic Book and the Arabic Warner are in this manner given background and continuity, and it makes good sense to acknowledge and accept the Quran as a Book given by Allah through the agency of Muhammed. The final step is taken when you realise the fact that they came last of all. Mankind has now reached the point of integration, where local Warners and Prophets are no longer needed, and distinctive warnings, written in various colloquial languages, are superfluous. With the development of communications and the spread of learning, whatever is made available in any one major language by one man is easily made available to mankind everywhere. God has therefore gathered up and summarised everything of permanent importance in all the previous books and confirmed it in the Quran. In other words, the genuine uniqueness of the Quran is not that it is a Book revealed from heaven, but that, as the corollary of the acceptance of the larger background picture with its many written warnings and its ten thousands of local messengers from Allah, it is the last and final Book and Muhammed is 'the seal of the Prophets'. Said more simply, if the Book and the Prophet of Arabia are last and final, then there must have been something which came before of the same kind.

And this idea fits in perfectly with the conception of Allah's kingship; with the theory of revelation found in Islam, that is, continuity, and with the superiority of the Quran over all other revelations.

25. There is also a very modern aspect to this question of acknowledgment and acceptance of Books and Prophets, just on general principles. As I have said before in this book, modern Muslims are reaching out for every possible argument to prove that the Quran teaches tolerance and goodwill towards other religions and people of other faiths. Now, if there have been over 124,000 messengers from Allah in the world, and over 100 scriptures, large and small, since the beginning of time, then it is reasonable to expect that there must be some remnants of their work here and there in the world. The most obvious are of course Jewry and Christianity. But there are others. Modern Muslims lay hold of those with both hands, whenever possible. Let me give you just one example. For the first time in modern history the Buddhist Jayanti ceremony was held in Karachi. It is a three-day festival, celebrating the birth, enlightenment and death of Buddha (2,504 after Buddha). The interesting aspect of this exhibition of culture was that the Minister of Education, a Muslim, inaugurated the ceremony. In his inaugural speech, he stated that Islam and Buddhism have much in common. Now note what was first: tolerance. He said that intolerance was opposed to the tempers of both religions. The brotherhood of man also found support in both religions. And in the end he said that there is (in Pakistan) nothing but admiration for the pristine purity of Buddhism.

26. This modern attitude towards all other religions reminds one of the spurious doctrine found (all too often) also among Christian missionaries, called '*Logos spermatikos*', meaning that God has not left Himself without a seed of witness in any land. The rationalist (whether Christian or Muslim) then goes on to believe that he can develop this 'seed' into a full grown *Logos*—Christian or Muslim as the case may be. Or at least he can be friendly and tolerant towards the people concerned. That is, of course, a complete misunderstanding of what tolerance is (cf. chapter 7), but we cannot go back to that here in this chapter.

27. The point is that the Muslim doctrine of Books and Prophets necessarily gives the awakening, modern Muslim a real foothold in his effort to make Islam one of the many members of a great family of religions. Perhaps an 'elder brother', but still one of many, instead of a strict missionary religion, as the first generation of Muslims usually conceived it to be.

## SECTION II

28. We can now go over to the inner and theological aspect of this question, in order to ascertain how the Christian and Muslim teachings stand in relation to each other. Getting down to the real, basic divergence between the two may be somewhat difficult for the Christian because it involves not only our fundamental theological thinking, but also our understanding of an attitude towards earthly governments. Although even a child may know that a despot is an autocrat, an absolute ruler, yet comparatively few people have the power of imagination necessary to give them any real understanding of what life must be in a country where the ruler with a nod of his head can sentence a subject to death—not in consequence of any statutes or laws, but simply because he so wills it. Even in those Western countries where kings are still extant, these are benevolent monarchs whose main duty is to keep traditions and traditional customs alive. They no longer rule their countries. Expressions like King of kings, Lord Sabaoth, Rab-ul-arbab, come from an age when mighty potentates ruled the world. Simply by proclaiming such and such as their wish and will, that proclamation became edict, a decree to be obeyed implicitly by all the millions of subjects under their control.

29. Expressions of this kind are often used in the necessarily limited vocabulary of religion in order to make abstract ideas more concrete. The ever-present danger in this method is, however, that people without a grain of poetry or imagination in their make-up strip the words of their symbolic meaning and apply them literally to whatever they are working with at the moment. The results are always erroneous conclusions. When the picture of God as King of kings, the Lord Sabaoth or Rab-ul-arbab is taken literally instead of symbolically, all the necessary paraphernalia of an earthly government, including the mode of government, is dragged into the consciousness of those concerned. The mode of government is, as before mentioned, by decree and edict. On this background, a peculiar attitude towards divinity is developed which is obvious not only in Islam but also in Judaism.

30. In the 13th chapter of Romans you find the typical attitude of that age towards government. The ruler, says St Paul, is not a terror to good works, but to evil. So if you wish to be unafraid of the ruler, do good; but if you do evil you had better be afraid, for he does not carry the sword in vain. So where the edicts and decrees of the ruler are promulgated his subjects avidly acquaint themselves with these, in order to protect themselves



against the ruler, whose wrath and sword they fear. In our day in a police state, people assure themselves against any contact with the police by hiding unnoticed behind the laws published. In this way a hedge or high wall of partition is built up directly between the ruler and his subjects. His edicts and decrees become the treasured possession of the people, for only by shielding themselves behind them is there any assurance of safety. The last thing the subjects wish is any contact with the ruler, for they fear his anger and his power to destroy them.

31. The selfsame thing happens when the ruler is Allah or Jahweh. His decrees and laws are used as a hedge, a pale, which keep God on His side and man on his. This means that in reality man strives to keep God out of his life, and the more he loves and keeps the divine laws, the more secure he is from any contact with God.

32. The Prophets and Apostles look at it differently. Isaiah presents Jahweh as saying (Isa. 65:2):

*I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts.*

And the Psalmist says (Ps. 103) that the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, and that He pities them that fear Him, like a father has pity on a son, for He knows our frame that it is dust. St John tells us in that world-famous verse (John 3:16) that God loves the human race so much that He sacrificed His own Son to save it from destruction.

And St Paul writes to the Corinthians (II Cor. 5:20) that God Himself is pleading with them through the Apostle, that they for the sake of Christ should be reconciled to God.

33. I have given these few references only to show that, while Christianity definitely holds fast to the imagery and symbolism of the expressions 'King of kings' and 'Rab-ul-arbab', it does so with the added predicate that the King of kings has revealed Himself as Father not merely in the sense of being the ultimate origin of mankind but also, and particularly, in His parental solicitude and care. He shows Himself in the Incarnation of our Lord as breaking through that high hedge which man has constructed of the divine edicts and decrees in order to live among us. He has become Emmanuel (God with us), and man cannot escape direct contact with Him. Christianity teaches how useless, futile and ungodly it is for man to take the very things of God and use them as a barrier against God, precisely by assiduously doing the very things God has decreed!

The Prophets point out repeatedly how blasphemous a thing it is zealously to offer sacrifices which Jahweh has decreed, with hands covered with the blood of widows and orphans. Is it not also true that many Muslims bear the burdens of the pilgrimage to Mecca, with the express intention of doing something to make up for their sins—great or small—whichever the case may be? But no informed Christian could possibly use the Books and Prophets to protect himself from close contact with God—even if He were—or turned out to be—the God of wrath with a flaming sword. When God breaks through that man-made hedge, He always does so with a thunderous No! precisely to the pious man who has secured himself from God as Emmanuel by faithfully keeping the law. But—once again—that No! comes from the parental lips of the Father, Who remembers that our frame is as dust, and Who in Christ removes our sin as far from us as the East is removed from the West.

34. We must therefore conclude that the Christian has no use for the Books and the Prophets in the way in which Jews and Muslims can—and do—use them.

35. There is one more momentous point, which must never be forgotten. By issuing and promulgating edicts, decrees and laws, an earthly potentate binds and commits his subjects to a certain, definite way of life. In principle, if not always in practice, these proclamations constitute what the Quran calls ‘a clear guidance’, so that people may know not only what is expected of them, but more particularly what is demanded of them. But these decrees do not at the same time bind the potentate, nor is he in any way committed because of them. As the giver of the law, he is above the law. Likewise, when God is thought of as Rab-ul-arbab in the literal sense, He is not committed to righteousness, but He is the Lord, the Master of righteousness. His laws and decrees teach people what conception of righteousness they are bound to consider valid for themselves and for their attitude towards life; but they do not inform mankind as to what kind of righteousness (if any) one can expect to find in Allah, for Allah is above and beyond any conception of righteousness. Naturally, therefore, the purpose of Books and Prophets in Islam is not to acquaint people with Allah in his actual relationship to mankind, but only to make them aware of his laws, decrees and edicts. Likewise it is also natural that in Islam the medium of revelation is Books and Prophets.

36. The very opposite is found in the Church. The Son of the Father, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, is symbolically called the WORD, This WORD was existent from the beginning, it was with God and it was

God. God Himself is revealed to man in the Incarnation as being man or 'flesh' as the expression goes. But he is not revealed in that we see or hear Him; but because the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, effectually opens our minds, so that in seeing we may recognise and in hearing we may understand God in His contact with man. When no Book or Prophet gets in between, but God in Himself and through Himself reveals Himself in His relation to man, we discover that He is binding Himself, committing Himself, in accordance with the absolute freedom of His sovereignty, to a definite course of action. The faith which we have been given teaches us to understand that this course of action is to save His creation from utter destruction, the very thing mankind is powerless to do for itself.

In short, the purpose of revelation is to teach us that God has bound and committed Himself; and the medium of revelation is God Himself in the Trinity of His Godhead. Nothing comes between God and His contact with man.

37. What use have we Christians then in any case for Books and Prophets? If I were to answer: 'No use whatsoever', it would be true; if I were to answer: 'Much in every way', that would also be true. The Books and Prophets are only weak earthen vessels in which we have great riches. The earthen vessels 'as such' mean nothing to us except that they are repositories of our abundant riches. The thirsty person, panting for water, has no interest in the earthenware bowl in which he is given water to drink. The bowl means nothing to him. On the other hand, without a receptacle of some kind the water would not be available. God revealed Himself inside the warp and woof of history. The WORD became flesh and lived on earth at a certain time, and a certain place. It is therefore necessary to have authenticated and reliable witnesses and records so that all men at all times everywhere may come to a knowledge of that WORD. But the knowledge available from these witnesses and from that record is, in one way of speaking, in the same category as the WORD itself, when it was manifested in the warp and woof of history. People may see and hear—just as in the case of the WORD itself—but without the effectual working of the Holy Spirit they can neither recognise nor understand God in His contact with man. But through the working of the Holy Spirit the witness and the record lose their identity and prominence as man realises that he is here standing in the presence of God and hearing Him speak.

38. To any person who will patiently study the facts it should be obvious that actually and in reality there is not one iota of likeness between the Muslim and the Christian faith in relation to Books and Prophets,

except perhaps the denotation of the very words and expressions which are used.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why is it futile to discuss 'Books' with the Muslims, as indicated in paragraph 27?
2. Why does the Muslim believe that the Books previous to the Quran are corrupted and/or abrogated?
3. State summarily what the difference is between the place in the system as a whole the Books have in Islam and in Christianity.

## CHAPTER 36

# Predestination and Fatalism

1. In order to be sure that we are thinking of the same things when we use the same words, I find it necessary, especially in this chapter, as clearly as possible to define both the important words, namely ‘predestination’ and ‘fatalism’, in the sense in which I am using them. These words are not, and should not, be used or thought of as synonyms, even though they do dovetail into each other, both in definition and experience, if you are not careful.

### FATALISM

2. A very ancient thought, found both in the East and in the West, is that behind the gods and goddesses who take active part in human affairs, a greater and inscrutable Power controls the destinies of both gods and human beings. In the dualism of Zoroastrianism this Power of destiny was the unifying element in the system of thought built up around the two gods, one struggling for the supremacy of goodness, the other for the supremacy of evil. In Greek mythology there were the three Fates, or the one Goddess of destiny. Behind the triad of Hinduism is the great impersonal Unknowable. Allah was also a Power of this kind, behind the tribal gods and goddesses of pre-Islamic Arabia. In modern natural science the Primal Cause of all other causes and effects is also an enigmatic impersonal power, which is accepted in an impersonal, often more or less unconscious, attitude towards the vicissitudes of life. One thing they all have in common is that, although man and his gods have no access to this Power, yet their lives in all details are completely abandoned to the working of this unknown and unknowable Power. It does not follow that this Power has any necessary moral or rational quality. It is thought of as good, bad and indifferent. In some cases the apparently evil is accepted as a blessing in disguise,

because this Power is thought of as good. Whichever way you take it, no understandable moral code is predicated of this power, and certainly no rational control.

3. This is what I call fate. It is interesting to note that this idea of fate (under different names) is quite common in our day. William James has this idea. Karl Marx, when working out his dialectical materialism, believed that a classless society would of necessity evolve. (It was Lenin, NOT Marx, who insisted that man must actively contribute to the evolution of that which Marx held would evolve of itself.) Philosophical existentialism is essentially fatalistic. And the great masses of unchurched 'Christians' have a fatalistic attitude towards the exigencies of life.

4. Since so many people through the ages have accepted and lived on some variety of fatalistic idealism, it must in some way or other satisfy the needs of humanity. What is there in it of religious value? When I was a child there was a simple little joke that went the rounds. It sounded something like this: 'Do you know what they do in Berlin when it rains?' Reply: 'No'. 'They let it rain'. Of course they did. What else could they do? Even though their fields were flooded and their houses and highways ruined, they would submit to the inevitable and, when it was over, they would repair what they could and carry on as before. When a strong wind blows through a tree it may lose innumerable leaves and some branches may break off and be carried away, but the tree sways and bends and gives way. Therefore it is still standing, although harmed and crippled, when the storm is over. If it were rigid, it would have been uprooted. In like manner a doctrine of fatalism helps man to bow and bend in submission when the storms of life are over him, even though he is being hurt and harmed. But precisely because he bows and submits, he is enabled later to raise his head and carry on as before. On the one hand, such a doctrine of fatalism gives him no joy, no comfort and no security. On the other hand, he is not frustrated, disillusioned or bitter. 'It had to be—so what?' Very common words indeed! But the man who is rigid, who rages against fate in impotent protest, soon cracks up and is destroyed.

Now I hope you have understood what I am talking about when I say 'fate'.

### PREDESTINATION

5. This is an entirely different thing. That power of destiny which is behind all is not blind, ruthless necessity. There is a 'predestiner', if I may

coin a word. In other words, there is a Being behind it all, an intelligence, a rational control. Just as the gods and goddesses of old were believed to be in contact with human events and spasmodically influenced them, so this greater-than-all Being is intelligently in touch with the details of human life, and predetermines what is to be. Theoretically this is true of the God of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. These religions have eliminated the demi-gods between man and the Power of destiny, and have accepted this Power of destiny as the God who is intelligently in touch with what He predetermines and predestinates. Certainly, most assuredly, the storm wind blows through the tree also in this case, but it is not blind necessity without rational control. There is a Being, intelligence and purpose behind the storm, whether man is able to understand it or not.

6. The doctrine of predestination can be developed in many various ways, but before going into that I must note that here at this point the difference between prophet and priest is glaringly apparent. The prophet, believing himself to have a burning message to tell forth, never creates theology. On the contrary, he blasts all logical thinking, trying to get into the heart and consciousness of man. It is only later, when the result of his labours is an established religious institution, that the priests (in their capacity of theologians) try to systematise the utterings of the 'Master', the prophet, into some kind of logical scheme of doctrines and dogmas. Do not misunderstand me. The functions of the priest (also as theologian) are a sheer necessity, but you must recognise the fact that the logical construction of the prophetic utterances will invariably lead to widely divergent systems of thought.

7. Now, if we leave all else aside and stick strictly to our subject, we will find that the 'prophetic' utterances in the Old and New Testaments, as well as those in the Koran, speak one moment of absolute predestination and the next moment of man's free will and clear responsibility. The learned men of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have always (and still do) waged intellectual wars, trying to prove either predestination or free will as the true and only basis of faith. As a matter of fact, both sides are able to quote innumerable verses from their scriptures, indicating how right they are! This is just as true of the Muslim<sup>1</sup> as of Jewish and Christian theologians. It is therefore absurd for Christians to insist that the Allah of the Koran

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<sup>1</sup> See articles on predestination in Hughes's *A Dictionary of Islam*, and on Kada and Kadar in *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*.

never encourages the free will of mankind in its efforts towards godliness. Of course he does.

8. How differently Christians can use the Koran may be seen from the two following quotations:

Blair, *The Sources of Islam* (pp. 104 ff.), sees Mohammed as a 'Master-mind' using the material at hand to work out his plans:

The Quran contains many passages which teach this doctrine (predestination), and Muslim traditions are as dogmatic in their assertion of it. Great stress was laid upon it by Muhammed, for the 'Master-mind of Arabia', with his farseeing judgement and intimate knowledge of human nature, discerned what subtle and powerful effects the doctrine would exercise on the minds of his unsophisticated and fanatical followers, not only to establish more firmly his own position among them as a prophet, but also for the propagation of the Muslim faith, and the establishment of a Muhammedan empire. It taught his followers to be courageous and fearless in the face of danger, to attribute the victory to the purpose of God.

Tor Andrea, *Mohammed, the Man, and His Faith* (pp. 84 ff.), speaks of Mohammed in these words:

The most remarkable implication of the Prophet's belief in Allah as sovereign, free, and indeterminable will is his doctrine of election by grace. Ultimately man's belief or unbelief does not depend upon his own desire and choice. It is Allah who grants or withholds the gift of faith, who either makes the heart receptive to warnings and revivals, or hardens the senses and veils the eyes of the soul.

The great and only significant and decisive thing which matters is God's majesty, His honour, His almighty, unconditioned will. This will, the cause and principle of all existence, cannot be forced, broken, or influenced by the rebelliousness and opposition of man. Man is not able to rebel against God's will and spoil His plan of salvation. The titanic rebellion of the godless man is a pathetic act of self-deception.

9. The only conclusion one can come to is that both men are leaning way over backwards to prove something about Mohammed. The one makes him out to be a cloak-and-dagger villain, the other a conscientious seeker after truth. Neither of these two things are to the point. The emphasis should not be on freewill versus predestination—that way of posing man's problems belongs to the bygone ages. What we must ask is whether Islam in reality teaches predestination or fatalism. Comparing Islam with Christianity on the basis of an argument about freewill over against predestination simply shows that the real problem has either not been seen or is being ignored.

10. I have often in my reading run across remarks about the like-ness between the Calvinistic and the Muslim teaching on predestination.



Tor Andrea adds St Paul and Luther!<sup>2</sup> Although I am not a Calvinist but a Lutheran, remarks of this kind have worried me considerably. From a purely theoretical point of view, there MUST be a difference between the teaching of Calvin and that of Mohammed on the same subject, simply because Christ in Christianity is NOT THE CHRIST OF ISLAM. Therefore to say that there is a likeness at this point must be extraordinarily superficial. But just why? That question is important.

11. Let us attack the problem from a radically different angle. There is a most heinous sin that theologians as well as untrained people are very apt to fall into. It is to think and work with doctrines, dogmas, and articles of religion, outside the context of faith, as though they were general knowledge or axiomatic principles. Can anything be more ridiculous than arguing, as Raymond Lull did mathematically, to prove the reasonableness of the dogma of the Holy Trinity? Or to try to find a pattern in nature to build up a complex unity on the basis of a simple unity, as Gairdner did? Or to try to prove the rational possibility of the virgin birth of our Lord on the basis of zoological and botanical parthenogenesis (unfertilised propagation), as De Vries did?

12. In the area of the Church, in the realm of faith, there is no doctrine, dogma, or article of religion which rests in itself, and can be proved or disproved by means of the same general principle or knowledge as found outside the Church, speaking in faith. For example, if you could prove or demonstrate that mathematically one can be three, there would still not be an iota of proof in that feat which could strengthen or demonstrate the truth of our faith in the Holy Trinity. And the most brilliant argument of complexity in highly developed unity says just nothing about the Trinity-in-Unity of the Athanasian Creed.

13. Now if we are going to talk about predestination as some kind of a philosophical or metaphysical concept, there is only one thing we can be sure of: it will not have any relationship to the faith of the Christian Church. If it were possible to take Calvin's teaching about predestination, paragraph by paragraph, and compare it with Mohammed's, and then to point out a hundred likenesses, still that would not prove any genuine similarity, for in each case the doctrines would be isolated from their context; they would be resting in themselves as general knowledge or philosophical conceptions, which is precisely what they are NOT.

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<sup>2</sup> For illustration see *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (p. 199), Blair *The Source of Islam* (p. 105), and Tor Andrea (op. cit., p. 86).

14. In other words, for us the vital question is not by any means the detailed teaching about predestination; it is rather, who is the predestiner, the one who predetermines? In the one case it is Mohammed's Allah, in the other it is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If the focal point becomes *who*, rather than *what*, or *how*, we are immediately back into the area of the Church and the realm of faith. The problem then becomes, how are we to understand the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the predestiner, contrasted with Mohammed's Allah in the same role? The answer to that question will show what radically different attitudes towards life go under the same name.

15. In Arabic there is a word called *qadr*, which supposedly means measure, value, degree; and from that comes the measurement of life, events, etc., that is to say, degrees of predestination. From this root you get *qudrat*, which means divine power; then *qadir*, the name of God denoting omnipotence; and finally *taqdir*, which means predestination, and is used as such mostly in the traditions and in Islamic theology. In Islam the predestiner is thought of in terms of absolute power. This is not only concerned with predestination; everything in Islam finally leads back to *qudrat*, that is, power—almightiness, final and ultimate. The Muslim conception of this power attribute of Allah is so overwhelming that even absolute eternal decrees become, in the final analysis, penultimate absolutes. This means that even predestination is not related to the Being of Allah, but is only predestination if that Absolute Power maintains it as predestination and does not cancel or abrogate it, a course of action he is powerful enough to adopt at any moment. As has been mentioned before, truth is not truth in itself, but only as long as the Absolute Power is pleased to maintain it as truth. Mohammed said that if Allah so wished he could at any time destroy both him and Islam, as though they never existed. The idea is that power in the Being of Allah is so absolute that nothing can stand before it, not even previous, eternal decrees. Even they are given on the presumption that the power of Allah can destroy or change them at any given moment. Actually, then, nothing is left in the Universe but Power. We can say it simply in this way: Allah has not bound Himself in anything He has done, not even in that which He Himself has predetermined, predestined.

Tor Andrea says (op. cit., pp. 91, 89):

It is entirely consistent with Mohammed's conception of God that Allah cannot be held to a word which He has once spoken. If He so desires, He is free to change what

He has previously decreed. Indeed, if He wanted to do so, He could even cancel the whole revelation which He has give to Mohammed (17, 88). No one can call Him to account for His actions. Another peculiar aspect of the irrational nature of the Divine will is that Allah often makes offensive or misleading statements in order to 'prove' men, or even to stir up unbelievers to contradict the revealed word (74, 30; 17, 42).

Mohammed does not attribute unchangeableness to the Divine being. It is not enough that Allah's decision can never be changed by an outside power, but His will possesses in itself neither limits nor obstacles, which means that He never binds himself to a decision which He has once made. It is one of the mysteries of this unrestricted Divine will that Allah obviously cares nothing about being consistent.

16. Admittedly any doctrine of predestination based exclusively on the idea of power, and carried through to the ultimate, must end just where Mohammed's thinking ended, namely in cancelling out all real sense of predestination. *Taqdir* is no longer ultimate, but only penultimate *taqdir*, when no moral quality, no rational control and no consistent action may be predicted of the power that determines beforehand the destiny of the human race, and of individuals. The Muslim is, then, theoretically at least, completely in the dark, not even knowing for sure that *taqdir* is in actual fact *taqdir*. Tying up predestination with the power concept is primal and basic in Islam, which may be adduced from the fact that the name of Mohammed's religion is Islam, meaning either submission or resignation. Some maintain that Islam only means submission, and add that this submission is not resignation to fate, but willing obedience. Actually it does not make any real difference in the concept as such.

17. The deduction I want to make here is this: in the picture as a whole, as presented by Islamic literature and nations, Allah is a Being that, apart from the power concept, is so remote that man really knows nothing about him, so that as an intelligent Being in contact with his creation he fades out, and the picture that takes his place is the age-old Power of destiny. If anyone will take a fair look at the whole Muslim world of today, he will find that, apart from the infinitesimally small percentage of modern and secular Muslims, the great masses of ordinary orthodox believers meet all the buffetings of life with an idealistic fatalism, not far removed from that on which the heathen of old, the masses of unchurched Christians, and many of the modern scientists and philosophers base their life. The reason for this state of affairs in Islam is not in the actual sentence by sentence teaching about predestination, taken out of its context, but because the predestiner is precisely Mohammed's Allah and no one else. In other

words, predestination in the hands of Mohammed's Allah becomes fatalism in the minds and attitudes of his devotees.

18. Now let us look at Christianity. I have often been surprised (though I do not know why I should have been!) to hear the unchurched and the anti-churchmen say that they felt a kinship to the Muslim teaching about destiny or *qismat*. Obviously the idea of bowing bravely or stoically in submission before the unknowable Power of destiny would seem a familiar action, although different words are used, by people who are ignorant of, or have ignored, Jesus Christ and the teaching of His Church, and have fallen back on ancient human ideas.

19. Now just what does the Church have to say about predestination? The salvation of mankind, by means of Jesus Christ, was predetermined in the counsels of God before the foundations of the world were laid. Christian belief in salvation must of necessity have as a corollary, faith in the predestined salvation of mankind. It then follows from this collective conception of predestination that every individual may rightly say: I have been predestined to have eternal life. That is the purpose of God, the goal God has set Himself.

20. It would appear that in Calvinism the doctrine of predestination derives from the emphatic teaching about the eternal decrees. In Lutheran theology predestination is the resultant teaching from the conception that man has no innate ability to bring about his own salvation. Therefore, since there is salvation, it is God's predetermined act. But in Calvinism, man's utter inability to save himself is stated as an article of faith, just as strongly as in Lutheran theology. On the other hand, Luther could also speak of the omnipotence of God as connected with our salvation. I would say that the real difference is that while Lutherans tie it in with man's normal experience of God's grace in salvation, Calvinists propound it more formally as doctrine, which must be accepted in faith. Suffice it to say that predestination in Christianity is not primarily concerned with extolling the omnipotence of God, but with the salvation of mankind. In other words both Luther and Calvin were aware of the fact that the Predestiner was the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and therefore predestination is to be seen first of all in our Lord, His life, teaching, passion, death, resurrection, ascension and second advent, all of which were foreordained in the eternal counsels. Going on from there, we can say that whatever has to do with Christ is predestined. In other words, we must understand predestination on the basis of our Lord's relationship to His Father—God.

21. What we learn in this way is, first of all, that the emphasis in predestination is NOT—emphatically NOT—on man, as being bound by, or abandoned to a mighty Power—personal or impersonal—so that his safest and wisest course is, like the tree mentioned above, to bow, bend and submit. On the contrary. Predestination teaches us something about God. It tells us that God in His eternal counsels has bound Himself. A remarkable phrase is used in both the Old and New Testaments, namely, that God swore an oath. What stronger and more dramatic language about God could be used to assure us that God is bound, has bound Himself. There is also mention of covenants and of unfailing promises. In other words, the faithfulness of God towards His creation, which is the essence of the Gospel, derives precisely from the doctrine of predestination. God can and will fulfil that which He predetermined was to be the destiny of mankind; salvation through Jesus Christ. All true knowledge of predestination is derived from this teaching.

22. The next thing we see—or should see—when trying to understand predestination is that in Christ we see that the almightiness of God—like all the divine attributes—must of necessity show itself on earth in its opposite. God's power in relation to man is not in competition with or a further development of the near-almightiness of some eminent oriental potentate. God carries through His predetermined purpose inside the context of human frailty and creatureliness. Therefore His power is crowned with thorns, plaited by sinful man's hands, and yet, without fighting back, invisibly, that power is working towards its goal. When informed Christians contemplate the glory of the almightiness of God, they see it in all its splendour—on the cross. Not the cross as such, but as the symbol of God's mighty power to complete His unalterable purpose, namely the rescue of mankind from destruction.

23. Again, looking at our Lord, we run up against a contradiction, which is precisely the contradiction of all flesh. It is emphasised more than once in the pages of the New Testament also by our Lord Himself, that although everything concerning Him is predestined from eternity, yet His personal obedience in the predestined role was an actual factor, a determining element all the way through. It is ridiculous to ask what would have happened if Jesus had fallen down, or cracked up, in the forty days in the wilderness; or in the three strenuous years of His ministry; or in the garden of Gethsemane; or even on the cross itself. I say it is ridiculous to ask, and yet innumerable people speculate about it. That in itself proves that the story of our Lord's life and death is so graphically and dramatically

written that few people would draw the erroneous conclusion that it was all just pro-forma, for the final result was a foregone conclusion since it was predestined to end the way it did.

24. From a study of the life and teaching of our Lord we can only conclude that inside the context of absolute predestination man's attitude of dependence or rebellion means something. St Paul's case illustrates the same point. The episode on the road to Damascus, taken as it stands, seems to leave precious little initiative to St Paul. And yet, later on, St Paul says: 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision' (Acts 26:19). We might say it in this way: God created man, and therefore man is outside of God, but utterly dependent on God. Inside the context of this dependence on God, man renounces his dependence and follows after other gods, or becomes his own god in his self-centredness—and thus goes on to destruction. If man's act of renouncing his dependence on God were not an actual dynamic fact to be dealt with, then God's predeterminate purpose to save him would make no sense at all. And if man's rebellion makes sense, means something, then his renouncing his rebellion must necessarily also mean something. Here you should note that we are not philosophising about man's ability to be either obedient or disobedient. We are discussing the concrete, dynamic fact of his being disobedient or obedient, that is, the actual fact of his renouncing either his dependence or his rebellion, both of which are inside the context of predestination. Not, repeat NOT, in the sense that he is predestined either to renounce the one or the other, but in the sense that his renouncing his dependence on God is the cause of God's predestination to save him.

25. Please do not accuse me of having brought in a teaching of synergism surreptitiously. That is far from my thoughts. I am only stating that, according to all proper Church doctrine, the obedience of our Lord was a real, actual, dynamic human quality that meant something vital and necessary inside the framework of absolute predestination. If man in his creatureliness and dependence on God renounced that dependence, and that renouncement meant something, then man also in his creatureliness renounces that rebellion against his Creator, and also that means something. In either case man is completely dependent on God, and in either case his action is a genuine, real, human action.

26. The power of God is seen precisely in this, that when God fore-ordained the salvation of mankind He did not change the creatureliness of man so that man became a puppet. Predestination as it reflects the almightiness of God in man is manifest in the fact that inside the context of His

predestination He brings about a genuine, real, dynamic obedience in man. Although this obedience is penultimate in the creatureliness of man, its true value as penultimate is not open to doubt, no more than the genuineness of the obedience of our Lord in His predestined role of Saviour is open to doubt.

27. When you study the *tadqir* of al-Qadir the omnipotent Allah, and contrast it with the predestination of the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, you will see why the great majority of Muslims end up in fatalism, whereas the Christian—even the hyper-Calvinist—is genuinely concerned with man's attitudes, moral actions and responsibilities, inside the framework of predestination.

### QUESTIONS

1. Can you give a short resumé of the difference between fatalism and predestination, as found in this chapter?
2. Why has Islam in practice developed belief in fatalism, when it supposedly teaches predestination in theory?
3. How do you explain the fact that believing Muslims and unchurched 'Christians' are usually fatalists?

## CHAPTER 37

# Resurrection and Judgment

1. This, the final chapter in this series about our approach to the Muslims, is, for several reasons, one of the most difficult. When we talk about Resurrection and Judgment we have not only the ambiguity of words with which we must struggle, but also a blending together of two distinct events which we as Christians, of necessity, must keep separate. Although Muslims can and do distinguish between the two theoretically, when need arises, yet in the ordinary thinking of both lay and clerical, the two are for all practical purposes only aspects of the one great event.

2. Another difficulty is that in the wealth of detail found both in the Koran and in the Traditions it is practically impossible to delineate clearly what the Muslims do actually believe to be the chronological course of events on that final and great day. To begin with, the Day itself has quite a number of different names. The one most ordinarily used is, of course, *Qiyamat* meaning both resurrection and judgment, at least by implication or connotation. But it is also called the Day of Encompassing, the Day of Standing Up, the Day of Separation, the Day of Judgment, the Day of Awakening, the Day of Reckoning, and (instead of Day) the Hour. If you will study all these names, you will find that they give you an idea of the essentials in the Muslim thinking.

3. Some of the difficult points are, just by way of example: will there be two or three blasts on the trumpet at the time; will the great scales, the *Mezan*, be used for all people, or just for those whose good and bad deeds are so nearly equal that they have to be weighed against each other to make certain that justice is being done; will all mankind have to go over the bridge called *Sirat*, or just doubtful cases; if all who have done well receive the 'book' in their right hand and those who have done evil in their left hand behind their backs, what purpose do the *Sirat* bridge and the



*Mezan* really serve; are there two coming prophets, namely Jesus and Mahdi, or are they in reality one and the same, and if two, will their functions overlap? In this way many more puzzling questions could be asked. All of these questions have been discussed thoroughly by a goodly number of authors.

4. Furthermore, there are abundant riches of added attractions and apocryphal horror-stories told about every detail of these events on the day of Resurrection and Judgment, which are equal to Dante's *Inferno* and the morbid imaginings of the Roman Church in the Middle Ages. I am afraid I suffer from the same defect as many Muslims: I cannot keep clear in my mind which stories are from the Koran itself, which are found in the Traditions, and which are the elaborations of commentators and legend-writers. However, this defect does not worry me overmuch, because I prefer to ignore them all and try to get down to the few really basic facts upon which all these other things are superimposed with the common, pious goal of frightening people to make them be good.

5. Wisely or unwisely, I am going to try to separate the belief in the Resurrection from the belief in the last Judgment in Islam; and see each in relation to its counterpart, as found among Christians. I hope in this way to show just where each religion stands in relation to the other.

## RESURRECTION

6. It is obvious from the Koran that Mohammed had a terrific struggle to make the Arabs believe in the possibility or probability of a resurrection.<sup>1</sup> The whole body of Islamic teaching, however, shows that it would be incomplete, like a road running out in sand or getting lost in the desert, unless it could produce faith in a concrete coming event commonly known as resurrection. If there is only one God, and if Mohammed is truly a prophet sent by that God to lead men into a right faith and, concomitant thereto, a righteous life, it naturally follows that man has to assume for himself the responsibility of choice and of action after that choice. But responsibility in itself has no pregnant value unless it is related to someone to whom one is responsible and to whom one has to answer regarding that responsibility. Since Allah is the Creator of all things, and it is He who has sent Warners to all the people on earth, it follows naturally that a day, an

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<sup>1</sup> Sura 17:49; 75; 32; 83; 22:1-7.

hour, MUST come where all mankind will have to face that Creator–Judge.

7. Mohammed did not conceive of this event as being some sort of ghostly, spiritual confrontation; on the contrary, this very man, complete as he is here and now, will certainly be the very man who stands before his Almighty Judge, his Creator–Allah. And when people ridiculed that idea, Mohammed in his arguments had to fall back on philosophical arguments about the omnipotence of Allah. He who created you the first time, is He not able to re-create you? (Sura 75). Right up to the time of his death in Medina he argued about the wonderful creation of man, and Allah's providence. It rains on dry, hard ground and life springs forth. Then why should not Allah who creates the rain have power over everything, including the recreation of man's body? (Sura 22:1–7). His point is that it ought not to be thought of as such a ludicrous idea that the Creator of man should re-create man's body, so that man, in his flesh, could answer for what he has believed and done here on earth.

8. Here another element enters in, which is not commonly brought out, namely that Mohammed was arguing about the re-creation of the body, not about the re-creation of the man, as such. Allah, says Mohammed, created all the spirits of all men at one stroke. Somewhere these spirits are living a shadowy, ghostly existence, waiting for the day a body will be assigned to them. Likewise when man dies, that spirit is taken out of the body, but it hovers about close by, until the death angels come to question the individual in his grave. At that time the spirit returns into the body, and the person is made to sit up in his grave and answer questions relative to his faith. (I had a vivid experience of this Islamic belief recently. A Christian died and I had a couple of Muslim carpenters build a coffin. There were many things to be done, and I paid no further attention to them until the coffin was practically finished. Imagine my surprise when I saw a box deep enough for a grown person to sit upright in! When I ordered it cut down to normal size, there was a lot of mumbling about *kafirs*.)

9. At the end of this examination the spirit again leaves the body—but stays nearby until the Day of Judgment (Resurrection). Some Muslims think that the spirits of good Muslims, who have made a true confession to the death angels, are allowed to rest, while all others are plagued and restless because of sins committed in the body. Others believe that all spirits rest until they hear the blasts of the trumpet at the end of time. Be that as it may, the point is that Mohammed has evidently introduced an element of pre-Islamic Arabian religion into Islam at this point, for it seems that they

had an idea of disembodied spirits being somewhere about the place. His argument seems, therefore, to be that just as Allah was powerful enough to create a body for the spirit in the first place, so also He is capable of re-creating that body so that the spirit may enter it for the purpose of judgment.

10. The result is that the Resurrection does not cause any enthusiasm in Dar-ul-Islam, nor does it create hope or comfort in the hearts of devotees. The pious Muslim usually shudders at the thought of having to be brought to life again for the purpose of judgment.

11. Now if we ignore all the flimsy, vague and insipid heathenism and cryptic Greek philosophy to be found in Main Street Christianity, and rely wholly on the New Testament and the ecumenical creeds of the Church universal, we find first of all that there is no doctrinal or dogmatic statement or authoritative teaching of any kind regarding spirits. When the fetus, or embryo, in the womb at a certain point of time becomes a 'living soul', is this a fresh, creative act of God, or just what does happen? We do not know—theologically. Can the soul (or spirit) function independently of the body? We do not know—theologically. Of all the questions we can ask about the spirit, we find no solutions or answers in genuine catholic Christian teaching.

12. When trying to understand what happened in the Church of the first centuries, it must be remembered that it was struggling—not primarily against the Jewish conception of resurrection, but against Gnosticism, the mystery religions and Greek philosophy. The Church was surrounded by varying beliefs in the non-physical components in man as the everlasting constitutive element. The body was not considered as the vehicle of expression, but as a cage or prison, limiting the full and true expression of man as such. The Jewish conception of man was, however, carried over into Christianity, namely that man is not man because of a sublime god-like, inner spark of divinity that is capable of soaring far above the heights of this mundane world, but that man was created as a single unit consisting equally of body, and soul or spirit. Together, as a unit, this was life, and the dissolution of this unit meant the passing away, the going out of existence, of this particular life.

13. It is certainly worthy of note that whereas the New Testament authors use the expression: the resurrection of the dead, the creeds—actually as many as have been found—speak of the resurrection of the flesh. This changeover from dead to flesh is not an effort of the Church to deviate from the New Testament teaching, but simply a necessary emphasis and clarification of the truth of the New Testament in a particular struggle situation. In

other words, it is emphasising the Church's denial of all gnostic and other heathen teaching on this point. It makes the body essential to man.

14. On the basis of this Christian doctrine, death must become something irrevocable, absolute and final. It is, naturally speaking, the ultimate, the final passing away, the future non-existence of that which before was existent, namely: man. Death is dissolution, destruction, a burning up of what before was. An expression like 'the immortality of the soul' may be Muslim, Greek philosophy or heathenism, but it simply cannot be Jewish or Christian because in these religions 'life is in the blood'. That is to say, the physical and non-physical together as a unit constitute man. This conception was so ingrained in the Jews that when the Apostles wrote authoritatively to non-Jewish converts about the law, one rule which they insisted should be kept by those who otherwise had no relation to the law was: refrain from the eating of blood (Acts 15:20, 29).

15. Some people get confused by St Paul's use of the words 'flesh' and 'spirit' used over against each other. In language which can be understood better in our day, he is saying that a life lived in faith always struggles against a life lived in unbelief. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the Gnostic idea that man is divided into physical and non-physical, and these two are at variance with each other in every person. In St Paul's teaching, the unit, the person, struggles back and forth, like the man who said to our Lord: 'I believe, help my unbelief' (Mark 9:24).

16. Now—when St Paul has to write to the Corinthians (I Cor. 15) about the Resurrection, he does not philosophise when discussing the actual reality of resurrection. On the contrary, no such philosophical statement is found in the New Testament, while the Koran abounds in such statements. He puts the genuine Christian position bluntly. How can any Christian be so foolish as to argue against resurrection, when Christ already has been resurrected? Your resurrection is guaranteed in Him and if He has not been resurrected you are the most miserable creatures alive; you are done for. He then goes on to argue about the modes of resurrection, namely how flesh and blood 'that cannot inherit the Kingdom of God' (his own words) is changed in the Resurrection so that it can and must enter precisely that Kingdom. In other words, in Christianity, resurrection is not ever based on a philosophical or metaphysical argument; it is based solely and always on the resurrection of our Lord, as the first fruits of them who have 'fallen asleep in the Lord'.

17. Consequentially—and this logical sequence cannot be ignored—when the Church speaks in faith of resurrection, it can only do so by

confining itself to those who died in Christ. The moment apologists, theologians, missionaries and others start speculating about mankind in general, some end up by believing in transmigration, some prefer the doctrine of universalism, again others see a solution in endless torture of the ungodly, and still others accept the annihilation theory. Most of these speculations can, one way or another, find support in the Bible.

Actually in faith all we can say is that all mankind is in the hands of God and under His providence. The rest is an enigma for us, simply because we know of no resurrection excepting that one particular resurrection which is in Christ, and because of Christ's resurrection Easter morning.

18. Finally, when the Creeds say: 'I believe in the resurrection of the flesh and in eternal life', it is confessing a hope, an expectation. It is confessing faith in a future event in which the impossible has become possible. With St Paul it can shout: 'Oh death where is thy sting? Oh death where is thy victory?' (I Cor. 15:55). It can repeat with the Apostle Peter: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (I Peter 1:3).

19. One thing no one can possibly fail to observe is the matter-of-fact attitude of Islam regarding the resurrection and the joyous expectancy, the living hope, which characterises this same future in Christianity. Why is this? Simply because Islam, like Gnosticism, heathenism, Greek philosophy and the mystery religions, has taken the sting out of death; it has obscured the grim victory of death over mankind. As long as death is considered to be a release from bondage, or a temporary separation from loved ones, or the ushering in of a period of waiting, then death does not have that poisonous sting nor the permanent victory over mankind, and resurrection will be thought of in a matter-of-fact way. But when the absolute victory of death is faced up to, when it really means what it is, namely, that which was is no longer, that the great creative work of God is acknowledged as having no future in God, then, and only then, is it possible to understand the ecstasy, the joy, and the hope of the Christian Church in the Resurrection. For the impossible has become possible.

20. Has it ever occurred to you that in saying the Creeds we are confessing something about ourselves in the last few words. Astonishing and remarkable as it is, after we look at the Church, the fellowship of the saints, the remission of sin—each a wonderful work of God—we end up by saying that we believe about ourselves that we who are 'corruptible', who carry the mark of death and dissolution on us, shall be raised up, new

creatures, having received the blessed gift of eternal life? It would be pure arrogance or positive ignorance if we confessed that eternal life, whether in heaven or in hell, is the natural order of things, something we have by nature, as if it were proper to man and belonged to the concept of being men. We have it in Christ, by Christ, through Christ and for the sake of the merits of Christ. But none the less we confess our faith in it joyously, with a living hope, with great expectancy. 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

21. To summarise: In Islam, the resurrection is merely the reuniting of an immortal soul or spirit with a re-created body, as a preliminary to face the Creator–Judge. And the supporting proof for this doctrine is a philosophical argument, presented as revelation, about the almightiness of God. In Christianity, the teaching about resurrection does not concern others than those 'in Christ', and it is based only and alone on the event of Christ's resurrection as 'first fruits'. It is conceived of as the gift of God destroying the absoluteness of death, by giving us that which by nature we do not have. It is therefore accepted as something radically new, an impossibility that has become possible, a living hope in a future event secured and made fast in a past event, a promise to comfort us and give us joy, an expectation which conditions our lives here and now in the midst of suffering, pain and death.

Naturally those two conceptions of the resurrection must also influence the teaching about Judgment in both religions.

## JUDGMENT

22. I believe one is justified in saying that Mohammed's attitude to life was in reality eschatological. I know that all students of Islam do not accept this position. There is, however, no evident reason why it should not be possible for Mohammed, on the one hand, to be engaged in the many mundane things he had to attend to, and yet on the other hand to hold the eschatological attitude towards life. Judgment, everlasting life, paradise and hellfire, engaged his thoughts right up to the end of his life.

23. If it is at all possible for one to work one's way through all the fringes and get into the essence of the matter, I expect one could summarise the matter as follows: As long as man is alive on earth his primary duty is to confess Allah as the one and only god, and Mohammed as the prophet

of Allah. This confession makes him a member of the faithful and involves belief in a certain number of doctrinal statements. It also includes certain basic, well-defined actions, as well as the deeds called for in general in the Muslim law. Inside the community, that is, the 'Umat' of the Prophet, sins can be purged (according to numerous traditions) in many ways. The danger for the negligent Muslim is that somewhere along the line—if not before, then at the time of questioning in the grave—he will repudiate the faith. Then, of course, he is outside the pale. The greatest concern of the relatives of a dying person is to keep before his closing eyes the uplifted index finger, reminding him that God is one God. Once the Day of Judgment has come then 'one soul shall be powerless for another soul, all sovereignty that day shall be with God' (Sura 82). Every nation will in the course of history have received one or more Warners, so the sharp distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims will on that day disappear. Those who have been given the power of intercession will then intercede, each for his own people. This certainly does not mean that grievous sins will not be punished with rigorous punishment. But for those who have an Intercessor, hell becomes a kind of purgatory from which they shall escape in due time. (Some rationalists believe that hell will in the final end be emptied of all people.) It seems to me that, although the evidence in the Koran for justifying such a hope is extremely scant, yet faith in Mohammed as a competent Intercessor, who by his pleading for his people will weigh the balances in their favour, is universal among Muslims (see chapter 23 on this question).

24. The two main factors in this whole set-up seem to be: first, that 'it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God', and secondly, that whatever the *qismat* of individuals may be, all creation will acknowledge that Allah has vindicated Himself as righteous and just in all His Judgments. While a great deal of picturesque language is used about the result of good and evil deeds, and while the stern, impersonal impartiality of the Creator—Judge is emphasised, yet this whole, carefully built-up fear-apparatus falls miserably short of its aim because of the (gratuitous?) introduction of the Intercessor idea.

25. In almost four decades of experience in work among Muslims, I have yet to meet the Muslim who claims to have 'a knowledge of salvation'. The whole construction of the complex corpus of teaching in Islam seems to militate against any possibility other than straight simple justice for deeds done in the body. But because this idea of justice, namely the weighing of deeds against each other, becomes so complicated, no assurance of escape

from hell's punishment is possible for anyone. The matter is left entirely in the hands of Allah, who knows all, is acquainted with every deed done in secret, in the darkness of the night, whether it be the committing of sin or for the purging of sin. And yet with Allah's permission, Intercessors step in and vitiate the entire picture. The ultimate becomes the penultimate, and the Muslim hopes where no hope should be possible.

26. In Christianity, judgment is something entirely different. To begin with it is not pivotal in Christian eschatology. Christian concern has always been with the resurrection life in God. Baptism tells us that (Rom. 6) and Holy Communion does the same (John 6). Where the conception of death is so absolute, the joy of believing in victory over that death is so overwhelming that everything else becomes secondary, even trivial. This cannot be misunderstood, if you look at the body of the teaching the Church has always held. Christianity is called the 'Evangelion', that is, the Good News. This is its official designation. The Good News is, in short, that God is faithful towards His creation, in that He will not allow it to suffer eternal destruction. This faithfulness is made wholly manifest through the Incarnate Son, who by His perfect obedience is declared to be the Reconciler and Redeemer of mankind. In Christianity, the righteousness of God means that God is reckoned as being just in taking a definite stand on the side of His Creation, remitting its sin and sins and rescuing it from its present and future death, as over against the purely human idea of a strict impartiality and objectivity, such as is expected of a human judge who is uncompromisingly just. All the various doctrines and dogmas of the Church are simply ramifications of this one theme.

27. The fact is that before the question of Judge and final Judgment ever arises in relation to Christian thought, the Evangel has to be proclaimed, the Good News has to be published and be made known. Therefore Christianity is ever and always a belief in God as Creator–Redeemer–Judge. The concept 'Redeemer' is interjected precisely between Creator and Judge. The Creator is primarily Redeemer, and thereafter, and only thereafter, Judge. It is not an extraneous idea, tacked onto a whole body of teaching which is obviously contrary to that idea. It is one of the postulates of Christianity that man does not really know sin until he knows the holiness of Christ; he does not know the meaning of death until he knows of the resurrection life of Christ; and he does not realise the wrath of God until he has learned of the love of God in Christ. And certainly he cannot know God as Judge until he has learned to know Him as Redeemer in Christ.



28. When you carry this thought a step further there is another aspect which comes out clearly. In our creeds we confess faith in Jesus Christ, Who is to come again in glory to Judge the living and the dead. The fact that it is precisely and particularly the Reconciler and Redeemer Who is the Judge as well, shows us that whatever else we may or may not expect, His coming again as Judge relates itself to the Church. But how? 'Lift up your heads for your redemption is at hand.' There is no weighing of evidence on the scales called *Mezan*, there is no bridge called *Sirat* over which the Christians must make a dash. On the contrary, this judgment relates itself to the Church in the sense that it will be God's final decree of separation between those in Christ, that is, in His Church, and those outside of Christ whose evil will have grown to such huge proportions in the world, in their effort to uproot and destroy the very body of Christ. At the Judgment the evil ones together with their evil will suffer 'everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord' (II Thess. 1:9). The last, final evil to be destroyed is death itself.

29. Here we must not close our eyes to the fact that, although we are justified in saying that the Judgment is related to the Church primarily in the sense mentioned just now, there is also another aspect of this truth. This judgment will also make the invisible Church visible. That is to say, the evil and false ones inside the present empirical Church to whom so many of our Lord's parables pertain shall be made manifest and destroyed, together with those already manifestly at enmity with God and His Church. The Christian Church has from the very beginning recognised the fact that evil and wicked men are to be found in the ranks of the clergy as well as among the laymen of every country under the sun. It has also held—against certain sectarians—that it is not our function or responsibility to weed out the tares from the wheat. 'In Christ there is no condemnation.' That is what we believe and confess. And it is precisely in relation to this article of faith that we confess our belief in our Redeemer, our Christ, as the final Judge. Whatever may be said over and above this is not of faith; it is speculation, or if you like, wishful thinking.

30. I have finished. But let us bear in mind that it is God Who is Creator; it is God Who is Reconciler and Redeemer; it is God Who preserves His Church; it is God Who quickens the dead; it is God Who judges; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; one almighty triune God to Whom be glory and honour and power, now and forevermore. Amen!

**QUESTIONS**

1. How many different Muslim names for the Day of Judgment can you remember?
2. Why does it seem natural that in Islam the Day of Judgment is equally for all mankind, whereas in Christianity it is related primarily to the Church?
3. What is the difference between the Intercessor in Islam and the Redeemer in Christianity?