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THE FINALITY OF JESUS CHRIST¹

This is the issue between Christianity and Islam. Any faith which challenges the finality of Christianity and professes to give a supplementary message, another gospel, higher ethics, a more adequate social program, must produce the equivalent of Jesus Christ. To call Christianity the absolute or final religion is, as Dr. Mackintosh asserts, "to contend not merely that in Jesus Christ God is presented in a form higher and more spiritually satisfying than elsewhere, but that the relationship to the Father on which believers thus enter, is such that it cannot be transcended."²

This supreme issue between Christianity and all other religions and philosophies, both of the East and of the West, is discussed, step by step, with convincing clarity and cumulative argument by Dr. Robert E. Speer in the Stone Lectures delivered at the Princeton Theological Seminary in 1933. Here we have an able, up-to-date, scholarly, sympathetic and, at the same time, uncompromising argument for the Christian faith once for all delivered to mankind in the New Testament Scriptures. The five lectures may be considered separately and collectively as an extended answer to the whole humanistic, modernistic view of missions, of Christ and of Christianity, so prevalent in many circles; or, better, as a supreme literary effort to state, once for all, unmistakably, with an astonishing wealth of evidence from the earliest Christian apologists down the centuries

¹ "The Finality of Jesus Christ," by Robert E. Speer. Fleming H. Revell Co., New York, pp. 386; \$3. (Second Edition).

² "The Originality of the Christian Message." p. 175.

to those of our own day, the great central verities of our faith. "To us," writes Dr. Speer, "Jesus Christ did not come to found a religion. He came to be the Life and Light and Lord of man."

This volume of evidences will not only have a wide reading and permanent influence in deepening and strengthening the faith of the Church, but we commend it here as the best manual of Christian Apologetics for those who are preaching the Gospel to Moslems. We believe that an abbreviated translation of the book into Arabic, Urdu and Turkish is greatly to be desired. Thoughtful Moslems are not blind to the real issue that divides us. While we both confess the unity of God and His infinite and unsearchable attributes of power, wisdom and mercy, it is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ which is the stumbling-block to Islam. Was He, and is He, the final and sufficient message from heaven, the plenipotential Mediator and Redeemer, or must we look for another?

The Laymen's Appraisal in "Re-Thinking Missions" may place Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed side by side and propose a new valuation of the "founders of religion;" true Christians and true Moslems know better. For them the question simply is the finality and sufficiency of Jesus Christ *or* the finality and sufficiency of Mohammed.

Some thirty years ago I was reading aloud to a Moslem in Bahrein a portion of the first chapter of Colossians. It spoke of one who was "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature . . . who in all things had the preeminence," and I paused to ask who this might be. Without any hesitation my Arab friend said, "Mohammed, on him be prayers and peace."

A distinguished Moslem author and editor in Western India, acknowledging the receipt of a book which was sent him, writes: "I thank you very much. Indeed, you are doing a great service to the Prophet, Jesus Christ, in whom we Moslems believe as the righteous Prophet of Allah. I heartily congratulate you and wish you a long life in your gray-hairs. Only if you and I compromise ourselves

by agreeing on two vital points we are one. I mean to take Jesus as the righteous Prophet of Allah, not the Son of God, and to take Mohammed also as the Prophet of God after Jesus. If this is done, both of us will belong to one church. It is for you to judge and ponder."

The circular, however, which my friend enclosed and the book for which he thanked me, call us both back to grim realities. "The Prospectus of the Grand Muslim Union Mission" with headquarters in Bombay leaves no doubt of its standpoint. They "challenge the non-Muslim world for the truthfulness of Islam which is the only religion of the world." They are to "respect the feelings of the followers of sister religions and in a civil and friendly manner explain the superiority of Islam as the only true Faith." To this end "the Grand Muslim Union Mission" holds meetings, publishes literature and asks for liberal donations.

In the same circular my friend states the issue even more clearly: "It is an Islamic obligation to believe in Jesus. Muslims regard him as a great Prophet of God. But all this Islamic respect for Jesus cannot hide the fact that the picture of Christ the Bible paints does not show him as a perfect man, though it may succeed to show Him as the Son of God. One who hated the social world; one who disregarded and disliked the customs of the world: one who failed to be kind to his own mother, and one who did not succeed to bear the brunt and responsibilities of the life of celibacy, can be the son of God, but cannot be an ideal for the entire world to follow. It is difficult to become a perfect man. The world so far has produced only one man who suited this title, and whose life events are handed over to posterity in the light of historical facts, and whose example can be a guide in every walk of life—Mohammed."

The lectures of Dr. Speer are an overwhelming reply to this sort of contention. The Church's conception of Jesus Christ in the first two centuries can be laid side by side with the Moslem conception of Mohammed during the first two centuries after the Hegira and, Moslems them-

selves being the judges, their Prophet was not like ours, their martyrs were not like ours, their message was not like ours. Let Luke's Gospel stand in vivid contrast to the second chapter of the Koran; and Paul's portrait of Jesus Christ be hung next to Ibn Hisham's portrait of Mohammed! Who can deny that both were devotees of those whom they portrayed, yet how absolutely different, how utterly incomparable, are the two portraits. As Dr. Speer says: "The less extreme and more common departure from the historic and authentic view of Christ is the modern conception of Jesus as simply a great spiritual teacher, a notable ethical example, a character-pattern, in our present-day terminology, and the correlative modern emphasis on the faith of Jesus rather than faith in Jesus. Now these three ideas are all embraced in the primitive thought of Christ, but they were secondary, not primary."³ The primary conception of Jesus is found not only in the Gospels but in the Pauline epistles of an earlier date than the earliest gospel.

"What Paul thought about the absoluteness and finality of Jesus and what Jesus thought about Himself, is the only thought which primitive Christianity entertained. Christianity conceived as the faith of Jesus, or as the religion of Jesus, or as sharing or reproducing the religious experience of Jesus, is a sheer invention."⁴ And then Dr. Speer calls attention to two unique facts about Christ which have no parallel in any other character of history: "Most striking of all, however, and more significant than all else, or rather gathering up into itself the significance of all else, was the early Christian conviction with regard to the death and resurrection of Christ. No one else had ever died or could ever die such a death. This death was for the sins of the world. The life of the Shepherd was laid down for His sheep. The Son of Man gave His life a ransom for many. We are 'reconciled to God by the death of His Son.' The Synoptists and John and Paul agree. There is no other person of whom such things could be

³ "The Finality of Jesus Christ," by Dr. Robert E. Speer, p. 49.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 52.

said as the early Church said of Christ's death. And He alone rose again from the dead. If he had not done so, we should never have heard of Christianity. But whether or no that is true, it is indisputable that the first Christians believed that He had risen, and on that amazing and solitary fact they built their faith. This was their Gospel, the Gospel of all Christians from Easter morning afterwards forever."⁵

Our missionary message not only, but our missionary methods are wholly dependent on this firm faith in the finality of Jesus Christ. If we still hold this primitive, apostolic view of our Saviour, what should be our attitude toward non-Christian religions today? Dr. Speer's second, third and fifth lectures are a detailed, historical and masterly discussion of this very question. He does not, of course, deal solely or specifically with Islam, but yet there are many germane and illuminating passages: "If the non-Christian religions are 'schoolmasters' to bring men to Christ, it would seem that the more intelligent and advanced and enlightened the schoolmaster, the more inefficient it is in fulfilling its mission. Justin Martyr pointed out this fact with regard to Judaism and heathenism in his time, and we see it in Brahmanism and Islam today. And it appears to be the highest and leading class in each religion that is hardest set against the 'schoolmaster' function, the priesthood of Judaism in Jesus' time and of Hinduism and Islam today."⁶ A candid Jewish Rabbi, whom Dr. Speer quotes, points out that the Personality of Jesus is the essence of His power today and that "this should be evident to every objective student of Christian literature. . . . The significant fact is that time has not faded the vividness of His image. Poetry still sings His praise. He is still the living comrade of countless lives. No Moslem ever sings, 'Mohammed, lover of my soul,' nor does any Jew say of Moses, the Teacher, 'I need thee every hour.' The genius of Jesus is not one of doctrine nor of organization It is distinctly one of direct influence."⁷

⁵ Ibid, p. 56.

⁶ Ibid, p. 346.

⁷ Ibid, p. 211.

One is tempted to quote other passages from these lectures, which have a special bearing on carrying the gospel to the world of Islam. Let the last paragraph of the concluding lecture suffice: "On this Rock of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, the only Redeemer, Saviour and Lord, the Christian Church stood at the beginning. Here it has stood through all the ages. Here it must continue to stand. 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.' From this foundation the Church of Christ, so long as it is true to its message and its mission, whether at home or abroad, will never remove."⁸ True to this mission and message, we will avoid all needless controversy, which only leads away from the center to the periphery, and press home the question Jesus Himself put to His disciples and to the world, What think ye of the Christ? We ask every sincere Moslem inquirer to study the Gospel story and try for himself to reach a true estimate of Jesus Christ, of whom Mohammed spoke in such high terms of honor as a Prophet and an Apostle of God; to take the historical foundations of the Christian religion and examine them as critically as he pleases, and to see for himself what Jesus claimed to be, and how His claims were understood by His disciples and by the early Church. We ask Moslems to study the Gospel in any way they like, but with only *one* object in view, "namely, that they may come face to face with Jesus Himself; that they may learn to know Him, and see how He claimed to hold a supreme position in the matter of the attitude of all men toward God, a position which none other has ever claimed."⁹

And in doing this every missionary will find the lectures of Dr. Speer most helpful and inspiring.

Princeton, N. J.

S. M. ZWEMER.

⁸ Ibid, p. 377.

⁹ W. R. W. Gardner, "Christianity and Mohammedanism Compared," p. 62.

THE OUTLOOK FOR ISLAM IN TURKEY

On October 29, 1933, Turkey celebrated the completion of her tenth year as a modern republic. And it is now more than fourteen years since that eventful March 16, 1920, when Istanbul was occupied by the Allies, marking the effective termination of the rule of the last Sultan, Vahid-ud-Din, and setting the stage for the control of Turkey by the energetic Ankara Nationalists. The reforming record which has been accomplished in so short a time by Ghazi Mustapha Kemal and his fellows would tax a reader's credulity if he encountered it in the realm of fiction. But established in the realm of fact, it is a record to be marveled at and recognized as a supreme triumph of social engineering.

It is not the purpose of this article, however, to survey or to summarize the achievements of the Turkish Republic. Already well known are such striking steps as the abolition of the fez and of the caliphate, the setting up of Western law codes, and the adoption of a new alphabet with Latin characters. In general the world realizes that the Islamic religion has been ejected from its old dominant place in government and society. But there is widespread confusion as to the present status of Islam in Turkey, what is the government's attitude toward it, and what chance Islam has to survive and thrive under the new régime. I do not propose completely to dispel this confusion and chart a perfectly clear analysis of Turkey's religious situation, present and future. In Turkey, as everywhere else in the world, storm clouds of uncertainty and indifference shroud the religious scene, interfering with clear vision. But an objective study of the acts and ideas of responsible Turks may aid in disposing of certain fallacious impressions and

in delineating in broad outline the main trends of the Turkish official attitude.

What can be discovered, in the first place, regarding the viewpoint toward Islam of those who control the nation's destiny? To this question writers have suggested a variety of answers. Some have asserted that the Ankara Government is frankly hostile to and apprehensive of everything connected with religion. The political leaders are themselves regarded as free thinkers, men who would like to obliterate as soon as possible all traces of Islam or any other religious system, and who permit retention of certain old religious forms only because they fear the violent reaction which would follow the open flaunting of the Moslem faith.

Others hold to an opposite interpretation, regarding the Kemalists as cordial friends and well wishers to Islam, men who are eager to purify it and strengthen it. Count Ostrorog, for example, discussing Turkey's reforms, insists that "the object was not . . . to destroy religious beliefs: religion was simply caused to recede from the halls of human conflicts and ascend into the stronghold of conscience, to dwell there in much greater dignity and security than when its ministers pretended to rule earthly interests as well as moral aspirations."¹

As a matter of fact, the true appraisal seems to lie somewhere between the two extremes of hostility and cordiality, with the words "experimental" or "opportunist" best describing the Government attitude.

There are numerous reasons why the Kemalists should not be utterly hostile to Islam. In the first place, religious sensibilities played an important part in the success of the Nationalists' campaign against the Greeks, the "War of Independence." Accounts of the Greek invasion tell of frequent insults and defilements cast on the Moslems and their holy places by the infidel foe. The thought of Christian enemies invading the precincts of Islam was an important factor in awakening the Turks to their famous desperate resistance. A notable event recorded by the Ghazi

¹ Count L. Ostrorog: "The Angora Reform." London, 1927. p. 96.