

immense increase in the national wealth, especially in the smaller Shaikhdoms of the Gulf, quite literally produces "embarras de richesse," while undermining both the tribal order and the emotional pre-suppositions of an age-long way of life. In the large "oil" countries, where vast social problems await the correction or the retrieval made possible by the golden flow of the world's liquid power, this accident of geology means a critical opportunity. And it is precisely in these larger states that its positive potentialities for the common good have been less readily recognized and attained.³ That peasant poverty remains so pathetically widespread in Iran has been consistently laid at the door of a foreign—and that a commercial—entity. The truth of the allegation will therefore be judged by the prompt efficacy of the remedy. The remedy may disclose that there are potent domestic reasons also for the persistence of human misery.⁴ At all events there are internal factors to be overcome which may be the more difficult to surmount for the fact that they have escaped notice in the vehemence of the external attack and the confidence of a single panacea.

Be that as it may, the oil wealth of the Gulf countries already amounts to a social revolution and promises to activate several more. It makes the occasion for far-reaching improvements in the general standards of living. It emphasizes the need for a just and fruitful distribution of wealth. It imposes new and unpredictable strains upon old systems both of thought and society and, by no means least, it creates a labor situation of the utmost importance. All these, in turn, bear exactly upon religious faith and forms. How far and how soon can Islam rise to the demands presented to it by the new industrialism rising over its ancient sands? How best can the Christian Church take active and proper cognizance of its duty to an Islam so challenged? The map, as well as the Spirit, tells us that these questions are not merely academic.

But certain objections to the trend of this discussion may be arising in the reader's mind. If he is a hard-headed "realist" he finds all this too ultimate and remote. Religion is here taking itself too seriously. Politics in the Middle East, politics anywhere, are governed by factors more immediate, more sordid, more material, than these. The answer to the "realist" is that his dimensions need enlarging. Let him study history and man more profoundly.

Another objection is of an entirely different kind. It is that Christians have enough problems in their West and these disqualify them

³ See Olaf Caroe, *Wells of Power, The Oil Fields of S. W. Asia*, London, 1951, pp. 138-141 for a discussion of "Welfare" Government in Bahrain and Kuwait.

⁴ See "The Agrarian Reform Problem in Iran," in *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. V., No. 2, Spring 1951, p. 181.

from adumbrating "Muslim" duties. This attitude makes a virtue of its unconcern. More anon about Christians and Christendom. But meanwhile both Islam and Christianity are committed to belief in the one-ness of humanity. The problems of the contemporary world are parallel. We would be disloyal to the plain lessons of our own social history if we denied that its struggles for truth in society had been sustained by the faith of Christ. We should be craven traitors to the trust of that experience if we failed to strive humbly for its mediation to every land and people, the more so as the science from which the social and religious problems result came also from the West to weigh everywhere upon contemporary man.

A third objection may suggest itself to others. It is that Christians have no ground for expecting from Islam the response that is here envisaged. On Christian premises as to man and grace and the Holy Spirit, it may be argued that Islam is already found wanting in those realms where it is here invited to be adequate. A full answer is postponed. But surely the objection is invalid. Must we not agree that the truest way to the discovery of limitation is not that of external information, but of interior experience? Current Muslim apology is full of the conviction of the adequacy of Islam to every problem in contemporary life. Let Muslims be encouraged to pursue that confidence, albeit radically and totally, in relation to the burning issues of their society. Let Christians, in the interests of human welfare, as well as of theological truth, assist and encourage them in so doing. They may be sure that Muslims, sincere and realist enough in their endeavors, will run into those old, stubborn facts about human nature and its need of divine redemptive action which, for the Christian at least, drive men to Christ. If the truth be as we have received it, they cannot drive them elsewhere—unless out into despair or back again to complacency and the selfish life, or—it may be—into the costly experiment of Communism.

But to return to the immediate situation and one deeper aspect of the spiritual vocation of the contemporary Muslim, which may perhaps in the end be the clearest indication of needs which only Christ can satisfy. Much has been written and will be written about the catastrophe of "Palestinian" Islam. It is deeply unfortunate that any active consciousness of this weight of human misery should be regarded in some quarters as incipient anti-Semitism. As if sympathy for one section of humanity could only be safe in a conspiracy of silence about another, or that the love of one's neighbor was a concept divided against itself. These irrelevancies should not detain or deter us. Whatever the truth may be about the manner and motives of their exodus, whether it was in truth departure or dispossession or both, the fact is that the Palestinian Arabs are gone, that their homes

and property are in other hands and that some 800,000 have suffered and still suffer in mind, body and estate. Tragic as is the physical homelessness, the mental bitterness and frustration are still more shattering. The Conference of Christian Churches in Beirut in May last bears witness to their continuing concern about this vast and persisting problem. The "camps" of refugees are subsisting, but little more, and that in pathetically miserable conditions. Short-term assistance, though vital is only a palliative. Long-term resettlement and re-establishment, the only real cures, are immeasurably more difficult. Yet it is precisely here that spiritual initiative and resolute leadership can only arise from within the soul of "Palestinian" Islam.

"Palestinian," with perhaps a brutal deliberateness, is italicized. For "Palestine" in the pre-1948 sense is no more. Events have happened which, however unjust, however intolerable, are none the less irrevocable. Painful as it may be, there can be no wisdom in refusing to recognize the "is-ness" of events. No fact could be clearer than that the advent of Israel is a fact which cannot be undone. It is evident that it has come to stay. There are recent signs that even politicians on the Arab side are recognizing the empirical reality of the situation and accepting it, but everything depends upon the spirit of that realism. Does it belatedly come to terms with events, or does it shape them? Religiously considered, are there not minds and spirits in the land of Abraham and Jeremiah to see the things that are and perceive that the truest patriotism is not to hark stubbornly back to what has gone, but to turn creatively to what has come to be? In the categories and dimensions of true leadership such a time is at hand in the Arab world.

Everywhere in the Arab dispersion there has been a festering and frustrating bitterness of soul, which would allow no solution but reinstatement and therefore in turn no prospect but despair. It is an attitude of mind which jeopardizes the entire future in the determination to restore the entire past, which turns in futile hostility against those whom it can blame. In terms of homes lost, careers broken, the familiar shattered, and families dispossessed, this reaction is so perfectly comprehensible that none but the dullest could fail to warm to it. And yet is there not a call in adversity to re-create life, even out of the complete destruction of material resources, through the resources that are eternal in a people's soul? Even in the crude language of the market, merchants are prepared to cut their losses. In the realm of the spirit, losses are not cut, they are transformed. Is this treachery to Arab honor? Is it damnably pro-Jewish? Is it not rather the open secret of all history? It says nothing about condoning wrong, nor yet about requital. These it leaves to the Divine Sovereignty in which it believes. It has learned that there are situations in which evil is only

borne away when it is borne, that tragedy only perpetuates itself in misery until it is faced in the spirit which disarms its consequences and liberates its victims.

The vocation to such a reaction awaits a creative minority whose would be the task and a glory. It would become the enabling condition of a true resettlement, a beginning again. It would release in new volume the strenuous sympathies of Western helpers, now hampered by the blankness of the present impasse and eager to cure rather than palliate the pain. Yet they know that such a point of view can only come to birth within the people themselves and though prayer and the spirit of Christ may serve it, there are no substitutes in travail.

Yet the precedents are many and they are local. Was it not in these very lands that Abraham became an exile and enriched the world, begetting a people who still revere his name? Was it not beyond the same Jordan that people from Jerusalem went into captivity losing the same vineyards and the same familiar hills? Did not prophets then transform the tragedy by interpreting its inner meaning? Is there not in the earliest Islam before the Hijra a noble strain of suffering and tribulation, earning and ensuring its survival? And greatest of all stands the Cross of Christ, the supreme example of evil suffered and so transformed. May it not be that in the present situation "Palestinian" Islam is faced by history with an opportunity for an interior decision of great meaning and consequence? Do not its present circumstances, quite irrespective of the rights and wrongs, the blunders and crimes which brought them about—find their truest interpretation and re-ordering in clues that are very close to the heart of the Christian understanding of God and evil? "In Jerusalem in this century," writes the Rev. E. F. F. Bishop, "Islam has been called to undergo and understand what it has so long denied—the experience of suffering, corporate and individual." He adds: "It is not merely suffering, but vicarious suffering, it has come about through little fault of their own."⁵ In this situation Christians are alongside their Muslim brethren—Arab Christians from Palestine, caught in the same maelstrom and Christians from the West, few but active. It is this "alongsidedness" in sympathy, in action, and in prayer, which may best minister to a new and liberating decision among the refugees and those who speak for them.

None will suppose that this is easy. Exacting in its own nature, it becomes all the harder from the plain truth that the end is not yet. If Israel is an accomplished fact, it is also a fluid fact. No one supposes that we are at an end of what its contiguity may mean,

⁵ See *International Review of Missions*, Vol. XL, No. 159, July 1951, p. 282.

territorially and emotionally, for its Arab neighbors. But the future of those relations turns, equally with their legacy in the past, upon a positive renewal of mind and will, as in the presence of a challenge, rather than a negative resistance. Not all the elements in the situation are essentially competitive. Israel's adjacency need not be always and only an irritant to Arab Islam. It can well be an invigorating stimulus, a cathartic agency—but only if the barrenness of resentment, however natural, is outlived.

It must not be thought that this concentration here on what may be called the ultimates of the present situation, religiously considered, implies any forgetfulness of the material details involved. There are just claims to compensation, to the releasing of "frozen" Arab assets as a means to active rehabilitation, and other legitimate demands of the dispossessed. There are urgent questions, emotional, economic and political, as to the location of resettlement. There are the endless items of pain, bitterness and brokenness, in the great anonymity of human misery—the untold personal tragedies known only in their fullness to the sufferers themselves. Yet from every point of view the attitudes here suggested as a religious interpretation of the recent past, would, more surely than any others, tend to a hopeful resolution of them all. Compensation is a more potent claim, if restraint, dignity and justice sustain it. It is compromised if lawlessness prevails towards Jews elsewhere, whose assets might be the counters in an orderly exchange. Wherever the new homes may be, in a thickly-settled belt close to Israel or remote in the Jazīrah region or in Jordan, their moral calibre is the prime factor. And the choice of location should be governed mainly by considerations of human welfare, rather than of politics. Miseries are most surely repaired when they are conquered in spirit. The absence of such a conquest may still bedevil their material retrieval. In every sense then, the invasion of Arab Islam by Zionist Israel, both territorial and cultural, spells a provocation, the long-term reaction to which is a crisis of decision.

Is all this visionary, unreal, impolitic? Perhaps. But it is only through vision that people cease to perish. There are plenty of forces on both sides of the Jewish-Arab conflict, making for power politics and employing the diplomacy of contempt. When one is bitterly worsted, it needs profound religious wisdom to see beyond these to the door of opportunity. But it stands none the less, and through it lies the re-possession of the soul. How close does physical distraction lie to the secret of the Christ of God. "At the watercourses of Reuben there were great searchings of heart."

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