

WORLD DOMINION

The World Dominion Movement advocates Informed Continuous Co-ordinated Evangelism to reach everyone at home and abroad. Its basis is belief in the Deity and Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the World's Only Saviour, and in the Final Authority of Holy Scripture.

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The Glory of the Impossible :

The Evangelization of the Moslem World

Notes of an Address Delivered at the World Dominion Missionary Meeting at the Marble Collegiate Church, New York City, 11th April, 1935.

SAMUEL M. ZWEMER

‘THE word *impossible*,’ said Napoleon, ‘is found only in the dictionaries of fools.’ But it is used in the Bible. ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’ ‘Nothing shall be impossible to you.’ ‘The things which are impossible with man are possible with God.’

The history of geographical exploration has in it the glory of the impossible. The penetration of south-east Arabia by St. John Philby and Bertram Thomas was a story of intrepid courage. The fourfold attempt to reach the unconquered heights of Kanchenjunga with its virgin snows 29,500 feet high—where Mallory and Irvine met their death in 1924—ended not in defeat, but in the glory of triumphant failure. Again men will try. As Toyohiko Kagawa said, ‘If you are willing to die for it there is nothing you cannot accomplish.’

The discovery of the North and South Poles only stimulated other discoveries. Piccard’s ascent into the stratosphere was followed by Beebe’s penetration one half mile downwards into the depths of the sea. They revealed two vast unexplored worlds—one above the highest clouds and the other in the depths of the abyss. Science will not rest until she has conquered both.

Warriors, too, have shared the glory of the impossible and their heroism has been the inspiration of many generations. Catch the spirit of Marshal Foch in the World War, when in words to this effect, he said: ‘My right has been rolled up; my left has been driven back; my centre has been smashed. But I have ordered an advance from all directions.’ Or Newbolt’s hero at Khartoum:

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The sands of the desert are sodden red,
Red with the wreck of the square that broke ;
The gatling's jammed and the colonel's dead,
And the regiment's blind with dust and smoke.
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England's far, and Honour a name,
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks ;
' Play up ! Play up ! and play the game ! '

It stirs our spirit of heroism to read of scientists, explorers, and warriors who, one and all, experienced the glory of the impossible. The spirit of man is the candle of Jehovah. ' Thou has made him a little lower than the angels . . . crowned him with glory and honour and put all things under his feet.'

So near is grandeur to our dust,
So close is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, ' Thou must,'
The youth replies, ' I can.'

It is, however, in the realm of the spiritual that we see the real glory of the impossible. Eleven disciples on Mount Olivet, ignorant, unlearned, feeble of faith, faltering in trust—' When they saw Him they worshipped Him, but some doubted '—to *them* came the great commission. In less than a half-century St. Paul had drawn the ellipse of a new kingdom across the old Roman empire with its foci at Antioch and Rome. It is in the spiritual realm of Christian missions that we see the glory of the impossible century after century in every continent and island. Men remembered Christ's words : ' All things are possible to him that believeth.'

We need not turn to the past, however. The most impossible of missionary problems is the evangelization of the world of Islam. The Laymen's Appraisal Committee in *Re-thinking Missions* made slight reference to Mohammed and Mohammedanism ; only ten lines of type in the whole volume, and they say they believe, ' the strength of Islam is waning,' and even where it exists it is ' rather an ally than a foe in the arena of truth.' No judgment could be more superficial and futile. In the evangelization of the Moslem world we face a task humanly impossible.

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1. Re-think its colossal dimensions and ever-expanding area; the baffling fact that Islam is the only religion that has defeated Christianity and eclipsed it; its categorical denial of all that makes Christianity Christian; its arrogant defiance of Christ's messengers and disciples by closing doors once open and by doors barred and bolted for thirteen centuries.

Think of the hopes deferred and the hearts made sick by massacres, martyrdoms and deportations. The recent novel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, is an example of what the oriental Churches have gone through for centuries. The sad fate of the Nestorian Assyrians is, in the words of Dr. Keller, 'the most tragic on God's earth.'

What are the actual dimensions of this problem? It is no longer confined to the Mediterranean basin or to three continents. It has crossed all the seven seas and invaded five. The Moslem population is 250,000,000, one-eighth of the race. In India there are 78,000,000 Moslems; in Java, 40,000,000; in China, 12,000,000. There has been an increase of 10,000,000 in a decade. It extends to South America and counts 3,500,000 in Europe. Under the American flag there are 587,000 in the Philippines.

2. This great system of Arabian monotheism eclipsed Christianity in Asia from the seventh until the fourteenth century. The story of this conquest was recently told by Laurence E. Browne. Islam is the only great religion that came after Christianity and yet defeated and destroyed it in Central Asia, in Arabia, Persia, Syria, Egypt, North Africa, even in Palestine, the land of its birth. Churches became mosques. Bishoprics became provinces that paid tribute. The Arab civilization wrote its Mohammedan palimpsest over the Christian tradition. Mohammed's name was exalted above every name. Armenians, Nestorians, Syrians, Copts, and Berbers were persecuted and, century after century, passed over to Islam, until the remnant of the faithful became like Samson with eyes blinded, grinding in the prison house of the Philistines! This is the tragic history of the oriental Churches.

3. The impossibility of this problem appears also when

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we ask what Islam really is. It is a colossal system of anti-Christian theism ; a threefold cord not easily broken. It has in it the Arabian pagan pride of language, race and culture ; a strand of Jewish fanaticism and Semitic intolerance ; it also has a universalism that seeks world dominion. Consider again other elements in this faith ; the strength of its short creed. The very words sounds like a defiant battle-cry—God and Mohammed ! The solidarity of its fellowship. The pilgrimage to Mecca every year. In spite of all diversity, Islam is marked by a strange solidarity in its denials and defiance of Christianity in every land where they come in contact.

It has meant, therefore, not only the eclipse of the Churches, but of the Christ. His incarnation, His atonement, His resurrection, His finality as Lord and Saviour are contradicted by the Koran, and His character and ethics by the life and character of Mohammed.

Sir William Muir truly says at the close of his four-volume life of the Prophet : ‘ The sword of Mohammed and the Koran are the most fatal enemies of civilization, liberty and truth which the world has yet known ! ’ And the German historian, Schlegel, in his *Philosophy of History*, gives an even sharper verdict : ‘ A prophet without miracles, a religion without mysteries, and a morality without love ; which has always encouraged a thirst for blood and began and ended in sensuality.’

Now these are not ancient and outworn opinions. The daily press of Cairo, during the flare-up against missions a year ago, gave evidence of the real character of Islam that cannot be gainsaid. The following telegram appeared in the press this year regarding the closing of the International Mission College at Smyrna. The telegram proclaims joyously the victory of the Turkish youth. ‘ The scorpion’s nest in Izmir is closed.’

‘ Izmir is silenced. Tarsus closes its accounts at the new year. Istanbul Colleges do their best in the way of propaganda, to catch in their net the ignorant, to get money. But it is all in vain. Sooner or later they will have to lock their doors, and put a signboard on the buildings that they are for rent.’

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So the American educational work of a century in Turkey has been nearly wiped out. The oldest station of the Presbyterian Board in Persia, Urumia, has been closed. New restrictions are imposed on the work of missions in Egypt and some of the leading Copts are saying with Professor Makram Ebeid, a nationalist leader, 'My religion is Christianity, but my nationality is Islam!' Ten times as many Copts become Moslems every year through economic and social pressure as the number of Moslems who become Christians. The facts are stubborn, startling. In Zagazig last November a Moslem procession celebrating the conversion of a Christian broke the windows of the Coptic Church and threw stones at the worshippers.

Al Azhar University has just secured a Government credit of £5,000 to propagandize Islam in America, China and Japan. The Moslems of North India are raising funds for 'the reconquest of Spain' as Moslem territory. These Moslems of the Ahmediyya sect have built mosques in Berlin, London and Chicago, and are circulating new lives of Mohammed in English, Turkish, Albanian, Polish, Italian, Javanese, Malay, Dutch, Chinese, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, and other languages. They claim to have published 70,000,000 pages of this literature. Even in Pittsburgh they have their propaganda centre.

4. Not only is this religion defiant of Christianity in its creed and propaganda, but the old law of apostasy, still in force in many lands, has made visible results meagre, and the battle for truth is a fight against the wall. One of the saintliest of missionaries, Miss Lilius Trotter, of North Africa, wrote just before her death :

'We who are engaged in Moslem work live in a land of blighted promises. That is a fact that none of us who love its people best, can deny; and the deadly heart-sickness of hope deferred, sometimes makes even the most optimistic of us almost despair of seeing abiding fruitage to the work.'

Look at the actual situation. Think of the thin red line, Christ's vanguard, His lonely sentinels. In Egypt eighty years of unremitting sacrificial toil by the noblest of men and women, yet scarcely 200 Moslem converts in all

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Egypt to-day! In Arabia forty years of pioneer effort against prejudice, loneliness, and a deadly climate—hospitals, schools, evangelism, toil and tears and blood, but only a handful of Christians. North Africa, which once boasted Augustine, Athanasius, Cyprian, Tertullian, thousands of churches and scores of bishoprics, now counts scarcely a single organized Christian community. To-day there is one missionary in all Tripoli keeping lonely vigil, none in Western Arabia; three little stations in all Central Asia; a few waiting wistfully on the borders of Afghanistan, where two or three have actually penetrated and returned. We sing 'Onward Christian Soldiers.' They are fighting and facing fearful odds, but remain undiscouraged.

'More than half beaten but fearless
Facing the storm and the night. . . .'

Theirs is the glory of the impossible. None of them would exchange places with us, because they are confident of the issue. They see the invisible, lay hold of the intangible, hear the inaudible voices. There is no great ingathering. Even from Persia they write: 'We pray and preach and work in anguish for single converts in the Mohammedan world to-day.'—(J. Christie Wilson.)

5. 'Watchman, what of the night? The morning cometh . . . but also the night.' With men this problem of Islam seems impossible, but not with God. The Roman Catholic Church recently published a most interesting series of studies on the psychology of conversion in the foreign field. The last chapter was entitled, '*Le bloc inconvertissable—les Musulmans!*' Protestant missionaries have never adopted this slogan. Bible circulation is our Protestant glory. 'It is real dynamite,' said George Stone, of Muscat. There may be new opposition, but there is also a new responsiveness to the Gospel.

Doors once barred and bolted are now opening. Ibn Saud has repeatedly invited medical missionaries to visit his capital and Taif. Dr. Dame has been within fifty miles of Mecca! Mr. Irwin, of Meshed, has crossed over into Afghanistan and is preaching the Gospel to the Mullahs of

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Herat. An Afghan Moslem educated in England writes a book entitled, *Lights of Asia*, and pays high tribute to Evangelical Christianity. That is the glory of the impossible. We say Afghanistan is closed, and from within comes this voice. All economic, social, and political changes of which we hear so much are negligible factors compared with such a work of the Holy Spirit.

The pent-up energies of unanswered prayer; the faith of those who saw the invisible before they fell asleep; the vision of the noble army of martyrs—from Raymund Lull and Henry Martyn to William Borden—all these are creative forces which God is now using to accomplish the impossible. It is daybreak, not nightfall.

The mosque of Santa Sophia no longer hears the muezzin's cry, the costly mosaics of the past centuries are laid bare and the Turks who visit the new museum behold the Christ of history. The words carved on the mosque at Damascus, once a church, will yet come true: 'Thy Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom and thy dominion from generation to generation.' Only one thing is impossible. 'It is impossible for God to lie.' His promises stand sure. Psalm 72 and Isaiah 60 have never been abrogated. 'Uplifted are the gates of brass . . . The Cross is in the field.' That Cross can never be defeated, because it itself was the defeat of sin and hell. He who hung on it shall yet have 'dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.'

A Religious Renewal in the Balkans

The Balkans are stirring with religious renewal; reacting to the prevailing irreligion of recent years. Islam is sharing in it, increasing both in numbers and efficiency. The old estimate of 3,500,000 Moslems for Europe has been passed. Bulgaria now shows a surprising total of 789,296 Moslems, and leaders of the Orthodox Church in recent conference with evangelical bodies are showing a concern for their evangelization. Of Bulgaria's 6,000,000 people, 4,500,000 are members of this Church, and its movement toward spiritual reform and missionary enterprise is in part due to the evangelical influence of some 7,000 Protestants, exercised by an evangelical ministry and a notable Sunday School work.