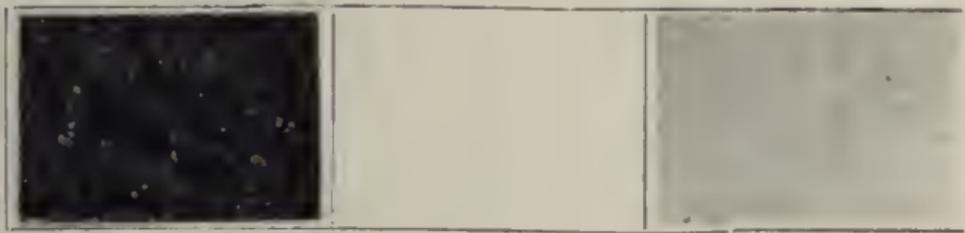




Thinking Gray in Missions



By Samuel M. Zwemer



THINKING GRAY IN MISSIONS

IN his book, "Thinking Black," Dan Crawford has so introduced us to the psychology of the black man as to give us a new angle of vision. This primitive mind seems, naturally, to think in black and white rather than in gray. Perhaps our modern civilization has made us lose the power of sharp distinctions in the world of thought. We are told that one of the results of the war will be to teach men everywhere to think less superficially and more conclusively on moral questions.

There is always a tendency to compromise in morals, and the same tendency is evident in regard to the work of evangelization. God divided the light from the darkness, not only in the world of nature but in the world of grace. "This, then, is the message," says John, "which we have heard of Him and declare unto you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth." The attitude of the apostles toward the non-Christian religions is not expressed in gray or twilight shades. There are no blurred edges to their convictions. "Sharp as a sickle is the edge of shade and shine" in their teachings.

THE APOSTLES' ATTITUDE

What Paul thinks of idolatry is clear, not only from the first chapter of Romans, but from such words as those in his Epistle to the Corinthians: "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I would not that ye should have communion with demons."

John was the Apostle of love and yet it was he who wrote in regard to the Gospel message: "If any one cometh unto you and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house and give him no greeting, for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works. Such intolerance is impossible to those who think in terms of gray.

James does not hesitate to class the devils with those who deny the Deity of Christ (2:19). And Jude speaks of the false teachers in his day as "autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots . . . wandering stars for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved forever."

MORE POSITIVE RELIGION

What we need to-day in missions is less comparative religion and more positive religion. It is possible to dwell upon the tolerable things in Hinduism and the noble things in Islam (even as one sifts out grains of gold from tons of earth,) to the practical exclusion of the social evils, the spiritual darkness, and the spiritual death which dominate these systems. This was not the method of the Apostles. A recent writer in the *Indian Witness* put this truth in very forcible language: "The wise general does not carefully search out the strong spots in the fortress of his antagonist and then spend his time illuminating them with his searchlights. He finds the weak spots and dwells on them with his heavy artillery. Let some of our sages who are scholastic rather than practical prepare a list of the things vitally antagonistic to Christian truth, then the men who are practical rather than scholastic will be able to avoid scattering an ineffective effort and to concentrate on those things the destruction of which by their fall will cause the fall of false faiths."

AMONG MOSLEMS

To us who work among Moslems their denial of Jesus Christ's mission His Incarnation, His Atonement, His Deity, is the very issue of the conflict. Almost spontaneously, therefore, what might have been mere theological dogma in the mind of the missionary turns into a deep spiritual conviction, a logical necessity and a great passion. Face to face with those who deny our Savior and practically deify Mohammed, one is compelled to think in black and white. The challenge of the *Muezzin* is a cry of pain; it hurts. In the silence of the night one can not help thinking that it pleased the Father that in Jesus Christ should all fulness dwell, not in Mohammed. Face to face with Islam one can not help asking what will be the final outcome of Christian Unitarianism. In the history of Islam its monotheism has always degenerated into some form of pantheism or deism.

When Moslems assert that the Gospel is corrupted and untrustworthy, the missionary can find no help in destructive criticism. One wonders whether the great conflict between Islam and Christianity will not have to be fought

out between the covers of the Bible. They themselves are abandoning their traditions and the Koran, in public and private discussion and are appealing to the Scriptures. Their appeal is often based on the interpretation of those who think in gray. A recent paragraph on the subject of Christ's Deity, that appeared in an Indian Moslem magazine, copied the arguments of modern Unitarians.

An Arabic book published at Beirut some years ago is entitled "Heathen Doctrines in the Christian Religion." It is by a Moslem who fancies that he has proved Christianity false by appealing to European critics of the destructive school. In Cairo the Moslem press quotes Unitarian interpretation of New Testament doctrine as proof against the New Testament Christ. The Christian who has no convictions in regard to the great fundamentals of Christianity is easily led to treat Islam as a sister religion and all Moslems as seekers after God in their own way. If there is no real distinction between creation and evolution, if there was no miracle at Bethlehem and only a martyrdom on Calvary, we may patiently await the future development of Islam on the right lines. In

that case the missionary is no longer a proclaimer of the truth but a seeker after truth. He is no longer an architect and builder but a geologist looking for fossil specimens in old strata to complete his collection of things once alive but now dead.

“The great obstacle,” writes an experienced missionary from India, “in the way of the success of the Gospel in non-Christian lands is not the attitude of the people or the inherent difficulties of the work but the tendency on the part of missionaries to be judges instead of advocates, with a desire to hold the balances of truth rather than wield its sword.” There can be no neutrality in a war for the Kingdom which has no frontiers.

In this connection we may quote a story told by an officer of Indian troops, as related by Dr. Robt. E. Speer. One day, a Mohammedan, in the course of a conversation, said to him: “Of course, Sahib, your religion and ours are very near together. Your Christ is one of our prophets.” My friend replied, “What do you mean? Of course, Christ is one of your prophets, but to us he is more than a prophet; He is the Son of God and the pattern of our lives. Besides

here is hardly a single practical point where Mohammedans and Christians are not entirely at issue." The man looked up and said: "Sahib, you have read the Qur'an, and you have read your Bible. I always make that remark to Christians: made it to a padre the other day; and they most always say, 'Very true; Mohammedanism has a great deal in common with Christianity.' Well, Sahib, when they say that, I know that they have not read the Qur'an, and they have not read their Bibles."

THE EFFECT OF THINKING GRAY

The effect of thinking in gray is inevitable on the messenger as well as on his message. Twilight life is not conducive to spiritual health. We need the full blaze of the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. His authority must be supreme in the intellectual sphere. His belief in the Old Testament Scriptures and His statement that "they can not be broken" leaves only one alternative: if we reject them, we reject Him also. It is not hard to accept the miracles of the Old and New Testaments if we accept the miracle in the first chapter of Genesis and the greater miracle in the first chapter of John's Gospel. As R. L. Knox says in his brilliant book *Some Loose Stones*:

“Orthodox theology explains all the miracles recorded of our Savior under one single hypothesis, that He was omnipotent God. But the enemy of miracle is forced to give a variety of different explanations: that the healing of the sick was faith-healing; the stilling of the storm, coincidence; the feeding of the five thousand a misrepresented sacrament; the withering of the fig tree a misrepresented parable; the raising of Lazarus a case of premature burial, and so on.”

A mutilated Gospel can only mean a mutilated spiritual life. When we walk in the light we do not mix colors. There is a noble intolerance in the very words used so often by the Apostle John: light—darkness; truth—lie; life—death; God—devil. The effect of thinking in gray always leads to compromise, and where there is compromise there is indecision. Men have opinions instead of convictions; they join Erasmus in his study rather than Luther nailing his theses to the door of the cathedral. But Luther would have made a better foreign missionary than Erasmus, especially in these days when so many in the Christian and non-Christian world are thinking in gray.



