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REAL CHRISTMAS GIFTS FOR 1938

The widespread spirit of Christmas giving throughout the world is evidenced by the general observance of Christmas even among the non-Christians—in music, festivals, cards and the too-often formal exchange of gifts. How much of this activity is truly motivated and directed by the Spirit of Christ? Christians acknowledge that every good gift comes from God—our physical and mental powers, spiritual things—and are available even though we neglect, reject, despise or misuse them. The best gifts are those that no money can buy, and that enrich the recipient while they do not impoverish the giver.

With Himself, Jesus Christ gave the world His love, peace and joy, the forgiveness of sin and Life Eternal.

Was there ever a time in history when these gifts were more needed than today? How much it would mean if they were everywhere received and shared? How infinitely better these would be than the gift of greater material prosperity for which men are striving so eagerly—better even than new laws, than new labor-saving inventions, higher wages or shorter hours of work!

What a difference it would make in the world today if the true Spirit of Christ were manifested this year among all nations in the observance of Christmas. Imagine the effect if Japan, moved by this Spirit, should give peace to China and true religious liberty to the Koreans. Suppose that Soviet Russia should celebrate Christmas by giving the right to teach youth to know and worship God, freedom to political prisoners and freedom of the press and speech! What if Germany gave civil rights and freedom from persecution to her Jewish population, freedom from religious and political oppression to pastor Niemöller and other Christians, friendly cooperation to Europe in pro-

moting international peace and a cessation from the building of a great army and air force.

Suppose that in Spain, Loyalists and Revolutionists should extend to each other the right hand of brotherhood and should give themselves to the work of promoting righteousness, brotherly love, and the rebuilding of their national life on a firm basis. Italy might celebrate their Christmas by giving Ethiopia her freedom and her own people a release from fear. Mexico's gift might be not only a square deal for the peons and for the Church but the right to teach Christianity and a just settlement of questions involved in the confiscation of property.

What about England and America? Could not Great Britain make a better Christmas gift than 5,000 new bombing airplanes? How would the Spirit of Christ best be shown in the settlement of the Irish question, the problem of Palestine, Home-rule in India and in the matter of German colonies? In America the Christmas spirit is not shown in the increase of armaments and of taxes. There is abundant opportunity to celebrate in a settlement of labor difficulties and by giving unselfish, efficient government to the nation, states and cities. Christ-like Christmas gifts would include the general observance of laws and customs that promote purity in the home and personal life; sincerity in the worship of God; brotherly treatment of Negroes, Mexicans and Orientals. America might celebrate in a Christ-like way by using her wealth to meet the crying needs of others around the world. Would not this be a different world if the love of Christ and a knowledge of His Way of Life should direct the Christmas celebration of all nations in 1938 and in the years to come?

We may not be able to control the giving of the nations, but what about ourselves? As individuals how can we best show our sense of indebtedness

What is the Koran?

By REV. E. E. ELDER, Meshed, Iran
Missionary of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.

TO UNDERSTAND the religious life of the millions who follow the Moslem faith one must know something of their sacred book. Although the Koran is not mentioned in their brief statement of belief: "There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is the Messenger of Allah," Moslems recognize the Koran as the Message of that Messenger.

No two sacred books in the world have so much in common as the Bible and the Koran. Both mention the creation of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden, the flood, the faithful witness of Noah and the promise to Abraham that he should have a son in his old age. The chapter in the Koran entitled "Joseph" gives over three-score facts about his life which agree with the story told in Genesis. From different chapters one may glean many details as to the life of Moses, his sojourn in Midian, his mission to Pharaoh and the exodus of Israel from Egypt. The Koran also contains a record of the tables of the Law, the episode of the calf, the manna, the quails and water from a rock. Space does not permit a record of all that is told of David and Solomon, Aaron and Miriam, Cain and Abel, Lot and Zerahiah. From scattered verses in the Koran one may learn that Jesus was the son of Mary, the Word of Allah, the Spirit from Allah and the Messiah, and that he healed the blind and the lepers and brought back the dead to life. But with all this material in common, the Bible and the Koran are in sharp contrast as to message, arrangement and theory of authorship.

The Koran speaks little of the "lostness" of man; there is great emphasis on the saying of prayers and the payment of alms by believers. The red thread of sacrifice which runs through the Bible is lacking in the Koran.

The Koran, although almost as large as the New Testament, is not divided into integrated sections dealing with history, doctrine or prophecy. There is little logical or chronological sequence in its arrangement. It consists of 114 *suras* (or chapters) which vary in length from one almost as long as the epistle to the Romans to some which, in the Arabic text, take but three or four lines. Each chapter has a special name referring to some subject mentioned therein. The longest is design-

nated "The Heifer" because it gives the command of Moses to sacrifice a red heifer (Deut. 22: 1-9). The fifth *sura* is called "The Table" from a reference made to a festival table sent down to Jesus from heaven. This is only one of the many subjects discussed in that chapter which, before it is a third through, has listed lawful foods and meats, prescribed regulations for ablutions before prayer, recalled Allah's covenant with Israel, warned Christians of infidelity and retold the story of Cain and Abel's offerings.

Most of the earliest *suras* are short and appear at the close of the Koran. They were delivered by Mohammed at Mecca. The style is rhythmic, but the staccato sentences are not strictly in metre. These set forth such subjects as the unity of Allah, the signs of his greatness and the certainty of judgment on the unrighteous. Later in Mohammed's career an appeal was made to history and many of the sections at the beginning and middle of the Koran tell and retell the stories of the prophets to illustrate Allah's guidance. At Medina when the prophet became the head of a warring community the revelations took the form of legislation for peace and war, inheritance laws and regulations of religious ceremony. The sentences now become involved; the rhythm is often stilted and artificial.

Each *sura* is made up of verses or *ayas* (signs or miracles). This term suggests the fundamental conception of the book as a collection of wonderful phrases and sentences. Another division of the Koran into parts cuts right across the chapter arrangement. There are thirty equal portions which facilitate the recitation of the whole book during the month of Ramadan—the month of fasting by day and feasting by night.

Protestants, in their contacts with Moslems, often assume that their scriptures are for them "the only rule of faith and practice." Alongside the Koran there are other foundations upon which religion is built; there is Tradition, what the Prophet taught, practised and approved; there is the Agreement of the Moslem community; and there is the use of reason in Analogy. All these have their place in the commentaries; all of them have been resorted to in the making of canon law.

Yet for the pious Moslem the Koran is the

source of all science and every kind of knowledge. Does it not say that it is, "a detailed account of everything" (12:111) and that in it "nothing is neglected" (6:38)? When in Egypt Napoleon asked the learned sheikhs whether this included the formula for making gunpowder. They replied that it did, but admitted that not every reader would know how to find it. Only a few years ago the representative of Egypt at the Oriental Congress at Oxford said that those who pursue a deep study of the Koran do not fail to find there some reference to the latest inventions or an explanation of some scientific points which have been obscure. He then proceeded to quote verses that for him showed that the earth had been flung off from the sun and prophesied that man had the power to fly.

Authors of the Bible and Koran

There is a sharp contrast between the Bible and the Koran in the time occupied in their composition. One represents less than a generation, the other over fifteen hundred years. At least thirty individuals contributed to the text of our Bible, whereas Islam holds that Mohammed was the sole human medium for the Koran. Christians believe that the writers of the Bible interpreted God through their personalities as they wrote. Different times and different environments called for men with different gifts. In Islam revelation and inspiration tend to merge into one another. To the Moslem's way of thinking the Koran is in no way connected with the genius of Mohammed.

Some years ago a prominent Christian was addressing an audience in Cairo, and thinking to clinch his argument he quoted from the Koran. He prefixed his statement with the words, "Your prophet says." When the Moslem hearers realized that he referred to the Koran, there was a storm of protest, not only because the words were not given verbatim, but also because the foreigner had ascribed the words of the book to Mohammed.

In spite of this mechanical theory of inspiration, native stories are given in the "Traditions" which reveal something of the process by which the Koran developed. One day Mohammed was dictating to his amanuensis, Abdallah ibn Saad, something regarding the creation of man. When he paused Abdallah said in wonder, "Blessed therefore be Allah, the best of Creators." The prophet was so taken with the words that he said, "Write that down, for so it has descended." The story continues that the scribe wondered whether revelation from Allah had not also descended on him. But such tales do not destroy the dictation theory of the Koran. It is held to be wholly a collection of sayings coming to Mohammed from the Angel Gabriel, so that the Moslem, when he first reads the Christian Gospels, rejects them as a

forgery. Instead of simple narrative about Jesus he expects to find God's words to Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount appears to most followers of Mohammed to be like some of his sayings recorded in the traditions.

Another thing about the Koran that strikes the non-Moslem reader is its constant reference to itself. Mohammed believed that he had a message to deliver and that this message was contained in a book. Other peoples had their holy books in their own tongues. Through him the Arabs were to receive a book in their own language. "Verily we have revealed it: an Arabic Koran that ye may understand." The Koran is self-conscious. One dominant note repeated throughout relate to the book itself; yet during the life time of the Prophet no attempt was made to gather the "revelations" into a volume. It did not receive its present form until one of the Khalifas, or successors of the prophet as head of the state, realized that the oral record, treasured in the hearts of men and in the few scattered written fragments, were futile to survive the ravages of war and time. An authorized edition was finally made by Zaid ibn Thabit who had been one of the Prophet's principal scribes. All other editions were supposed to be destroyed. Some years ago Dr. Mingana, of the Rylands Library in England, aroused considerable interest when he brought back from the east a manuscript which contained a version considerably different from the present text. Moslem critical works on the Koran give various readings that run into the thousands. Although the book is of comparatively recent date, when contrasted with other holy books, perhaps no other has more variant readings. Are there verses left out that should have been included? The Shiah of Iran, who hold the preeminence of Ali among Mohammed's companions, hold that some verses substantiating their claim have been suppressed. *Sura* thirty today contains only seventy-odd verses; there is a tradition that it once contained two hundred. There is little wonder then that Umar advised, "Say not I possess the whole Koran, but of it what is extant."

In spite of the references to the Torah and *Injil* (Gospel) as being authoritative for their peoples, Moslems today usually hold that the Koran has superseded the Law and the Gospels of the Bible. This is not surprising when certain verses in the Koran itself have been abrogated by other verses. The text remains but a later saying has taken away its force. The Koran provides for this by saying: "Whatever verse we may annul or cause thee to forget, we will bring a better one than it, or one like it; dost thou not know that Allah is mighty over all?"

At the same time Islam holds that the Koran

is the replica of a Heavenly Book, written on a preserved or well-guarded tablet, sent down on the Night of Destiny and dictated to Mohammed piecemeal by the Angel Gabriel. In spite of the historical evidence for a great variety of readings and the great part played by scribes in collating the material, together with the possible omission of what was originally from Mohammed and the inclusion of portions suggested by others, nevertheless orthodox Islam holds that the Koran is the uncreated speech of Allah. Westerners may fail to see the soundness of such arguments, but the Moslem theologian, with his use of dialectic, answers that all the varied readings are given in the Preserved Tablet. He can even argue that, far from detracting from the glory of the Koran, they add to its glory.

Although commentators admit that the perspicuous book contains obscure ambiguous passages, it is held to be the miracle of the ages. To millions who follow the religion of Islam its claim is inviolate. "Verily if men and *jinn*s were assembled together with a purpose of producing this (book) they could not do it, even though they helped one another."

Influence of the Koran

Few Christians appreciate the hold that the Koran has on adherents of the Moslem faith. In Arabic-speaking lands it is still the golden treasury for examples of grammatical constructions, rhetoric and literature. Throughout Egypt students in elementary, primary and secondary schools are required to memorize selected portions. Illuminated texts, in elaborate styles of penmanship, take the place of pictures and wall decorations. Over the radio professional readers daily recite portions from it. The poverty-stricken beggars who ask for alms chant passages from the sacred volume. Rarely does a Christian preacher receive a fifth of the salary obtained by favorites of the theatre or Hollywood studios, but I have been told that the best professional reciters of the Koran are as well paid as the best perform-

ers on the Arabic professional stage. The measured cadences of the book have so woven themselves into the life and worship and literature of Moslem peoples that they are the expression of their deepest emotions, sorrow and joy, anger and love, prayer and praise.

The percentage of literacy is low in many Moslem lands and that has increased the use of the Koran as a magical force. A minute edition is sometimes used as an amulet and worn about the neck or on the arm. The recitation of certain verses is believed to make evil spirits flee in terror. Quotations are used as a means of divination. In lands where Arabic is not understood the power of the Koran must often be thought of as magic. To the learned Mullahs any translation of the Koran from the sacred Arabic has seemed a sacrilege. Turkey has now, however, issued an edition in Turkish in Latin characters. The religious leaders of Egypt finally admitted the possibility of an interlinear translation which would be in their eyes a commentary on the sacred text.

With the invasion of Western civilization and Christian teaching into the world of Islam a challenge has come to the power of the Koran. Even in the desert one finds that in practical life there are more real forces in a Moslem's life than the sacred book. Jarvis, in "Yesterday and Today in Sinai," tells us that the Arab will cheerfully give false evidence on the Koran, and that in the Libyan Desert if you want the truth you must get your man to make his oath at some sheikh's tomb; in Sinai you must resort to trial by ordeal, which consists in licking a white-hot iron. Yet the educated classes among Moslems, who admit they know little of the contents of their sacred book, reverence it and say with one of the modern writers, "from the point of style alone, it is nothing less than a miracle, as great a miracle as ever was wrought." Time alone will show whether it can stand translation, whether it will go down before changing ethics, and with what resistance it may confront the Living Word of God.

NOW WHAT SHALL I DO?

We held our communion service at the soldier's camp, in two languages and I could not understand all of the dialects. We had put Itola's baptism off until the next communion for she had been "following afar off." She tried to speak to me several times, but the Buluba-speaking Christians crowded her out. We had not been able to check the communicants at this soldier's camp, as we usually check our outstation Christians before communion and not until after the service did Itola get a chance to speak with me. In great distress she cried out, through an interpreter: "I took the bread and wine before I was baptized and now they say I shall die. *Now what shall I do?*" I told the interpreter to explain to her that God would not hold her accountable if her heart was right. "Be punctual at the Inquirer's Class," I said, "and when I return, you shall be baptized."

PLUMER SMITH, *Mutoto, Congo Belge.*