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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

MILETUS TO JERUSALEM— PENTECOST 1961:

A Dream of St. Paul With His Friends

by ERIC F. F. BISHOP

THE following "dream" was related by Mr. Bishop just before Whitsuntide last year in a sermon preached in St. John's Church, Felbridge, Sussex. It may now give food for thought to others at Whitsuntide 1961. This is no lighthearted "jeu d'esprit"; it is good to try to imagine what Paul's reactions would be to the situation he would find if he were able to revisit the scenes of his apostolic ministry. Paul himself can no longer revisit the Near East, but Paul's gospel, proclaimed by Pauline men, can demolish middle walls of partition today as in New Testament times. We know of no man who has a more Pauline concern for the people of those lands today than Mr. Bishop. The persons referred to (in addition to the visitors from the first century) are all real persons, known to the author.

"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them . . . 'Behold I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there'" (Acts 20 : 17, 18, 22).

I saw in my dream that Paul came to visit some of the churches he had founded in Asia. Christian leaders, old and new, foregathered with him on the shore at Miletus. They had come from Ephesus and elsewhere for consultation over matters that concerned the Church of God. They saw that his mind was set on being in Jerusalem for the Pentecost of 1960. He told them he was glad to be in Asia again; to which they replied that "Asia" was no longer the narrow strip of which their Ephesus had been the Capital. It was a term used for the greatest land mass in the world. Where they were meeting was now called "Turkey", after a tribe from Central Asia which had conquered and then settled in the area over 400 years ago.

I noticed that some of Apostle's old companions were with him. There was Luke, veteran like himself; and Timothy and Titus, looking as young as ever. There were friends from Athens and Corinth. They sat discussing plans and the route they would take to the Holy City. Two figures approached from

the mainland — Barnabas with his nephew, Mark. News travels quickly and they had flown over from Cyprus with the request that Paul would not omit the Island in his itinerary. The Apostle had not yet heard of air travel; but a Corinthian remarked that this should cause him no surprise; had he not mentioned in one of his letters to them of his being caught up to the Third Heaven? Mark said it looked as if this experience might be paralleled in the twentieth century.

And I saw in my dream that as they fell to discussing ways of reaching their destination, Luke looked up and asked whether the constitution of the party was not a prior question; while for himself he was opposed to air travel: they would visit as many communities of Christians as possible and no one seemed able to stop in an aeroplane just where desired. So they chose their personnel making it both representative and ecumenical. Luke himself came from Philippi, while the Corinthians chose Stephanas, as the earliest Christian from Southern Greece. The Apostle was gratified that there was no hint of jealousy. Barnabas was the first Cypriot disciple; and Mark would be invaluable as knowing Jerusalem and its neighbourhood so intimately. He at once broke in that the only reasonable method of getting about was by car; and he could share the driving with Timothy and Titus, but it would be advantageous to have a fourth of their age and vigour. Paul interjected that the obvious choice was Onesimus of Colossae, who at one time made his way alone to Rome. Between them these four knew all the roads of the Eastern Mediterranean round to Alexandria. Barnabas said that if Egypt was to come within the purview of their consideration, Apollos the Alexandrian could not be left out. Then Timothy, semi-Aryan that he was and so interested in international relationships, remarked that he had heard something disconcerting about passports and visas and frontier posts, phenomena unknown in their century. It would be wise therefore to have someone *au fait* with Government regulations and who could appease people in times of tension. He suggested Onesiphorus, who had been town-clerk in Ephesus and known to stop a riot. The others acclaimed the proposal and Onesiphorus agreed, but said he had not been in Jerusalem before; but one of the other Ephesian Elders had been there once, Trophimus, the unwitting cause of the stampede in the Temple Area that landed the Apostle in custody. So Trophimus made the eleventh; but Stephanas said "twelve" was a more satisfactory number and in accordance with the practice of Jesus Himself.

All faces turned to Paul who had no misgivings in recommending Aristarchus, who had been his companion on two journeys and shared his imprisonment in Italy and Palestine.

And I saw in my dream that after prayer on the beach the Elders put two of their cars at the disposal of Paul and his company — two five-seater cars which in the Near East always took six! They said they would keep together as far as Antioch, which was no longer in Syria but Turkey. There they would separate to meet later in Jerusalem. Timothy said they must go through Lystra, his old home, where Barnabas and Paul had been taken by the local pagans for a couple of Greek gods; but he didn't suppose there were any pagans anywhere, since Christianity was surely paramount everywhere. Luke said that he was still puzzled by the name "Turkey"; but Titus told the group that he had found out that the Turks were a Mongolic tribe, which breaking out of Central Asia finally settled in what they had known as Anatolia. They even spilled over into Europe, still occupying a city called Istanbul, which used to have many churches and exercise considerable influence. Paul asked why Christianity should have begun to lose influence; when Onesimus broke in with the information that he had made a quick visit to Colossae and found scarcely a trace of the Faith. He understood that these pagan tribes from further east never became Christians but adopted Islam instead, the religion of people whom they conquered. This elicited questions from the group — What was Islam? And where else were the adherents of Islam to be found? The Apostle sat quietly perturbed at different statements made by others who had been at pains to discover something of what had happened since the first century and the arrival of the Turks. He added that he had found it strange that although he was a ready linguist he had met only a few people who understood him in Greek; and when he tried Hebrew or Latin they merely smiled courteously. Apollos said at once that in Antioch they would find things better, where Arabic began to be spoken which was akin to Paul's own dialect of Aramaic. Stephanas commented that it was a blessing to have a scholar in the group and Apollos ought to make research into linguistic and religious matters throughout the tour. These problems might be found to be interrelated. There were points of history too requiring elucidation. Paul said this was best done in joint endeavour and the group would leave it to Mark and Timothy. This meant they should not travel in

the same car but compare notes at the end of each day and hand their findings to Apollos.

And I saw in my dream that the party seated themselves in the cars, Barnabas and Paul being in the same because of the agreement to visit Cyprus. The Elders had told them of small groups of Christians, and some missionaries of the current century who owed their inspiration to the example of the great Apostle. They had sent on ahead to a couple of very interesting men to meet them in Lystra and help to straighten things out. There they were waiting — one a Canadian born in Turkey; the other a younger man from a leading Muslim country in Asia. The former was responsible for circulating the Scriptures, the other connected with Universities of the west and east. Further through his own thought and research he had found the way to faith in Christ; so he was obviously the one to talk with Apollos on the relationship between Christians and Muslims (as they were called). While the two scholars were deep in conversation their other friend surprised them by offering Paul a copy of the New Testament in Greek. He was amazed to see his name in such a prominent position on the title page; but in itself this fact posed a problem. If these letters of his to churches and individuals were being published 1900 years after they were written, how was it that in their journeying the party had noticed but few signs of Christianity? Their friend had an answer. Things were not as bad as sometimes appeared the case. His father had translated the whole New Testament into modern Turkish for Muslim readers; while he was himself responsible for distributing the Scriptures in Arabic over a wide area, for it was unquestionably the most important language for most of Northern Africa and Western Asia. On the other hand it was so often true that when you talked with ordinary Muslims in Turkey or elsewhere, it seemed as though “the Crusades took place the day before yesterday”. These wars were reckoned as if they still represented “the expression of Christianity towards Islam”. Aristarchus interrupted that this statement cleared up part of the difficulty. He had learned that this religion “Islam”, or “Submission (to the Divine Will)”, came out of Arabia 600 years and more after Paul had planted the Gospel in Asia and Europe. But the two religions — with their respective signs of Cross and Crescent — had never entirely understood each other. In fact the Crusades (mentioned by their friend) told how Christians had fought against Muslims in this Mediterranean area up to Jerusalem, where the former

set up a kingdom for 100 years in the very place where Jesus had said that His Kingdom was not of this world.

Upon this Apollos returned from his talk with the Professor, who knew both Islam and Christianity from the inside. What impressed Apollos was that, despite disagreements, theological and social, Islam was the only other religion, which had in its system a place for Jesus Christ, regarding Him as the Word of God (though not in the Christian sense). There were some 300 million of these Muslims in the world — mostly in Asia from Antioch eastwards and in Africa from Alexandria southwards. Apollos added that he would not forget how the Professor stressed the fact that “religious experience can never truly lend itself to scientific analysis”. Truth was “reached and tested” by attitudes of spiritual sympathy. It was thus that both the Professor and himself, through touch with other Christians, had been enabled to see the way of God more clearly. Apollos felt sure the time was ripe for Muslims and Christians to give thought to the exchange of mutual ideas and experiences.

I saw in my dream that Onesiphorus rose to say that they must move on; and that all frontier formalities had been arranged for the occupants of the two cars up to Jerusalem. So they crossed the Taurus mountains and then drove through Tarsus, where there was a Christian College, which the Apostle was pleased to note was an advance on his time. Some miles past Tarsus the cars turned south to Antioch. They stopped close to the old grove of Daphne and knelt in the shade of the trees to commend each other to God for the work which they fulfilled. Then Luke, Apollos, Stephanas, Onesiphorus, Titus and Timothy set out for Aleppo, partly because of its memories of Abraham, the father of the Semites and of the Faithful everywhere. But they were pleased to find over a thousand students in Christian Institutions. In fact they came across evidences of the influence of Christianity all over the place through the devoted work of doctors and teachers, which naturally appealed to Luke and Apollos. They made good progress down the direct road to Damascus, interested in finding Christian touch between the City of Homs and disciples in far away India, where “believers” seemed to be taking to heart the dangers of exclusiveness (as Paul had pointed out to the Corinthians). Once in the Capital of Syria they asked the way to the “Street called Straight” so as to tell Paul what it looked like after 19 centuries. Apollos took every

opportunity of talking with people, as easy as he had always found it in the friendly Near East. There were Christians who proved helpful; but in the University he found two Muslim Professors, one of whom knew the New Testament well enough to quote in lectures, the other more venerable who had made a real impression in gatherings of Muslims and Christians, which had taken place in two or three countries in the Area. Timothy spent his time learning about the political influence of Damascus 13 centuries ago, influence which had meant the spread of Arabic culture as far as Spain; in fact Arabic words were found embedded in the languages of the French and the English. Timothy also knew something of the divisions in Islam itself and devoted much attention to the controversy over the Person of Christ. In Damascus they abode some days.

And I saw in my dream that when the party started one day from Damascus for Palestine they saw to it that they should arrive "at midday" close to the spot where Saul had met the Risen Christ. They alighted for a few moments and stood in thankful silence. They drove on along a road that was full of history, their happiest hour being when Titus went slowly with the Lake of Galilee on their right; and they glanced with thankful remembrance towards Capernaum and the Mount of the Beatitudes. Southwards of the Lake the journey was less inspiring; a lot of desert and a puzzling number of large concentrations of people showing signs of frustration on their faces. Luke said they must bring this matter up with Paul in Jerusalem. Onesiphorus nodded and said he would find out something when they reached the Capital of the new country called "Jordan". He had been given an introduction to some highly-placed Christians. Postponement of discussion proved wise, since things grew worse the nearer they approached the Holy City, especially in the hot Jericho Plain where they found some thirty thousand people living in hovels beneath the "mountain" where tradition said the Master had refused the Kingdoms of this world. So they drove up towards Jerusalem, not knowing what they might encounter there. They lodged in the hospice of St Anne close to the Temple Area, to await their colleagues. They could not avoid hearing quite often the voices of men who climbed one or other of the tower-like structures and summoned Muslims to the worship of God. The older men remained in the hospice talking with anyone they could, while Timothy and Titus went on a voyage of discovery and brought back to Apollos news that he could discuss thoro-

ughly and deeply the implications for Muslims and Christians of "The Call of the Minaret" with an acknowledge authority who was often in Jerusalem. Apollos expressed his pleasure; and Stephanas added that they might have the same kind of experience as in the old days in Corinth in "comparing spiritual things with spiritual". There were still saints in every place.

And I saw in my dream back once more in Antioch that after waving farewell to Luke and the others, Paul and his company sat for a brief while calling to mind the mission of Barnabas and himself to Cyprus, when the church in Antioch fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them and sent them away. Onesimus announced that the helicopter was ready for the trip to the Island and he would accompany the two apostles. Trophimus said that Aristarchus, Mark and he would spend the time discovering what "Antioch" might have to tell them of Christianity today. The other trio landed in Salamis within the hour, quite close to the ruins of the synagogues which Luke had mentioned. Barnabas was amused at having to point out his own grave, as they drove across the Island to Paphos. Paul noted at once that the Christian population of Cyprus exceeded that of the Muslims by three to one. He hoped that this might lead to better understanding and that Christian leadership would always remain loyal to the Gospel. It was a relief to talk Greek and he told the friends in Paphos that his preaching and ministry in the old days had resulted in the conversion of the then Governor. A people, he added, capable of reading the Gospels in the original Greek had hope on their side. They would remain the basis for any proclamation of the word of God.

And I saw in my dream that back on the mainland they rejoined their companions in the car and driving on exchanged experiences and conclusions. Aristarchus told them how a visit in the Museum revealed a known civilization in the area for some three thousand years before the Rise of Christianity. They met a missionary who admitted this was the case but added that throughout this period of five millennia the inhabitants hardly ever knew the direction of the next invasion. Too many great nations had imperial designs on small countries. Here Trophimus interjected that they should be grateful for the trouble taken by Onesiphorus, since although they had only 300 miles to cover the frontier business was deplorable — Turkey into Syria, Syria into Lebanon, Lebanon into Israel, Israel into Jordan. The ex-

pectation of these partitions nearly broke Paul's heart and he was more absorbed with wondering about the ideas of "the rulers of this world" than of noting the changes on the road that was so familiar to him, as they drove past Crusading Castles and through the ports where fishermen plied their trade as of old, while in the waters off shore where anchored curious new ships, as at Sidon, which took oil in different directions after being filled from pipes that went all the way to Arabia and Mesopotamia, which made these lands very rich. The Apostle said something about the dangers inherent in untold wealth. He was however gratified that he could make himself "understood" with his knowledge of Semitic when the cars stopped in Beirut and Haifa. He was told that the inhabitants of Lebanon were about half Christian and half non-Christian; while in Israel (a geographical term he failed to understand) both Muslim and Christian communities were very small. He felt as he had in Athens with his spirit provoked within him. He could hardly find words to express his thoughts, which the others realized was unusual. The road ran close to the sea and Aristarchus cheered him with memories of their imprisonment in Caesarea. Soon after they turned inland driving up to Jerusalem through Lydda; but finding on arrival at the Holy City that the frontier situation was at its worst. The City was "rent in twain". The others noted Paul's distress and Barnabas, son of consolation that he always was, said the sooner they found Luke and Apollos the better for the apostle and them all. They drove through *No Man's Land*, passing the wall of Herod Agrippa and getting out at the Damascus Gate, so as to walk through part of the Old City to St. Anne's, where they rejoined the others thankful yet disturbed. Paul murmured, "I planted, Apollos watered, God gave the increase".

I saw in my dream that next morning they crossed to the Temple Area, now a holy place in the Islamic world. They sat talking on the steps close to the site of the old Fortress of Antonia, where Paul was rescued from the mob by the Roman soldiers. Neither he nor Trophimus had been in the area since then. Luke said it was the appropriate place to summarize their findings, with its memories of the three monotheistic faiths; their tour had given opportunity for advice on the problems surrounding Islam and Christianity. Apollos who had made the most of every opportunity on the road and in the City was recognized by the others

as representing them all, while of course the Apostle, happy in their fellowship, would have the last word. Apollos started by saying that since they could not go further than Jerusalem till after Pentecost, he had been in touch with Alexandria through letters, which mentioned Egypt as having the largest concentration of Christians in any section of the Arabic-speaking world. Otherwise almost over the whole area Christians were a tiny minority, except in Cyprus and Lebanon. This meant Egyptian Christianity was as important as in the days of Origen or Athanasius. It was important too since in so many other parts of Africa Islam and Christianity found themselves in confrontation. Apollos felt it imperative that the two faiths should work for more mutual comprehension — especially, he went on, because Christianity understood the clash of culture better than Islam, while Islam understood the clash of colour better than Christianity. Here was a problem facing Africa in particular; and as he spoke Onesimus could not refrain from interjecting “there cannot be Greek and Jew . . . barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman”. The other points reached through the group’s comparing notes were more general. They were unanimous:—

FIRST: that Christians in most of the Islamic world had to learn the art of being a minority recognized as morally indispensable.

SECOND: Christians should admit mistakes of the past or in the present as this they had learned from talking about the Crusades. (Quoting his Jerusalem friend Apollos added, “History has not yet outlived the legacy of their reproach”.)

THIRD: Christians and Muslims, especially those educated in similar institutions or who have travelled, should use every opportunity for the exchange of ideas; and share in different forms of social work.

FOURTH: Muslim scholars should be invited to make as thorough a study of Christianity as Christian scholars have of Islam. Apollos said he was told of a beginning in this direction; but the purpose of such research should be an uninhibited appraisal of the Gospels and he added (glancing at the Apostle) the letters of St. Paul!

FIFTH: This implied a great increase in the need for literature and literacy.

Luke then asked Paul if he and his party had come across those concentrations of people, some poorly housed, but scattered in the lands they had traversed, working in some cases but always frustrated and with “little prospect of the longer future” Mark asked leave to answer as he had driven the car when they passed through one of these “tented concentrations”, the road bisecting the camp. In Israel too there were thousands of homeless Palestinians. Luke said there were more refugees in Jordan

than elsewhere, as Onesiphorus had found out. Paul said it was this fact and the frontiers which caused him such pain of heart. Here was a wall of partition not broken down but built up. This was a denial of all that Christianity stood for. It was serious that ninety per cent of these people were Muslim, driven from home through no fault of their own. Their suffering therefore was vicarious and might yet be redemptive; as had been the case supremely one Friday in Jerusalem long years ago. Paul said that because of this he would add a seventh to the points made so succinctly by Apollos. He realized that Christianity had been fading in the Near East. He stressed, as a linguist, the importance of Arabic for human intercourse; he stressed, as a disciple, the understanding of the Cross. For more than 1300 years Islam had spread over the Mediterranean Area (often at the expense of Christianity) and much further afield. It seemed to have refused the historicity of the Crucifixion and rejected any validity in the way of suffering. But here "suffering" had reached the very heart of the Islamic world in the personalities of these refugees — and this was the same whether they were in camps or dispersed among the nations near and far. So he prayed for the uplifting of Christ Crucified once more, quoting words he had written centuries ago: "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ". "He came and preached peace to you who were far off and to them that were nigh". Once again had not Paul come bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that might befall him or others there? And I saw in my dream that as Paul said these words the others gathered round him on the steps, and the wind of Pentecost began to blow, carrying the echo of his words east and west and north and south. And I awoke and behold it was a dream.

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