

A THEOLOGICAL APPRECIATION OF THE  
 REVEREND LEWIS BEVAN JONES (1880 - 1960)  
 Baptist Pioneer in Christian-Muslim Relations

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the outstanding contribution to Christian study of Islam made by Lewis Bevan Jones, M.A., B.D., Baptist Missionary in India. Bevan Jones was born at Agra where his father, the Revd Daniel Jones, was a missionary of considerable stature. A gifted linguist, Daniel Jones was renowned for his work in the leper asylum and for his contact with ordinary Indians: 'Little native children knew he belonged to them, faces of poor lepers lit up at his approach'.(1)

Bevan Jones' sister, Edith, inspired by her father, served with the Baptist Zenana Mission at Agra (1896-1901). His half-brother, S. W. Maslen Jones, found expression for his sense of obligation to serve in his career as a distinguished surgeon.(2) Bevan Jones himself served with the B.M.S. in India from 1907-1944. Unlike his father, who spoke of a sudden 'conversion',(3) he ascribed his Christian commitment to a gradual growing up into faith:

Trained while a child by Christian parents I must have been very young when my mind first opened itself to the things of Christ. And the desire to serve him, aroused in early years, has grown increasingly more determined and intelligent.(4)

He was baptised at Heath Street, Hampstead, in 1895 whilst a pupil at the School for the Sons of Missionaries (now Eltham College). After two years in the business house of Edward Jackson J.P., a deacon at King Street and sometime Mayor of Reading, gaining experience through teaching in the Sunday School, he proceeded to his father's old college at Cardiff.(5) In 1904 he graduated with a good second class honours degree in Semitic Languages. This was followed by the B.D. from London University which he gained as a student at Regent's Park College. Much later, he received the M.A. from Cardiff for a thesis entitled *The Status of Women in Islam*.(6) In his final year at Regent's he decided to follow in his father's footsteps and offered himself to the B.M.S. He believed that his childhood knowledge of the colloquial and 'the intercourse' he 'once had with the people' gave India 'a double claim' upon him.(7) Reflecting the influence of both his father and the Revd. R. Rowntree Clifford, in whose pioneer work at West Ham(8) he shared whilst at Regent's, Bevan Jones spoke in his candidature of 'rendering obedience' to the needs of the people 'for whom' he 'hoped to live'.(9) During his studies, he read about Indian religions (mainly about Hinduism) and began to wrestle with the question of Christianity's relationship with them.

His original statement of faith, submitted to the B.M.S. on 16th January 1907 was returned to him for revision. No specific reason for this is stated though its tendency towards universalism and its lack of a detailed theory of atonement would not have pleased everybody, even though demonstrating the openness of his theology: he spoke of God

having 'granted light in varying measures to heathen peoples' and of 'the fuller revelation of that light in Christ'.(10) His second statement was more Christo-centric. Salvation is channelled through Christ. The importance of repentance from sin is emphasised. His father had stressed in his preaching that 'Christ is the all sufficient Saviour for sinful men'.(11) Tension between the 'universal' and the 'particular' was to shape and influence much of Bevan Jones' later thought and work.

As he sailed to Agra, his father retired to England because of ill health. This re-inforced his conviction that he was continuing where his father had left off. However, after three years at Agra mastering Hindi and assisting in the School he was transferred to work with students in Dhaka where he soon added Bengali to his command of languages. Initially, he tried to encourage Hindu and Muslim students to socialise and to befriend each other across traditional barriers. This task proved impossible. Subsequently he turned his attention towards Islam.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, missionary work and thinking was experiencing a sea-change. Missionaries were more conscious than they had previously been of the need to study other religions before attempting to evangelise. One result of this sea-change was the International Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 which led to the establishment of the Missionary Training Colleges at Selly Oak, Birmingham, and to much closer co-operation between Protestant Missionary Societies in certain areas of their work. Missionaries were increasingly aware of how much damage Christian disunity caused. Ecumenical co-operation came even earlier amongst Protestant missionaries to Muslims, whose first international conference was held at Cairo in 1906.(12)

Bevan Jones' interest in Islam dates from 1911, the year in which the second International Conference of Missionaries to Muslims met at Lucknow, India. This was the inspiration behind the foundation of the Missionaries to Muslims League in India and the Far East, which attempted to co-ordinate missionary work among Muslims by sharing information and providing training facilities. In an early published article, Bevan Jones suggested that Muslims had been neglected by missionaries: 'Christian missions seem to have gone out of their way to do all for the Hindu and next to nothing for Muslims'.(13) The time was ripe to be of 'real service' to Muslims, especially in 'educational matters'.

Bevan Jones' specialist vocation was recognised by the B.M.S. Triennial Conference (India and Ceylon) which in 1914 set him aside, together with the Revd William Goldsack and Revd Joel Lall, for Muslim work. Goldsack, who had attended both Cairo and Lucknow on behalf of the B.M.S., made a valuable contribution to Christian understanding of Islam in his *Christ in Islam* (1913) and his translation of selections from the *Mishkatu'l Masabih* (1923).(14)

During the next five years Bevan Jones began to develop a *modus operandi* of missionary work amongst Muslims. The cornerstone of his method was personal contact, not inside the Mission compound, but

outside, in the Muslim bazaar, in the courtyard of Mosques, in Muslim shops and homes. He befriended Muslims of all classes and theological persuasion - orthodox Imams, a Sufi darwish, a hafiz (a person who has learnt the Qur'an by heart), the liberal minded, the literate and the illiterate. He formed several lifelong friendships. He advocated practical action as an important plank in a missionary's programme: helping people gain employment, getting their children admitted into school, or interviewing their landlords or municipal authorities on their behalf:

It is out of such little acts of simple, ungrudging kindness that the substantial bridges of understanding, sympathy and friendship are built. (15)

He became convinced that before any progress could be made accurate knowledge of Islam was absolutely necessary. If a missionary:

would understand the mind and heart of the Muslim he must first acquaint himself with the contents of the Qur'an, its commentaries and the Traditions, and with the development of Muslim theology, moreover, he must keep himself informed through the daily press.... (16)

Surveying the history of Muslim-Christian encounter in India, he concluded that much mischief had been caused by missionaries who had made ignorant attacks on Islam. He resolved not to repeat their mistakes. His main authorities were secondary sources, though based on primary sources - the works of British scholars, books written by Christians about Islam: Sir William Muir's *Life of Mahomet* (1858); Edward Sell's *The Faith of Islam* (1880); William St Clair-Tisdall's *Religion of the Crescent* (1895); Stanley Lane-Pool's *Studies in a Mosque* (1883); and the writings of his Middle-East contemporaries, S. W. Zwemer and Temple Gairdner. (17) He was also familiar with several eminent European authors, including Noldeke, Goldziher, Snouck Hurgronje, and the French Jesuit, Henri Lammens.

However, he knew that Muslim authorities must ultimately be the test of any appraisal of Islam. Canon Sell, to whose memory he was to dedicate his own *The People of the Mosque* (1932) had written:

Much that is written on Islam is written either in ignorant prejudice or from an ideal standpoint. To understand it aright one must know its literature and live amongst its peoples.... (18)

He therefore also studied the Qur'an itself, the *Hadith* (Traditions), especially the *Mishkatu'l Masabih* and the writings of modern Muslim scholars such as Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan, Sayyed Amir Ali, Sir Ahmad Hussain, Mr Khuda Baksh and Cheragh Ali. (19)

However, perhaps the most important element of his study of Islam was that it was set in the context of going out and living among its practitioners. His knowledge of Islam was the fruit of personal observation as well as of academic study, a knowledge gained as much in the intercourse of the bazaar as in the study. His academic study and field observation of Islam highlighted a major deficiency in his

equipment - lack of Arabic. Believing that a new class of literature was needed for use with educated Muslims, he realised that in order to attract Muslims such literature should be in Arabic.

In 1917 Bevan Jones, accompanied by his wife, Violet Rhoda, whom he married in 1916, spent six months studying Arabic at the Cairo Study Centre which, founded by Temple Gairdner in 1912, had pioneered new methods in language teaching.(20) This was followed by six months research at Oxford where he wrote his definitive article 'Paraclete or Muhammad?', in which he discussed the popular Muslim conviction that Muhammad was the Paraclete whose coming Jesus had predicted in John 24.16 (a conviction based on Qur'an 21.6). The discussion revolves around the etymology of the Greek *parakletos* (Advocate, Comforter) and the Arabic *Ahmad* (praised). He dismisses the Muslim claim that the original Greek had read *perikytos* (very renowned) citing as evidence several early manuscripts of the New Testament. Neither can Muhammad be said to have fulfilled the role predicted of the Paraclete: Jesus had promised a Spirit, not a man.(21) Muslims are 'in solemn truth ... victims of an ancient blunder; a blunder that goes back to the days of Muhammad; the saddest result of which is that they should see no beauty in the Crucified Christ that they should desire Him'.(22) Returning to Dhaka in 1918, his determination to devote his entire effort to Muslim work was to a degree thwarted by the necessity of standing in for an absent colleague in the Mission Station. This may be interpreted as an example of tension between 'vocation' and 'obedience', interesting in a Baptist context. Nevertheless, he established a reading room in the heart of the Muslim bazaar and, as a contribution towards the new genre of literature for which he had called, wrote a Bengali *Life of Christ*, an early attempt to write a Life of Christ specially for Muslim readers. Translated into sixteen languages, it became a best-seller. In 1922, the Bevan Jones moved out of the Dhaka mission compound to a bungalow in the middle of the Muslim bazaar. This move, which was, says H. W. Pike, motivated 'by a burning desire to get nearer to the lives of the people'(23) finally enabled Bevan Jones to concentrate on his chosen area of interest, Islam.

The decade from 1920 saw a change in the main thrust of his work, as he began to share his experience and knowledge with others. He began, with William Goldsack, to lecture on a sessional basis to students at Serampore College. Also he succeeded John Tackle, the New Zealand Baptist founder of the Missionaries to Muslims League, as its Secretary/Editor. Contact with missionaries of all Protestant denominations throughout India helped him emerge as a leader in the field of mission to Islam in India where he gave the national movement the co-ordination it was given on an international level by Zwemer and Gairdner. In 1924 he attended the third International Conference at Jerusalem, where he met S. W. Zwemer, Gairdner, Constance Padwick, fellow missionaries, and from the academic world, Professor D. S. Margoliouth of Oxford. The Jerusalem delegates called for the establishment of Islamic Study Centres, modelled after the Cairo Study Centre, in all major Muslim mission fields.

In India a school of Islamics, funded by several Protestant societies, eventually opened at Lahore in 1930. It was an initiative of

the National Christian Council's Committee on Muslim Work. Bevan Jones, a member of the Committee, Dr Murray Titus, its Secretary, and Dr William Paton, General Secretary of the International Missionary Council, are credited as the school's co-founders.(24) The committee unanimously chose Bevan Jones to be the new school's first Principal, which office he held until 1941. The name, 'Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies', was his personal choice, honouring the man who is regarded as the first modern missionary to Muslims.(25)

The school's brief was to produce literature and to carry out research into trends and movements within Islam and to train personnel. Bevan Jones headed a capable and distinguished staff who all produced major scholarly works within a few years of the school's opening. Dr L. E. Browne, a High Anglican, subsequently became Professor of Comparative Religion at Manchester; Dr Sweetman, an English Methodist, Professor of Islamics at Selly Oak; John Subhan became a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Bevan Jones contributed three important books, *The People of the Mosque* (1932), *Christianity Explained to Muslims* (1938) and, co-authored by his wife, *Women in Islam* (1941).

Between 1941 and 1944 he pastored a church in Delhi, followed by a pastorate at Burgess Hill, Sussex (1944-47). Until his death, he remained active especially in ecumenical circles. From 1950 until 1959 he chaired the Fellowship of Faith for Muslims(26) for which he wrote several booklets, still available today. From 1950 until his death he served as a non-Anglican Assessor on the Council for the Muslim World of the Church Assembly, alongside such eminent Christian scholars of Islam as Professor W. Montgomery Watt of Edinburgh and Bishop Kenneth Cragg. Professors Browne and Sweetman were also members. In 1953, on behalf of the C.M.W., he visited Cardiff where a significant number of Muslims had settled. Reporting back as to how the churches were responding to their presence, he stated that 'nothing was being done'. The Council noted that a similar situation prevailed in Birmingham and other large cities and discussed the possibility of appointing someone to work in Britain. Perhaps Bevan Jones was the first Baptist to consider the challenge of Islam within the domestic context.(27)

The remainder of this paper will examine the main characteristics of Bevan Jones' thought and understanding of Islam as contained in his first two books. In *The People of the Mosque: An Introduction to the Study of Islam with special reference to India* he offered not only an introduction to Islam but a guide as to how the Christian should relate to the Muslim. His aim was to interpret Islam to Christian readers. The book's title indicates its tenor - it concerns 'people': how they think and live and what they believe. In the sections on Islamic faith and practice, the book contains little, if any, original material but drew openly on the work of Muir, Sell, Lammens, Lane-Poole, Gairdner et al. Nevertheless it does, as its author claimed, contain 'features ... which are not to be found in any of the existing manuals'.(28) In part, its value lies in the sheer skill with which Bevan Jones succeeded in reducing almost the whole of Islam's basic contents into one concise and readable volume, but more particularly in the approach to Islam which it advocates. Muhammad Yakub Khan, Imam of the

Woking Mosque and a close friend of Bevan Jones, wrote on learning of his death:

The new approach between the two great sister religions, Christianity and Islam, now coming to the forefront found its very early exponent in Bevan Jones, to which his book *The People of the Mosque* is a standing monument. (29)

What was this 'new approach'? Put simply, the 'new approach' was a sympathetic rather than a negative one. Most previous missionaries and Western Christian scholars of Islam held totally negative assessments of Islam. William Muir (1819-1905), for example, called 'the sword of Mahomet and the Coran ... the most fatal enemies of civilization, liberty and the truth which the world has yet known'. (30) He believed that Muhummad was satanically inspired. Similarly, the C.M.S. missionary, Douglas Thornton, said in June 1902:

The religion of Islam is the greatest foe of the Christian Church ... it is a Satanic force ... because it denies our scriptures ... the divinity, ... death and resurrection of Christ. Now, I say that it is a Satanic force. Who but the great enemy could have produced such an effectual barrier to the reception of the Gospel? (31)

Although some nineteenth-century writers did suggest that similarities between Islam and Christianity might provide a base on which Christian truth could be built (as St Paul based his preaching at Athens in Acts 17 on 'the unknown God'), even this possibility was rejected out-of-hand by the hard-liners. George Knox, editor of the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, wrote in 1874 that it was humanity's duty:

to seek by all lawful means ... to rid the world as far as possible of Muhammedanism as its bane, and to hold no truce with it or any other form of error ... what Christianity is to learn from Islam ... is a thing altogether beyond us. (32)

Led by the German, Karl Pfander (1803-1865), who staged public debates with leading Muslim scholars in India's North West Provinces, missionaries employed a rationalist technique, trying to prove by argument that Christianity was true, Islam false. They aimed their assault upon Islam's creed, at the mind rather than the heart. Such an approach, opined Bevan Jones, 'had shown insufficient regard for the sensitive spirits of devout Muslims' and usually resulted in similar attacks on Christian belief. (33) He believed that the vehemently anti-Christian Ahmadiyya movement began as a reaction to Christian preaching:

founded as part of the reaction in the body of Indian Islam to the upheaval of thought and feeling caused by the exposure of Islam and Muhammad in the public debates initiated by Dr Pfander. (34)

Some missionaries, however, while acknowledging Pfander's zeal and owing much to his example, in practice moved away from his hard-line

approach. Two such men were Thomas Valpy French (1825-1881) and William St Clair-Tisdall (d.1928), with whose work Bevan Jones was familiar. Although, early in his career, French had assisted Pfander in one of his debates, he later adopted a more irenical approach: over-reliance on rationalism did an injustice to the *mysterium* that lies at the heart of Christianity. He preferred to emphasise God's love and fellowship and found it increasingly difficult to reject Islam totally as containing no spiritual value.(35) St Clair-Tisdall believed that 'elements of truth' in Islam could be used as a 'foundation for Christian faith'. The missionary's object, too, should be to win souls, not arguments.(36) Whilst he remained convinced that Islam was of 'human origin' different in kind not in degree to Christianity', Tisdall wrestled in two books with the problem of interfaith relations.(37)

Bevan Jones' own lifelong study of Islam convinced him that elements of truth within her could only be explained by reference to the activity of God's Spirit.

Our concern as followers of Christ when dealing with Islam and Muslims should be to seek to discover and fulfil. We should rejoice in whatever evidence we can find of the presence of God's Spirit in Islam and in every witness it makes to His Being and Majesty...(38)

Acquainted with the work of J. N. Farquhar (1861-1929), he suggested that his 'fulfilment' approach to Hinduism be applied to Islam.(39) He called for a 'bolder and more venturesome faith ...':

faith to believe that other nations and peoples of other religions do have a real contribution to make in the fulfilment of God's purposes for the world through Jesus Christ.(40)

How did he reconcile this with the Christian conviction that Jesus is God's Absolute Self-Disclosure to man? He did so by suggesting that, whilst the Revelation in Christ is 'absolute', it is not 'exhaustive'; God is not precluded from revelatory activity elsewhere. Such revelation may not be 'more complete' than the Revelation in Christ but may be supportive of it. Bevan Jones did not accept Karl Barth and Hendrik Kraemer's total divide between the Revelation in Christ and religions as futile human attempts to bridge the gap between the human and the divine.

We need not and indeed cannot claim that God is, in Jesus, exhaustively revealed ... Let it not seem strange that we are forced to confess that our faith holds fast to contradictions - God is known, and yet not known. After all, in the Revelation of Himself in Jesus we stand face to face with a profound mystery; it is not surprising that we do not fully understand.(41)

Bevan Jones believed that the Holy Spirit could work in Muslim hearts as well as in Christian hearts. He wrote:

Let us then invite the Muslim to explore the phenomena of spiritual experience, his and ours. In his heart, as in ours, the

spirit of God is actually at work. (42)

Mutual exploration of 'spiritual experience', then, is a fruitful exercise for Christians and Muslims to pursue across the threshold of faith and may result not only in the Muslim learning from the Christian but also in the Christian learning from the Muslim. Here we have a radical departure from the position of Muir, Pfander and Thornton. Their Islam could offer Christianity nothing. Bevan Jones wrote: 'We require ... faith to believe that there is something of real worth to the Kingdom of God at the heart of Islam'. (43)

The main characteristic of his approach was that it aimed to see Islam through Muslim eyes, to portray Islam accurately and sympathetically so that a Muslim might recognise his own faith in his writings. He was aware that Christian writers had all too often allowed bias and prejudice to colour their work. However, he was not wholly successful in his attempt to free himself from traditional stereotypes of Islam. This lack of success may be seen in his treatment of Muhammad. Sensitive to Muslim respect for and idealization of their prophet, he warned against the dangers of repeating Pfander's tactical mistake of an outright attack on Muhammad which had resulted in tit-for-tat attacks on Christ.

Yet whilst he knew that Christians had often exaggerated supposed moral defects in Muhammad's character, he still concluded that 'moral blemishes' could be attributed to the prophet. Fully aware, too, that a comparison of Christ with Muhammad was inappropriate because, theologically, the true comparison should be between Christ and the Qur'an, he nevertheless upheld the comparison in his final statement on Muhammad:

we cannot escape the obligation to compare Muhammad with Jesus Christ, and, in that light, seriously-minded and unprejudiced people all the world over, whose only concern is to follow the highest, have found in Muhammad what can only be described as grave moral defects. (44)

It must be noted that a very few Muslims have found 'grave moral defects' in Muhammad. The 'unprejudiced people' referred to are almost undoubtedly Christians and are therefore prejudiced by their Christianity. However, the danger of quoting passages out of context is that they may suggest that the reason for Bevan Jones' deferential approach to Muhammad was merely tactical - not to cause offence to Muslims. This was not the case, as is made clear by a remarkable passage in which he appraisingly cites a Muslim friend:

A Muslim who respects the name of Jesus Christ is more likely to form a right judgement about Christianity than is a Christian about Islam who enters his study with the conviction that Muhammad was an imposter. (45)

Nevertheless, whilst he undeniably dealt more sympathetically with Islam than had most previous writers, no Muslim would actually accept his account as unbiased. A tabular examination of four important aspects of Islamic belief, as presented, firstly, in a popular Muslim



work (used by Bevan Jones) and, secondly, in *The People of the Mosque* will expose the principal differences.

Islam's Self-Portrait

(as exemplified in the apologetical work of Amir Ali, contemporary with Bevan Jones)

Arabia

Islam sees its origin not in a geographical area but in a concept Q.3.19: 'True faith in Allah is Islam' i.e. 'surrender to God'.

Attitude towards Muhammad (pbuh)

Muhammad was the 'Seal' of the Prophets, Q.33.40; the 'perfector' not the 'founder' of Islam. Other prophets besides Muhammad are revered (Q.3.83) though he is the guide unto the right path for all men. All prophets are sinless. Muhammad was God's mouthpiece.

Attitude towards the Qur'an

Q.2.185: 'A book of guidance with proofs of guidance distinguishing right from wrong'. The Qur'an is the very speech of God, totally divine in provenance with no human element whatsoever. A veritable miracle of eloquence and authority.

Attitude towards the 'Traditions'

They are to a very large degree historically reliable and accurate.

Bevan Jones' View

The West looks to Arabia as Islam's background and starting point. It looks to pre-Islamic Arabia to provide historical backdrop to the emergence of Islam.

Muhammad founded Islam. He was a great leader, spiritually and politically, but very much a child of his times and his personal behaviour falls short of modern standards. He responded to new situations as they arose, taking 'new lines' if his cause could be advanced.

The Qur'an is a composite work which drew on Arab, Christian, Jewish and Persian sources. If not actually 'written' by Muhammad it certainly emanated from his creative and ingenious mind.

They are historically unreliable, 'apocryphal'; relatively few are authentic.

The real value of *The People of the Mosque* lies not so much in its conclusions as in its spirit and aim. It aimed to penetrate Islam's inner meaning, to move beyond traditional argument and intellectual debate to the sharing of spiritual experience and insight, to what Bevan Jones called 'the rarer atmosphere of the things of the spirit'. (46) Reviews suggest that in its temper, the book achieved its aim. *The Times Literary Supplement* commended the 'scrupulous impartiality' with which 'the author wrote and the good feeling towards Islam and Muslims which he constantly displays and inculcates'. (47)

For Bevan Jones, the study of Islam involved inner tension and

anguish: Islam was not purely and simply the subject of an academic study - his engagement with Islam involved spiritual discovery. Such discovery was not merely 'external' but was 'internal' to his own understanding of faith and the closer he came to Islam as practised by devout, sincere souls, the harder and more painful his eventual rejection of Islam became.

Ultimately, his aim remained traditional - to 'trace out' and 'lead back' Christ's 'other sheep'(48) - and perhaps what attracted him to the Fellowship of Faith for Muslims (an organisation basically conservative in its approach to Islam) towards the end of his life was its emphasis on prayer. The issues at stake were so crucial that Bevan Jones resorted to prayer: 'We shall make most progress', he wrote, 'on our knees': 'we must know in truth what it is to agonise in prayer on behalf of these people'.(49)

Before turning our attention to *Christianity Explained to Muslims* it should be recorded that *The People of the Mosque* remains, even today, a very useful introduction to Islam. Dr Dwight Baker, who edited and revised the fifth (1980) edition, wrote: 'I am convinced that for the Christian student there is no comparable work which deals with Islam in general and Indian Islam in particular'.(50)

The aim of his second book was to explain Christian faith to Muslims and to replace two earlier 'manuals for Christian Workers' by William St Clair-Tisdall and W. A. Rice.(51) He also hoped that it might 'bring about a better understanding between people of the two faiths'.(52) In this book, he drew on a large number of Christian scholars. Amongst them were A. M. Fairbairn (1838-1912), H. R. Mackintosh (1870-1936), William Temple (1881-1944), Charles Gore (1853-1932), A. G. Hogg (1875-1954), D. J. Cairns (1862-1946), P. T. Forsyth (1848-1921), R. W. Dale (1829-1895), Leslie Weatherhead (1896-1976), Nathaniel Micklem (1886-1976) and D. M. Baillie (1886-1969), representing a wide spectrum of churchmanship and theological opinion, from conservative evangelical to High Church liberal. Several common emphases can be traced, including incarnational theology, kenotic theory and a desire to re-interpret Christian faith by countering the doubts and arguments of scientific twentieth century Western man. What Bevan Jones did was to take their ideas and emphases and apply them to Islam, to counter Muslim objections to Christianity. Were Bevan Jones an Anglican, his theology could have been described as 'broad church'. Bishop Subhan described him in these terms:

Bevan Jones was uncompromising in the fundamentals of the Christian faith. He could not be classified as an extreme liberal or a narrow fundamentalist. He might be termed orthodox in his belief, though he would wear no label...(53)

His Christianity was rooted in 'religious experience' not in 'intellectual statement'. His basic concept was one of 'essential Christianity'. In the past, missionaries had often stressed what he considered to be 'by-products' of Christianity rather than the Christian message as such - dogmas rather than Christian experience.

In *Christianity Explained* he attempted to glean out of an examination of Christian doctrines what he deemed to be essential for faith in Christ. Then, in the light of Muslim prejudice and objections, he sought to 're-express' Christian faith so that, without compromising essentials, causes of misunderstanding were removed. He suggested that in order to be able to do this the missionary must first of all discover what Muslims object to and why. He contended that often Muslims object not to what Christians actually believe but to what they think they believe. In his own 'explanation' he always emphasised the 'why' rather than the 'what' of belief. He contended that 'beliefs' or 'doctrines' were essentially post-experiential attempts to describe, within the poverty and limitations of human language, what people believed to be true about their experience of God. Any given 'description' or 'doctrine' was less important than the original experience which it attempts to describe. The most important result of this approach is seen in Bevan Jones' attitude to particular doctrines of the Church:

The author is far from holding that we should demand from anyone, least of all Muslims, an understanding of and acquiescence in particular dogmas of the church as a condition of discipleship or as necessary to faith in Christ. (54)

Freedom of conscience has always been central to a proper Baptist tradition. Baptists have always defended the individual's liberty to work out their own salvation before God, free from doctrinal tyranny. This basic principle of Bevan Jones' thought is evidence of his fundamental 'Baptist' position. He knew that Muslims would find it difficult to grasp 'accepted definitions of God' and suggested that Christians should not be 'over distressed at this': 'What is really important is to know God and to do His will'. (55) 'The only thing in the world worth caring for', he said, 'is to become Christ-like'. (56)

With reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, a traditional debating point between Muslims and Christians, he subordinated its 'intellectual abstraction' to the experience which it describes:

If the Muslim can be brought to understand that in the doctrine of the Trinity an attempt is made to explain our apprehension of the redemptive operation of God's Holy Spirit within us - then, though it may still appear unacceptable to him, he will see it as no longer unreasonable and certainly not blasphemous'. (57)

If the distinctive Christian idea of God were to be compressed into a phrase it would not be that God is Triune, but that He is redemptive love. (58)

Essentially, his Christianity was a personal faith, rooted in religious experience. It was a Christianity which did not hesitate to declare that 'mystery' had a part to play. A pilgrim faith, it was prepared to think new thoughts and to plough new soil. Not surprisingly, 'conversion' was for Bevan Jones an ongoing process:

conversion is but the beginning ... no man is really converted

unless he is constantly re-affirming his conversion ... conversion is a lifelong task ... comprehended by the old term sanctification. Paul reminds us that we have to work out our own salvation. (59)

On a negative but pragmatic note, the main stumbling block for Muslims, as highlighted by Bevan Jones, is the difference between Christian and Muslim concepts of Revelation (*wahy*). Islam begins with a concept of God which emphasises his 'Altogether otherness': 'The typical Muslim, like the Hebrew, stands for the Transcendence of God'. (60)

Intimate or direct contact between God (in his heaven) and man (on his earth) would be degrading to Him and would compromise His divinity. Islam posits a discontinuity between Creator and creature. God communicates to man from a distance, sending his *Kalaam* (speech) which, according to orthodox theologians, is an eternal, uncreated attribute of God to man via the angel Gabriel. Muhammad received the Qur'an piece by piece whilst in a trance-like state; his human faculties were in abeyance. Thus the Qur'an passed through Muhammad's mind without in any way being coloured by his personality or by the particular historical circumstances in which he found himself. Bevan Jones' Christian concept of revelation was radically different. He believed that 'real kinship' exists between God and Man which makes possible 'the translation of the Eternal Thought into the language of the time'. (61) The natural, created world is but 'a plastic expression of God's will'. (62) God did not use the Biblical authors as a 'gramophone'. The spirit of inspiration which seized them did not stun or overwhelm their consciousness but used their characters and personalities to clothe scripture with human experience.

Consequently, the Bible and the Qur'an are regarded 'quite differently by those who possess and cherish them'. (63) The Qur'an is, for Muslims, the 'very speech of God', devoid of any human content whatsoever, whilst for Christians the Bible 'is the Revelation of God to man through the medium of human minds'. Listing the qualifications essential of a missionary to Islam, Bevan Jones wrote:

He must know the Bible, not as a quarry for proof texts, but its sources, its compilation and, if possible, something of its original languages. He should possess the scholar's view of its progressive revelation and an informal view of inspiration. (64)

An impasse is therefore reached. The Muslim cannot accept the Bible as scripture because it does not contain unadulterated divine speech. For them, it qualifies as *Hadith*, (Tradition). The Christian, for his part, rejects the Qur'an's claims because for him scripture must contain human thought, feeling and emotion. Supremely, for the Christian, Revelation is Jesus Christ, in whom God became Man. Thus:

while to the Muslim the true revelation is to be found in a book, the Qur'an, to the Christian it is not to be found in the Bible, but in the Person of Christ. (65)

The concept of incarnation, central to Christian faith, remains an anathema to Islam.

Perhaps the most significant and permanently valuable aspect of *Christianity Explained* is that in it Bevan Jones was prepared to take the challenge of Muslim theology into his understanding of Christian faith: his Christian faith was challenged by his engagement with Islam. It was this willingness to 'engage' with Islam that had influenced Bishop French to modify his missionary tactics and St Clair-Tisdall to struggle in his writings with the relationship between Christianity and other faiths. Theological openness characterised Bevan Jones' thinking. He was a man, a Christian, a Baptist missionary scholar who, in his encounter with people of Muslim faith, found himself crossing the threshold of faith.

This study of his life and work is offered as an example of how a man of faith encountered and shared with people of a different faith on the level of spiritual experience and discovery. Although we know from his obituarists that he knew how to laugh and have fun, we also know from his writings that he was driven to his knees in prayer by his encounter with Islam.

He was, from the start to the finish of his distinguished career, profoundly aware of the tension between the universal and the particular and he valued this tension as a positive factor in his ministry. It was, to borrow an expression of the late Bishop Stephen Neill, a 'creative tension' which stimulated his thinking, prevented complacency and an acceptance of easy or sanguine conclusions. It necessitated constant re-appraisal of his own position in the light of Muslim objections. Eric Bishop compared him with missionary giants such as C. F. Andrews, Temple Gairdner, Donald Fraser and J. N. Farquhar, and said that Bevan Jones' principal concern was 'the placing of scholarship in the field of evangelical purposefulness'. (66) For him the scandal of particularity was a fact of day to day life. Specific to Christian-Muslim relations this has been referred to as the problem of the 'too much' meeting the 'too little': Muslims (for Christians) make 'too little' of Jesus Christ and Christians (for Muslims) make 'too much' of Him. *Christianity Explained* is not a systematic theology. It does not follow through all the exciting possibilities of its approach. Rather, we are challenged to take up where Bevan Jones left off. To do this, we will need to be as courageous in our thinking as he was in his. Courage is required, because in relating what we learn from our engagement with Islam to our own faith, we may have to change or adapt our thinking in the light of new experience. Risk is also involved, because in venturing where Bevan Jones summons us to go, we may well open ourselves up to pain and anguish. It is the present writer's contention that an inter-faith experience which does not know anguish, pain and prayer is a bogus one. If, in our inter-faith ventures, we are as open to the spirit and to the challenge of the faith of others as was Bevan Jones, we shall go a long way towards breaking through the barriers and stereotypes which traditionally keep Muslim and Christian apart. In his own ministry, Bevan Jones' aim was to bring Muslims to a saving experience of Christ, but he knew that a Muslim might approach and experience Christ in a different way than people brought up within traditionally Christian societies.

## NOTES

- 1 'Daniel' Jones of Agra: A Great Heart of our India Mission', *Baptist Missionary Herald*, 94, 1911, p.143.
- 2 cf. *Lives of the Fellows 1965-73*, Royal College of Surgeons, p.240.
- 3 D. Jones, 'Memoirs' *Mr Herald Cenhadol*, Welsh BMS, 1911, privately translated for the present writer by H. Evans, M.A.
- 4 Candidates Records, BMS Archives, File No.393.
- 5 Daniel Jones trained at Pontypool College, which subsequently moved to Cardiff.
- 6 Bevan Jones received his M.A. from the University of Wales in 1941.
- 7 Candidates Records, BMS File No.393.
- 8 The story of West Ham is told by P. R. Clifford, *Venture in Faith*, Carey Kingsgate, 1955. Bevan Jones is referred to on p.51.
- 9 Candidates Records.
- 10 Both statements are reproduced in full by C. Bennett in unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1985, pp.183-6.
- 11 D. Jones, op.cit.
- 12 cf. *Methods of Mission among Muslims: Cairo 1906*, Fleming H. Revell & Co, London 1906. Two conferences followed, cf. *Lucknow Conference Report*, C.L.S., London 1911 and *Conference of Christian Workers Among Muslims*, IMC, New York 1924.
- 13 L. B. Jones, 'Some Educated Muslims in Bengal', *Muslim World*, 6, 1916, pp.228-35, esp. p.234.
- 14 Goldsack (d.1957) served with the South Australian B.M.S. from 1897 until 1912 when he joined the British B.M.S.
- 15 L. B. Jones, *The People of the Mosque*, S.C.M., 1932, p.316.
- 16 L. B. Jones, *Christ's Ambassador to the Muslim*, FFM, reprinted 1972, p.6.
- 17 For a recent appraisal of S. W. Zwemer (d.1952) and W. H. T. Gairdner (1873-1928) see L. Van der Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, William Carey, Sth Pasadena, 1977.
- 18 E. Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, 1920, p.XI.
- 19 These Muslim scholars were discussed in W. C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Minerva, Lahore, 1943. Smith studied at the Henry Martyn School of Islamics during Bevan Jones' Principalship.
- 20 The Cairo Study Centre became the School of Oriental Studies of the American University, Cairo, in 1920. For its pioneer language teaching see L. Wan der Werff, op.cit., p.197.
- 21 L. B. Jones, 'The Paraclete or Muhammad', *Muslim World*, 10, 1920, pp.112-125, and also cf. A. Guthrie and E. F. F. Bishop, 'Paraclete, Almunhamanna and Ahmad', *MW*, 1951.
- 22 *People of the Mosque*, p.315.
- 23 H. W. Pike, *Lewis Bevan Jones*, unpublished tribute, Regent's Park College, Oxford, 1960, p.1.
- 24 Dr Titus (1885-1964) was a missionary in India 1910-51. For Dr Paton's involvement cf. E. M. Jackson, *Red Tape and the Gospel*, Phlogiston Publ., Selly Oak, 1980, p.111.
- 25 cf C. Padwick, *Henry Martyn, Confessor of the Faith*, SPCK, 1923.
- 26 The FFM was founded in 1915 following a visit to Britain by Dr Zwemer. It aims to unite people 'in prayer, service and sacrifice' for Islam. It had early links with the Missionaries to Muslims League.

- 27 cf. Minutes for the CMW 9th Session, 22nd April 1954, General Synod Archives, London.
- 28 *The People of the Mosque*, p.IX.
- 29 'Remarkable Tributes to a Great Missionary to Muslims', *The Missionary Herald*, November 1960, pp.171-2.
- 30 Sir W. Muir, *Life of Mahomet*, Smith & Elder, 1858, IV, p.322.
- 31 *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, June 1902, p.427.
- 32 *ibid.* July 1874, p.237, reviewing R. B. Smith, *Mohammad and Mohammedanism*, Smith & Elder, 1874, in which the author suggested 'that Mohammedans may learn much from Christians and yet remain Mohammedans, and that Christians have something at least to learn from Mohammedans which will make them not less but more Christian than they were before...' , p.XXV.
- 33 *The People of the Mosque*, p.248.
- 34 *ibid.* p.289.
- 35 For Pfander, cf. A. A. Powell, 'Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi and Muslim-Christian Controversy in the mid-19th century', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1976, pp.42-63. For French, cf. H. Birks, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Valpy French*, 2 Vols., John Murray, 1895, esp. pp.323, XXI, 68, 46, 204-6.
- 36 W. St Clair-Tisdall, *Mohammedan Objections to Christianity*, SPCK, 1904, p.14.
- 37 cf. *Comparative Religion*, Longman, Green & Co., 1909 and *Christianity and Other Faiths*, Robert Scott, 1912.
- 38 *The People of the Mosque*, p.253.
- 39 Bevan Jones refers to Farquhar in his annual report: *India Report*, BMS 1916 pp.46, 253. For Farquhar, cf. E. Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil*, Uppsala, 1965.
- 40 *The People of the Mosque*, p.254.
- 41 L. B. Jones, *Christianity Explained to Muslims*, YMCA, Calcutta, 1938, p.76, cf. also L. B. Jones, 'Our Special Message to Muslims', *MW*, 10, 1930, pp.331-5, esp. 335a.
- 42 *Christianity Explained*, p.93.
- 43 *The People of the Mosque*, p.254.
- 44 *ibid.* p.265. 45 *ibid.* p.253.
- 46 L. B. Jones, *Christ's Ambassador to the Muslim*, p.11.
- 47 *Times Literary Supplement*, 1611, 15th Dec. 1932, p.966.
- 48 *Christ's Ambassador*, p.12.
- 49 *ibid.*, p.11.
- 50 Dwight Baker, ed. *The People of the Mosque*, SPCK/CLS New Delhi, 1980, p.vii.
- 51 St Clair-Tisdall, *Mohammedan Objections to Christianity*, 1904 and W. A. Rice, *Crusaders of the Twentieth Century*, CMS, 1910.
- 52 *Christianity Explained*, p.XI.
- 53 John Subhan, 'The Reverend Lewis Bevan Jones', *MW* 1961, pp.128-31.
- 54 *Christianity Explained*, p.IX.
- 55 *ibid.* p.95.
- 56 *The People of the Mosque*, p.321, citing Henry Drummond.
- 57 *Christianity Explained*, p.93.
- 58 *ibid.*, p.80 with footnote reference to J. Baillie, *The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1929, pp.185-6.
- 59 *ibid.* p.149. 60 *ibid.* p.77.
- 61 *ibid.* p.52. 62 *ibid.* p.180.
- 63 *ibid.* p.47.

- 64 *Christ's Ambassador*, p.10: for Bevan Jones' concept of 'progressive revelation' cf. *Christianity Explained*, pp.50-1.
- 65 *ibid.* p.53.
- 66 E. F. F. Bishop, 'Tribute to the Memory of Lewis Bevan Jones', *MW*, 50, 1960, p.303.

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## REVIEWS

Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century, (A History of the English Baptists, vol.2)*, Baptist Historical Society, 1986, pp.187, £4.95.

'The early eighteenth century account of General Baptist life', Raymond Brown writes, 'is rarely inspiring', for General Baptists were for the most part inward-looking, exclusive and disputatious. General Assemblies condemned those who worshipped, however occasionally, with other denominations, labelled marrying outside the General Baptist communion as sin, and devoted much time to the petty feuds of neighbouring congregations. Particular Baptists appear to have been a little more flexible and outward-looking: marriage was to be 'in the Lord' but not necessarily to a fellow communicant and there was some interest in evangelism. In particular they translated into effective action the concern they shared with some General Baptists for an educated ministry: a fund for the education of ministers was established and academies, most notably that associated with the Broadmead church in Bristol. But they too were beset by controversy, as the ongoing debate on the permissibility of hymn-singing reveals. Moreover in the interests of safeguarding orthodoxy they could be exclusive: General Baptists were denied the benefits of the Particular Baptist Fund.

The eighteenth century marks a transition from 'local Baptist insularity' to 'ecumenical partnership'. In part early parochialism reflected the rural isolation in which most Baptists lived, whereas churches founded later in the century might be in or near growing communities. In part it reflected a defensiveness caused by long-established fear of persecution, though the advent of toleration saw both General and Particular Baptists immediately calling Assemblies, a symbol of the connexionist commitment of the former and the willingness of the latter to co-operate among themselves. National funds and the resumption of regional associations similarly testify to an early sense of partnership, though the history of associations also reflects regional diversity and antagonism. In 1696 General Baptists who disapproved of the unorthodox Christology preached by Matthew Caffyn in the churches of Kent and Sussex temporarily resigned from the Assembly, establishing their own association. Later in the century in Leicestershire and Lincolnshire a separate New Connexion of General Baptists was established, for men