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ON
"THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGION IN THE
MODERN WORLD"

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cannot be indifferent to them. Undoubtedly more common action is needed for their solution, but actions which do not come from deep meditation and prayer cannot be truly effective in the spiritual transformation of man for the maturity of his humanity. What is needed most is not self-sufficient contemplation but hard thinking and reflection coupled with prayer and meditation, always in faith, hope and love.

"Are the religions relevant?" is a question often asked by religious people themselves. They should rather ask themselves whether they are honestly and earnestly trying to make their religions relevant. And the beginning of this effort will only be made by a self-examination of and self-reflection on the history and content of their own religions. History reveals to their embarrassment what share the religions have had in the fostering of prejudices and hostilities. This should make man humble and penitent, but not frustrated. As long as the eternal source of light is still shining above the clouds, he need not despair of the darkness below in which he finds himself. Instead of blaming and accusing each other, the religious of the world should seek to turn people's eyes to that Light Transcendent. Again speaking on behalf of Christianity, the best positive contribution it can bring to the renewal of mankind will be to bear witness to that love revealed by Jesus Christ in its purity, in which the most universal works in and through the most particular.

A Baha'i Viewpoint

by

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What a happy coincidence that this unique Conference is being held this year when we, the Baha'is all over the world, are celebrating the Centenary Year of the proclamation of Baha'u'llah, The Divine Founder of the Baha'i World Faith.

It was in 1867 that Baha'u'llah (literally: The Glory of God) sent out His holy invitations to all the rulers and religious heads of the world asking them to unite, in the name of God and for the sake of humanity, and thus lay the foundation for understanding the universal harmony of the entire human race He said:

"O people! consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship."

The Universe is wrapped in an ecstasy of joy and gladness. The scriptures of past dispensations celebrate the great jubilee that must need greet this most great day of God. Well is it with him that hath lived to see this day and hath recognized its station. . . . Seize your chance, inasmuch as a fleeting moment in this day excelleth centuries of a bygone age. . . . Neither sun nor moon hath witnessed a day such as this.

It is heartening to note that this Conference of ours is in keeping with the spirit of the Baha'i faith in this age.

The most important and emergent question of the world today is a planetary solution for the whole of mankind, for a living peace and justice in action.

The failure of highly vaunted schemes, spiritual despair and heartless intrigues are everywhere evident. What is the disease mankind is suffering from? What are its cures? Can we do something in this?

The importance of statesmanship, the increase of godless movements and the weakening of the pillars of religion has brought about an unprecedented crisis, unprecedented because it is a world crisis, demanding a universal solution on all levels and in all walks of human life.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i faith, wrote: - "The world is in truth moving on towards its destiny. The interdependence of the peoples

and nations of the earth, whatever the leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an accomplished fact. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood and recognized. The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and distress of the part brings distress to the whole." The revelation of Baha'u'llah has, in His own words, "Lent a fresh impulse and set a new direction" to this vast process now operating in the world. The fires lit by this great ordeal are the consequences of men's failure to recognize it. They are, moreover, hastening its consummation. Adversity prolonged, world-wide, afflictive, allied to chaos and universal destruction, must needs convulse the nations, stir the conscience of the world, disillusion the masses, precipitate a radical change in the very conception of society and coalesce ultimately the disjointed, bleeding limbs of mankind into one body, single, organically united and indivisible.

Indeed, the lessons of two world wars have not sufficed to bring mankind to its senses. We are numbed with fear and do not wish to dwell on the awesome reality of atomic warfare. Philosophies, economic systems and politicians have led us nowhere. It is crucial for mankind to find out whether religion has the answer. Hence, the question of its relevance to modern society; the economic plight of the world and the injustices we see everywhere. How powerful is religion to revive the failing fortunes of a harassed humanity?

A WORLD IN TRAVAL

"The world is in travail and its agitation waxeth day by day", said Baha'u'llah. "Its face is turned towards waywardness and disbelief. Such shall be its plight that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake. Then and only then will the Divine Standard be unfurled and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody."

"How long will humanity persist in its waywardness? How long will injustice continue? How long is chaos and confusion to reign amongst men? How long will discord agitate the face of society? The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective."

"The vitality of men's belief in God," Baha'u'llah has testified, "is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the elixir of His potent revelation can cleanse and revive it?"

THE ROLE OF RELIGION

"Religion is the greatest instrument for the order of the world and the tranquillity of all existent beings. The weakness of the pillars of religion has encouraged the ignorant and rendered them audacious and arrogant. Truly, I say whatever lowers the lofty station of religion will increase heedlessness in the wicked, and finally result in anarchy."

THE RELEVANCE

"The all-knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."

ONENESS OF THE HUMAN RACE

"The Baha'i Faith upholds the unity of God, recognizes the unity of His prophets, and inculcates the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race. It proclaims the necessity and the inevitability of the unification of mankind, asserts that it is gradually approaching, and claims that nothing short of the transmuting spirit of God, working through His chosen mouthpiece in this day, can ultimately succeed in bringing it about. It, moreover, enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all manner of prejudice and superstition, declares the purpose of religion to be the promotion of amity and concord, proclaims its essential harmony with science, and recognizes it as the foremost agency for the pacification and the orderly progress of human society. It unequivocally maintains the principle of equal rights, opportunities and privileges for men and women, insists on compulsory education, eliminates extremes of poverty and wealth, abolishes the institution of priesthood, prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy and monasticism, prescribes monogamy, discourages divorce, emphasizes the necessity of strict obedience to one's government, exalts any work performed in the spirit of service to the level of worship, urges either the creation or the selection of an auxiliary international language and delineates the outlines of those institutions that must establish and perpetuate the general peace of mankind."

Baha'u'llah wrote hundreds of books while in prison and in exile. He wrote and sent letters to the principal priests of all religions and to top leaders in various departments of human life, and a proclamation in 1867 to

all the kings, emperors and rulers of the whole world, summoning them, one and all, to the Divine Banquet of world peace through living world unity in all the inter-dependent walks of humanity in its entirety. Among these are (1) Spiritual Unity, as a Foundation, (2) Social Unity, as the Ground Floor, (3) Economic Unity, as the 1st Floor, and (4) Unity on the Governmental level as the Dome of the Super-structure of an Enduring Planet-Wide Most Great Peace.

This being a Spiritual Summit Conference, I shall say a few words about the spiritual solution offered by the Baha'i faith for world unity and peace through divine love.

All prides, prejudices and chauvinisms must be forgotten once for all, for Baha'u'llah says: "The Tabernacle of Unity hath been raised. Regard ye not one another as strangers. . . . The whole world is but one country and mankind its citizens. . . . One people of the World! Of one tree are ye all the fruits and of a single branch the leaves."

All religions are fundamentally one. It is only the outward and non-essential aspect of religion which is changed by the Divine Will in accordance with the evolving necessities of human beings living in every age.

Religion must be the cause of the unity of the entire human race, or else it is not worth the name. It is not religion which separates man from man and divides humanity. It is our misunderstanding based on misinterpretation of the divine scriptures that has played havoc. Hence, it is obvious that we should come to a universal understanding and nothing less. Herein lies the realization of our true aims and objects.

We should first come together, understand each other on a global scale and try to adjust with one another and co-ordinate all our affairs. Then and then alone we will be guided by the Divine Plan to merge into the mighty ocean of the love of God and His infinite mercy and be as one soul and one body living with the breath of God and functioning in complete harmony to His pleasure.

Religion must be in full harmony with human reason and science, or else it is mere superstition. On the other hand, science must be controlled universally by God-fearing men for the benefit of the whole of the human race and its richest services should be utilized in the establishment of paradise on earth.

Of course the golden age when men will truly be able to live as brothers in the same family is still far away. We have only to look about us to see how tragically true this is. Indeed we often fear the forces of destruction by uncontrolled powers of science and politics. We see young people in every country asking the question, "What should we all do to prevent a universal suicide which we are going to commit?" In conclusion let me once again quote Baha'u'llah who spoke in unequivocal terms about the harmony between all religions of the world and the working together of all the peoples on this planet:

That the diverse communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this day, of the essence of the faith of God and his religion. These principles and laws, these firmly established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one source (God), and are the rays of one light (Divine). That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated.

And last but not least, Baha'u'llah says: "O people! Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of fragrance and fellowship."