

Committee, appointed by the Executive Board of the Bahai Temple Unity entrusted with the affairs of the Unity of the current year, in the annual convention of Bahais, held at Chicago, April 29th - May 2nd, 1916.

C. M. R.

October 9, 1916.

[ABDUL Bahá, from the portrait by Juliet Thompson]

I.

FOREWORD.

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Special unrest and change of thought have been peculiar to the religious world of these latter years, and many people now look beyond the man-made barriers of sect and creed to seek along universal channels of divine knowledge for that moral and spiritual assurance and poise which every soul craves and which truth gives. This seeking and running to and fro in quest of truth, is bringing many sincere men and women to inquire into the principles and the objects of the Bahai Movement that is daily more recognized and known throughout the realm of religion and philosophy as the great spiritual teaching in which all religious faiths have a common ground, a basis upon which to unite, in those matters that are essential and needful in producing religious harmony among men, as well as in bettering their temporal condition.

The hope of the writer in preparing this small volume is to place a brief and concise statement within the hands of the many who wish to understand the Bahai Movement, and to know what it offers to humanity.

II.

RELIGION NEEDED.

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It is open to but little question, and now generally admitted, that there is something radically wrong or lacking, in the religious world.

The great test, "By their fruits ye shall know them," has quite demonstrated to the thinking world during the past two or three years of carnage and bloodshed, that humanity has

been deceiving itself in
believing that its conception of religion was the potent factor for peace and
righteousness its
expounders purported it to be.
The truth of the matter is that from the world of conventional religious
thought the vital spirit of the
true reality of religion has departed, leaving behind but an empty form — the
husk without the kernel.
Such cataclysms as the world is now suffering, caused by the absence of the
spirit of true religion in
the souls of individuals and of nations, are at last causing people to awake to
the real spiritual needs of
humanity. Many souls are now recognizing that this general misery and suffering
is fundamentally due
to the fact that the vital constructive spiritual reality of divine religion is
not sufficiently realized in the
lives of peoples, and that peace and prosperity, happiness and joy can only be
known when this vital
spiritual reality of religion is born into the souls of men and manifesting in
their daily deeds.
If material and intellectual advancement could in themselves produce ideal
conditions in the world,
the present

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advanced world-culture would offer different evidence than that we are now
facing.
There was a time, not long past, when many eloquent leaders of thought
disabused innumerable
minds of their time-honored superstitions and erroneous beliefs that through
the imaginations of men
had so encrusted true religion as to deaden and obscure its light, and prevent
its penetrating those
veiling forms and thoughts. Because of apparent contradictions in religious
teachings, discrepancies,
and lack of reason and common sense, many earnest, thoughtful souls were
repelled, abandoned older
systems of belief and formulated newer ones more in harmony with their own
views of things spiritual,
while others threw aside all religious affiliations of whatever sort discarding
along with the dross the
good that should have been retained — as the pendulum of spiritual sincerity
swung to the other
extreme.
In this day it is of utmost import that those who are studying the matter have
noted that the period
of religious iconoclasm has passed. Many of the superstitions have been

eliminated from religion and more are being discarded by the people, and now the question in their minds is not, as formerly what not to believe of creed and dogma, so much as what to know in order to be spiritually and morally reinforced for all the problems of life.

The religious upheaval which has continued for a generation or more, has so prepared the hearts and minds of mankind, that the iconoclast and the destroyer no longer [page 13]

find listeners, for the ears of the multitude are open to those who have constructive and demonstrable truth to give forth. Humanity is more than ever led by the constructive principles of truth, and while thinking people have in no way returned to the old discarded ideas and religious forms, yet they are seeking religious truth, and it is evident that atheism and agnosticism are on the decrease. Nowhere is this more noticeable than among scientists and other deep thinkers who realize the dynamic force of religion for inspiring humanity to constructive and productive spiritual idealism — acknowledged as the most necessary factor in the progress and equilibrium of the race, the inner spiritual illumination that is the basic foundation of true social and economic tranquility and happiness, and the source of advancement of real civilization.

This illumination quickens the soul of man, freeing him from limitations of the past, displacing fear by courage, and despondency by hope and assurance. This spirit quickens and gives life to all latent possibilities and capacities for good. Thus, true religion is the source of human progress, while a false religion of spiritless, dead ideals causes both moral apathy and physical degeneration. Thus, progressive men are foremost as sincere seekers of truth. They are not to be satisfied by mere dogma. They wish to know reality and to see results, and then they believe in the source of living truth that proves its power and its luminousness by the life which it gives — as a life giving sun shining upon living things.

III.

THE BAHAI MOVEMENT.

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Religion, which is inherent in man, dates in general essence before the dawn of written history —

each religious movement in its purity of truth being a phase of the one great Universal divine religion.

The particular, present, latter-day phase of religion that we are here considering — the Bahai

Movement — began over seventy years ago, when its first teacher arose in the year 1844, in the

Southern part of Persia, teaching under the title of The Bab, which term signifies door or gate. He

proclaimed the approaching advent of One — a great world teacher — whose divine mission was the

uniting in one great spiritual brotherhood of the peoples of all nations, races and religions, and the

establishment of a new spiritual era of oneness of all humanity in spiritual knowledge, and in

brotherhood and peace.

The Bab's teaching dwelt upon the coming of the Great Manifestation — of whom He spoke as

“He Whom God Would Manifest” — exhorting the people to prepare, and purify themselves to meet

this Promised One, and to be ready to serve Him when He should appear.

Many seeking souls were attracted by The Bab through His purity and illumination of spirit, for in

Him the people not only saw the fore-runner of the great universal messiah, but they realized in Him

“The First Point” of the great new age of God in the world.

To The Bab flocked people from the great religions of

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Persia. Much enthusiasm was manifested by all, and the Mohammedan clergy watched the growth of

the movement with jealousy, because they saw thousands of their own people going out from Islam and

from the superstitions and forms which they taught. Seeing their own religious hold over the people

waning before this teaching, these priests of Islam sought to exterminate the new movement. They

incited the fanatical Moslems to pillage, arson and murder. Thousands of the Babis (followers of The

Bab as they were then called) were massacred, their homes burned and possessions destroyed; but

notwithstanding this persecution the cause continued to grow, the blood of the martyrs being the seed.

The Bab, Himself, was among the first to suffer. Scarcely had His mission begun than He was

placed under military surveillance, and after two years of teaching under this

difficulty, was cast into prison where He remained for four years, and at the expiration of that time He was tried for heresy before a clerical court was condemned and suffered a martyr's death. Not long after the martyrdom of The Bab, the great world teacher appeared, in the person of Baha'o'llah, "He whom God Manifested." Surrounded by countless fanatical enemies who strove to destroy Him and His cause, Baha'o'llah was first known as a leader among the much persecuted Babis; then later, as His power became manifest to all, He was generally acknowledged to be The One Whose coming The Bab had proclaimed. From that time on the cause became known as the

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Bahai Cause, and the followers, as Bahais, while the Babi Cause as a separate movement, ceased to exist, the Bab's mission and the teaching which He established being not an end in itself but preparatory to the coming of Baha'o'llah. The Mission of Baha'o'llah lasted forty years, during which time He withstood all manner of trials and persecutions. He was sent out from His home in Persia as an exile and a prisoner to Bagdad in Asiatic Turkey, then to Constantinople in Turkey in Europe, and later to Adrianople in Roumelia, where He remained for five years, afterward enduring with His family and about seventy followers, men, women, and children, a still more distant exile imprisonment in the fortress of Akka, in the Holy Land. In that country ever made sacred by God's prophets and Holy messengers — within view of Mount Carmel upon which Elijah and others of the Prophets had taught, and within a few miles of Nazareth where Jesus had lived — Baha'o'llah completed the latter half of His active ministrations to humanity. During the first years of His captivity in Akka Baha'o'llah and His followers suffered great privations. Confined in the barrack prison under conditions the most unsanitary, illness broke out and the suffering was so intense that without the faith and the assurance of soul of all incarcerated, the spirit of the community would have been quite broken, but in reality their persecution and trouble had the effect of increasing their miraculous faith and devotion.

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As years passed, the officials of the prison fortress city realized that Baha'o'llah manifested love, and harmony, and they became friendly, so little by little the condition of the Bahai exiled community was bettered. Baha'o'llah was first given the liberty of the city and later He was allowed by the governor to reside beyond the walls. The followers from various countries came to receive teachings from Him, returning again to their own lands and peoples fired with the desire to share with others the spiritual pearls of great price which they had found, and thus the cause spread throughout various of the oriental countries. Baha'o'llah gave His teaching and planted His cause amid humanity, thus completing His work in this world. Then for further guidance and development and for the interpretation and explanation of His teachings He designated as His successor, His son Abdul Baha. With the passing from this world of Baha'o'llah, in the late spring of 1892, began Abdul Baha's mission as the Center of The Bahai Cause. The title of servitude which he chose for himself, namely, "Abdul Baha" means "The servant of God." Abdul Baha seeks no honor nor glory for himself other than servant of those who are serving God, yet in the texts of Baha'o'llah the spiritual station of Abdul Baha is clearly set forth as the Center of the Bahai Covenant to humanity. From his earliest childhood Abdul Baha's life has been devoted to the service of God and humanity. He was with Baha'o'llah during the sixteen years of exile and

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travel prior to His arrival in Akka, and then began Abdul Baha's long exile of forty years in that fortress, to which the sultans of Turkey of the old regime used to send their most dreaded enemies so that its terrible conditions of filth and disease might speedily accomplish their destruction. It was in August, 1868, that Abdul Baha arrived in Akka with Baha'o'llah. In August, 1908, when the Turks revolted against former rule and established a constitutional form of government, Abdul Baha was officially freed. But during those years of trial Abdul Baha had accomplished his work despite the persecution of his enemies, while held as Baha'o'llah was held

prisoner by the law of Islam because of his progress in teachings. With each added trouble came spiritual growth and strength to the cause. Throughout the years that Abdul Baha was in Akka he labored constantly with his pen and was able, from time to time to receive visits from truth seekers of Europe and America as well as of the near and far East. Now the Bahai Cause is firmly planted in both the Occident and the Orient and souls are constantly arising to promote Abdul Baha's work. Some little time after the revolution in Turkey, that brought freedom from prison confinement in Akka to Abdul Baha, he went down into Egypt and from there visited Paris and London, and later, in the Spring of 1912, he came to these United States, where he spent eight months. He traveled from coast to coast and visited many places where he had friends and where there

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were people who wished to hear his explanations of religious questions and who were desirous of coming into closer touch with that vital illuminating spiritual force which so characterizes his presence.

In America, as well as in England and in France and, subsequently upon his return to Europe, in both Germany and Austria, the pulpits of Christian churches of many denominations, institutions of learning, and the platforms of philosophical societies and of progressive humanitarian movements of various kinds sought Abdul Baha, welcomed his message of peace and world oneness, and were rejoiced by the spirit which he radiated.

In his many addresses, most of which have been published, Abdul Baha treats of the creative function of the religion of God, of the great world problems of this present day, and of the solution of these great human difficulties through the application of the true spirit of religion in the lives of the people. Upon all occasions he has taught of the coming of the great world teacher and Manifestation of The Spirit, Baha'o'llah, and of the new spiritual era upon earth that Baha'o'llah inaugurated. Abdul Baha invites all people to approach the Bahai Cause and for themselves seek and partake of this divine bounty, and to become servants of God and of humanity in carrying this message of the Lord to all peoples.

Those who have seen Abdul Baha, with quickened spiritual eyes of the soul, have realized in him the life giving spirit of Baha'o'llah and in Abdul Baha's life of service to humanity the manifested fruit of The Cause of Baha'o'llah.

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The Bab was the precursor and "The First Point," of this religious cause in the world of to-day.

Baha'o'llah and His teaching, formed the root of the movement, which has been compared to a tree —

Abdul Baha the branch, springing from the root that is Baha'o'llah. As the branch of the tree bears the

leaves, flowers, fruits and seeds, so in the life of Abdul Baha is the world witnessing the budding forth

and flowering of the Bahai principles of religion and their application to the needs of humanity.

IV.

BASIC SPIRITUAL TRUTHS.

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The Bahai teaching is in no sense a crystalized belief or philosophy. It has within it that spiritual dynamic force or life principle that ever has been the intrinsic essence of religion eliminating those outward forms and fixed formulae of theology which characterized the ancient religions and which always caused their decay and the decline of vital power. In its beginning each religious teaching in its purity was a vital spiritual force unencumbered by creed or dogma, yet as time rolled on the intrinsic pure religion became encrusted with forms and ceremonies until the spiritual light became hidden or quite disappeared.

Like all vital, primal religious movements. The Bahai teaching deals with divinely constructive principles — those principles moral and spiritual that govern the evolution of man, for in the realm of the soul there are working spiritual laws as unchangeable and is immutable as the laws governing the universe of inorganic matter. It is only through becoming spiritually quickened and by living in harmony with these spiritual laws of the divine realm of being, that man can arise from his natural condition of ignorance and savagery into a state of true knowledge and civilization.

The mission of the prophets and divine teachers who have appeared in every age has been to quicken men's souls that they might perceive the truth and know God,

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to reveal the divine laws working in the spiritual world, and to teach humanity how to live in accordance with those laws, that man might work and progress spiritually, intellectually and materially.

These vital spiritual principles the Bahai movement puts forth and upholds with all candor and fervor, because these are the foundation principles of religion, of science, and of civilization. They are living truth and have nothing to do with forms founded upon superstition and imagination.

Whereas, in the formulae of some religions the people are forbidden studying for themselves or trying personally to understand things of the spiritual realm, in the Bahai teaching the people are exhorted not to accept merely upon blind faith, but are taught that each one should seek spiritual illumination. Through understanding the divine reality of religion past and present, and through living in accord with this high standard, each soul will become enlightened and strong in the truth of God, and will be enabled to lead a good and useful life in glorifying God through serving humanity.

The Bahai teaching, like all true religion, is founded upon the eternal reality of the Spirit of God.

True religion is truth and it must all come from the inspiration of the Spirit of Truth, God. This is one of the basic principles of the Bahais, who speak of it as the fundamental unity of all religions, for they recognize all the great religious revealers and teachers as having been inspired from the one eternal Spirit of God, "The Word." The teaching of the prophets and their institutions varied

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in each age in order to meet the needs, moral and spiritual, of the changing epochs. As a child passes through elementary and primary grades of education and on through higher ones to the college and the university, so humanity has needed many teachers of spiritual truth, each manifesting God's spirit to man.

When understood, the teachings of the many prophets are in perfect accord as

are the various grades or schools of scientific knowledge, appropriate to childhood, youth and maturity; but a clear differentiation must be made between living truth as taught by the prophet, and the man-made philosophies falsely attributed to prophetic teaching, in reality, formulated by individuals who have lived generations after the revelator. The pure teachings, as given by God's messengers to humanity; have been divinely constructive and they have formed the basis of real advancement and learning. The spiritual teachings were not only in harmony with the scientific thought of their times, but all later science has been in harmony with their principles; and yet this cannot be said of the interpretations and the superstitions which have crept about the pure message of truth, through the mortal minds of men. As religions become characterized by superstitions they are the cause of hinderance instead of development of education and science; and formal crystalized religion has ever been found to be the most persistent enemy that progressive humanity has encountered. In all ages and under all religious systems the dogmatists have opposed and retarded advancement and

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progress, although the divine teachers whom these formalists claim to follow were themselves progressive.

One of the great and important phases of the Bahai work is to establish this true and harmonious relation between religion, or spiritual science, or divine reality and material science or physical reality.

These two go hand in hand and there is perfect harmony between them, but it is needed that man should recognize and acknowledge this divine reality of true religion. Freed from superstition he will then be established in his religion, not upon an unstable basis of imagination and dogma, but upon a firm basis of spiritual knowledge which nothing can shake.

V.

RELIGION THE FOUNDATION
OF CIVILIZATION.

RELIGION THE FOUNDATION OF CIVILIZATION.

It is with great interest that the material progress of the world can be traced by the student along

and parallel with the moral and religious progress of humanity. That which benefits men's souls and adds to their moral strength, as does the true spirit of religion, performs benefits men physically and elevates their standard of material living. Conversely, a philosophy full of superstitions and imaginations merely sophisticates the conscience and tends to stupefy the intellect and spirit of man, thereby so weakening him morally that physical degeneration takes place with a general lowering in the scale of his material life.

As with the individual so with the mass in the long run, the material tranquility, happiness and progress of a nation, or people are directly proportionate to their grasp of spiritual truth, while the internal disintegration and fall of a people is always due to deviation from the fundamental constructive principles of the pure truths of religion.

This basic fact is clearly to be traced in the rise and fall of the civilizations of the past. Each great civilization had its birth in a vital religious movement that upheld and represented progressive moral and spiritual principles in which both the spiritual, and material progress of humanity are rooted. As time has passed the fruit

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of such true religion has appeared in the civilization of a people with its literature and arts and sciences.

Upon the other hand the fall of great civilizations has, in every instance, been due to religious superstitions and laxity of morals, which both cause and accompany an age of religious degeneration

— all of which manifests in the material and physical downfall of humanity.

The condition of present-day humanity illustrates this principle as vividly as conditions of any past

age. In countries where the most conventional religious systems exist, one finds form and ceremonial, creed and caste most in evidence, while the mass of the people are in a state of ignorance and often in

general misery. Among these people one finds beautiful religious ideals recorded in their holy books,

but these have become as empty shells upon the sands, beautiful shells that testify to a life and growth

of the past, but from within them the life force has gone and they now are inert or dead.

Each world age has its own problems. That which conduces to the constructive

development of the
epoch is moral and progressive, and is truth. The Bahai Teachings hold that it
is the duty of every soul
to consider these matters, and for the universal good of humanity to support
these principles of true
religion that are necessary for the progressing world.
To-day, civilization is in a turbulent state of change. In the religious world,
old conventions are
being discarded and dynamic truths are being sought. This condition of
truth-seeking is universally
evident among peo-
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ples of all races and of all religions; and because of this universal spiritual
condition there is a merging
of civilizations from the East and the West of the present and the past,
resulting in a conglomerate mass
of ideals and standards all at variance. The time now is, when a new Divine
Manifestation is needed
establishing a universal standard of true religion that shall be the basis of
the new civilization — a
world civilization. The foundation of this great world-harmony, spiritual,
moral and material, the Bahai
founders have brought to humanity. To this end They have devoted Their lives,
as the divine
messengers of old sacrificing all for the truth of God and to serve the people.

VI.

THE ONENESS OF HUMANITY.

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The object of true religion has ever been the oneness of the human family, and
the real spirit of the
teachings of Christ and the prophets thus unites the souls of men in that
spiritual state spoken of in
Holy Writ as “The Kingdom of the Father.” Conversely, through misconception
and wrong
interpretation, religion has been so misconstrued that it has often become
false and a cause of
inharmonious instead of peace. Some of the bitterest wars and the bloodiest crimes
of history, have been
due to fanaticism and other forms of false religious teachings.
In defining the true object of religion Abdul Baha says:

“Every religion is the greatest divine effulgence, the cause of life amongst
men, the cause of the
honor of humanity, and is productive of the life everlasting amongst humankind.
Religion is not for

enmity or hatred. It is not for tyranny or injustice. If religion be the cause of enmity and rancor, if it should prove the cause of alienating men, assuredly non-religion would be better. For religion and the teachings which appertain to it are as a course of treatment. What is the object of any course of treatment? It is cure and healing. But if the outcome of a course of treatment should be productive of mere diagnosis and discussion of symptoms, the abolition of it is evidently preferable. In this sense, abandoning religion would be a step toward unity.”

The Bahai Movement teaches the abandonment of all denominational, religious, racial, national, and class preju-

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dice because hatreds have ever been destructive forces and often have been the cause of war, and bloodshed and suffering. People are exhorted so to conduct themselves as to conduce to the unity, harmony and general welfare of the human race.

While many religious teachings condemn those persons holding views other than their own, Abdul

Baha says:

“Baha’o’llah addresses Himself to the world of men, saying, ‘Ye are all leaves of one tree and the fruits of one arbor.’ That is, the world of existence is no other than one tree, and nations or peoples are like unto the different branches or limbs thereof, and human individuals are similar to the fruits and blossoms thereof, while in all past religious books and epistles, the world of humanity has been divided into two parts, one called the people of the Book, or the Pure Tree, and the other, the Evil Tree. Onehalf of the people of the world were looked upon as belonging to the faithful, and the other as belonging to the irreligious and the infidel; one-half were consigned to the mercy of the Creator, and the other half were considered as objects of the wrath of their Maker. But Baha’o’llah proclaimed the Oneness of the World of Humanity, He submerged all mankind in the Sea of Divine Generosity.”

The great spiritual teachers of the world have so modulated and applied their teachings as to meet the specific needs of the temporal, material and intellectual, as well as spiritual being. While the Bahai

teaching is essentially spiritual in the abstract, it also applies its spiritual

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force to the existent age, and is emanating through the general advancement of humanity. The welfare of the individual and the welfare of the community depend upon mutual co-operation, as that which benefits the community benefits each member of the community, and that which in reality benefits the individual also benefits the community. In the Bahai teachings, this co-operation is carried further from the individual to the nation, and from the nation to all humanity. The constructiveness of the co-operation of nations, is advocated for the establishment and maintenance of those international institutions which would make for the peace and prosperity of the whole world; for in this universal age, now in its dawn, and for the first time in history, the problem of the interdependence of nations is paramount. In this developing age the welfare of the nations and the welfare of humanity, are inseparable. One of the greatest responsibilities of the age is the adjustment of its economic difficulties. In speaking of this, Abdul Baha says:

“No religious books of the past prophets speak of the economic question, while the economic problem has been thoroughly solved in the teachings of Baha’o’llah. Certain regulations are revealed which insure the welfare and well being of all humanity. Just as the rich man enjoys his rest and his pleasure surrounded by luxuries, the poor man must likewise have a home, be provided with sustenance, and not be in want. Until this is effected happiness is impossible. All are equal in the estimation of

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God; there is no distinction for any sou ; all are protected beneath the justice of God.”

The Bahai Movement advocates a liberal education for children of both sexes, of all countries, races and religions, under a universal standard of instruction and a common curriculum, thus abolishing the limitations and prejudices of local environment providing that each child be educated toward

sympathy with a universal humanity, in this way laying the foundations and instilling ideals of a universal world citizenship, achieving the downfall of the confining and binding prejudices of past generations.

Another great issue of the present day is "Feminism." The Bahais, in all countries east and west, stand for the advancement of women and for unhampered opportunities for both sexes. In countries of the Occident the emancipation of woman now seems to be progressing without much opposition, but not in the Orient, where the conventions of existing religious systems still keep woman in ignorance and bondage. In these countries a change of religion is needed to uplift women, for the old forms of their religion keep the women in ignorance. Abdul Baha, in writing to the Bahais in Persia, tells them that it is more necessary that they educate their girls than their boys, because the girls become mothers and first teachers of the following generation therefore their education is of the greatest importance.

Many years ago, Baha'o'llah advocated a universal language, for the furtherance of intercommunication and

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world unity. In speaking of this, Abdul Baha says:

"The oneness of language, namely, that a universal language shall be adopted which shall be taught by all the schools and academies of the world. A committee appointed by national bodies shall select a suitable language to be used as a means of international communication, and that language shall be taught in all the schools of the world in order that every one shall need but two languages, his national tongue and the universal language. All will acquire the international language."

In treating of world peace, which is the greatest insistent of to-day Abdul Baha said:

"That all men and nations shall make peace; that there shall be Universal Peace amongst governments, Universal Peace amongst religions, Universal Peace amongst races, Universal Peace amongst the denizens of all regions. To-day in the world of humanity the most important matter is the

question of Universal Peace. The realization of this principle is the crying need of the time.”

This need of universal peace is essentially one for which true religion is the only remedy. The present war of nations has quite demonstrated to the thinking world, that the generally accepted philosophy of Christendom has been applied in theory rather than in deed, for had the nations been alive with the true spirit of Christianity, such a condition could never have arisen. Baha’o’llah laid the foundation for world peace through bringing into the world the soulquickenning spirit

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of the reality of religion, and in the many diverse human elements which His Cause is fusing into spiritual unity can be seen the growing nucleus of this new religious life in the world. The Cause of Baha’o’llah includes also, the necessity for the establishment and the enforcement of international justice as well as of civil justice. In speaking of this Abdul Baha said: “A universal tribunal which will be under the power of God under the protection of all men. Each one must obey the decisions of this tribunal, in order to arrange the difficulties of every nation.” “About fifty years ago in the Book of Akdas, Baha’o’llah commanded the people to establish the Universal Peace and summoned all the nations to the Divine Banquet of International Arbitration so that the questions of boundaries, of national honor and property and of vital interests between nations might be decided by an arbitral court of justice.” “Remember these precepts were given more than half a century ago. Baha’o’llah proclaimed them to all the sovereigns of the world. They are the spirit of this age; the light of this age; they are the wellbeing of this age.

A new note has been sounded in the world, for in this day one’s interests can no longer be restricted, but patriotism must become universal. Baha’o’llah struck that new note when He said: “Let not a man glory that he loves his country, but rather, let him glory that he loves his kind.”

VII.
THE GREAT DIVINE TEACHER
AND THE NEW AGE.

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The Bahai Cause teaches that the finite mind of man cannot grasp, nor form any conception of the Infinite Spirit of God for the finite mind is limited to the finite sphere of humanity.

The desire for knowledge of the working of divine laws that govern the growth and development of the soul, is inherent in man, and in all ages he has sought religion in some form.

This desire or capacity for spiritual knowledge in man has been ministered to through God's sending, from age to age, spiritually quickened human beings who revealed to the world those truths that are food and sustenance for the souls of men.

Thus, divine messengers have manifested to man The Word, or living spirit of the Divine. These messengers have been men and, as other men, have lived and suffered, yet apart from this they have been differentiated from the rest of humanity by the inspirational Divine Word, which in them was manifest.

These Divine Manifestations have been the sources of spiritual knowledge and the centers of true religion in humanity. They have all manifested the one same and single Divine Light. In alluding to the spirit of these divine teachers and centers of wisdom, Baha'o'llah, in one of His works, the "Words of Wisdom" writes:

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"The Sun of Truth is the Word of God, upon which depends the training of the people of the country of thought. It is the Spirit of Reality and the Water of Life. All things owe their existence to it.

Its manifestation is ever according to the capacity and coloring of the mirror through which it may reflect. For example: 'Its Light, when cast on the mirrors of the wise, gives expression to wisdom; when reflected from the minds of artists it produces manifestations of new and beautiful arts; when it shines through the minds of students it reveals knowledge and unfolds mysteries.

"All things of the world arise through man and are manifest in him, through whom they find life and development; and man is dependent for his (spiritual) existence upon the Sun of The Word of God.

All the good names and lofty qualities are of The Word. The Word is the Fire of God, which, glowing in the hearts of people, burns away all things that are not of God. The minds of the lovers (of God) are ever aflame with this fire.' ”

From the teachings and lives of the great divine teachers have come the great religious movements of the world, which in turn, have produced each its own evolution, advancement and civilization. It can easily be traced and seen, that “The root of all knowledge is the knowledge of God,” and that the “Divine Manifestations of The Word of God” are the sources of divine knowledge and spiritual wisdom that stimulate humanity to moral and intellectual advancement, and thus they are the qualified educators of humanity.

Mankind exists approximately upon a dead level for generations until a divine messenger appears.

His pres-

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ence ushers in a new day or age of religious enlightenment. Through him and his teachings man arises to the higher spiritual and moral level of the new age. Then, after centuries, religious decay occurs, until another divine teacher appears to establish again the true spirit of religion which has been lost by humanity.

All religions teach of the coming of a great divine universal world-teacher, and of the new age of spiritual harmony and peace that He will inaugurate among mankind. The Christians look for another appearance of the Christ, “The Word”; the Jews, for their Messiah; the Moslems, for the Mahdi and The Christ; the Zoroastrians, for their promised one whom they call Shah Bahram; the Buddhists, for their great Fifth Buddha; the Hindus, for the reincarnation of Krishna, or the great Avatar; while other forms of religious thought hold the hope that a great divine master-teacher will appear, and establish Truth universal, in the world.

As one studies, and delves into the reality of these various teachings with their prophetic writings of the “Promised One,” he becomes assured that all these many prophesies refer to the appearance in these latter days of one great divine teacher, who will inaugurate the new age of

spiritual oneness,
brotherhood, and peace that the people of all religions are expecting.
This new age of spiritual awakening to the reality of Divine Truth has dawned.
The teachings of
Baha'o'llah have ushered into existence a new spiritual stimulus, and
through the spiritual principles
embodied in the religious

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explanations and the life of Abdul Baha, the world has received the basis of
the life of this new day and
age.

In speaking of this great world master-teacher, Abdul Baha once said:

“I. That Great Master will be the educator of the world of humanity.

II. His Teachings must be universal and confer illuminations upon human kind.

III. His knowledge must be innate and spontaneous, and not acquired.

IV. He must answer the questions of all sages, solve the difficult problems of
humanity, and be able

to withstand all the persecutions and sufferings heaped upon Him.

V. He must be a joy-bringer and the herald of the kingdom of happiness.

VI. His knowledge must be infinite and His wisdom all-comprehensive.

VII. The penetration of His word and the potency of His influence must be so
great as to humble

even His worst enemies.

VIII. Sorrows and tribulations must not vex Him. His courage and conviction
must be God-like.

Day unto day He must become firmer and more zealous.

IX. He must be the establisher of universal civilization, the unifier of
religions, the standard-bearer

of universal peace, and the embodiment of all the highest and noblest virtues
of the world of humanity.

Wherever you find these conditions realized in a human temple, to Him look for
guidance and
illumination.”

As with things of the spirit so with things on this earthly plane. The Bahais
see and anticipate with
the

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growing spiritual unity of religion peculiar to this newly dawning age, a
material unity of religion of all
peoples, and a fusion into one great world-people, evolving and developing
toward a great universal,
world civilization, the light of which to humanity, now, is but a faint
glimmer.

World oneness, tranquility and peace, and the adjustment of all conditions so

as to bring opportunity, development, and happiness to the individual and to the mass of humanity, are the ultimate objects of true religion, and the Bahais believe that in this new age these ideals are to be realized by the power of God's Spirit, as humanity manifests in the universal civilization uniting all nations, races and religions, the constructive principles of true religion.

VIII.

THE MASHRAK-EL-AZKAR.

THE MASHRAK-EL-AZKAR.

In every age true religion has produced certain institutions that have served spiritual and practical needs of the people of that time. Such institutions have been a material expression of the spiritual quickening and of the cementing together of the people by the organic, cohesive force of truth. They have naturally grouped themselves about the places of religious worship and meeting, which temples have been the geographic centers of human progress and activity, and the mothers of architecture and the other arts.

Throughout the years of the earliest prophets, the people led nomadic lives, going up into the mountains at stated times for their religious observances; thus the open air altars on the mountains were the recognized religious centers of the collective life of the people.

While the children of Israel were migrating from Egypt to the Holy Land, the tabernacle occupied the central position in their encampment, and later on, in their capital city, Jerusalem, the temple of the Lord crowned the highest hill and was the center of the intellectual, material, and religious life of the people.

In the typical Christian city of long ago the cathedral has been the great central edifice about which the other buildings of the city, religious and secular were grouped. The religious life of the people of this epoch was all important, and this principle was expressed in the architectural development of their cities.

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The temple of each religion and civilization, is always found to be the focal point of the city

architectural. The acropolii of the Greek cities, upon the summits of which were the temples, the forums of the Roman cities, with their many temples, the mosques of the Moslem cities, the fire altars of the Zoroastrians, the pagodas of the Buddhists, and the temples of the Hindus, all testify that each religion has been creative of its own art and civilization in the evolution of an epochal temple.

As in time past, true religion has been the chief motive force for advancement, learning and culture.

The Bahais now anticipate the day when the great universal temple of God will be built; the result of

the spiritual quickening of the people, which will signify and further all phases of universal human

advancement, spiritual, moral, and physical, of this new age of humanity.

The "Mashrak-El-Azkar" which translated from the Persian literally means "The dawning-point of

the mentionings of God," is the Bahai temple of worship and service to humanity. It consists of a

central building for worship, the temple proper, surrounded by schools, hospitals and hospices, homes

and asylums for the orphan, for the incurable and for the aged, and by colleges and universities. The

temple of the Mashrak-El-Azkar is for reading, meditation and prayer, not an auditorium for preaching.

It is essentially a place for worship and drawing near in spirit to God. Thus it will be a center of

spiritual power and attraction exerting a divine influence in the world.

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Its many surrounding institutions are for the practical moral and physical service to humanity. The

Bahais appreciate that man should glorify God in deed as well as by word of mouth, therefore this

principle is embodied in its fullest expression, in the Mashrak-El-Azkar.

Some years ago the first large Mashrak-El-Azkar was built. It is located in the city Eshkhabad, in

Oriental Russia, which has a considerable following of the Bahai Movement, and where the Russian

royal government has been friendly to the cause. First, the temple proper was erected, an imposing

structure in the oriental style of architecture, and then a school was founded, and a hospice and now

other institutional buildings are being added as the necessary ways and means are available.

Not long past, the friends of the Bahai Movement endeavored to unite in establishing a Mashrak-El-

Azkar, in America. Contributions were received from the far parts of the world, sent by persons of different countries, races and religions for the building of this great universal temple in which peoples of every race and of all religions might find a welcome, and worship there in spirit, and in deed. A very beautiful building site at Chicago, on the shore of Lake Michigan, has been selected and purchased and it is hoped that sufficient offerings will soon make it possible to begin the work of construction.

When this Mashrak-El-Azar, with its institutional groups is established, it will be as an ensign to all those who are seeking the great universal spirit of religion, and it will be a practical demonstration of the spirit and of

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the working principle of service to humanity in the Bahai Cause. Resulting from the united efforts of the friends in its erection, the completed Mashrak-El-Azkar will be a center from which spiritual illumination will radiate and it will be a haven that will attract seeking and spiritual souls.

Abdul Baha speaks of the Mashrak-El-Azkar in the following terms:

“When these institutions, college, hospital, hospice and establishments for the incurables, university for the study of higher sciences and giving post-graduate courses, and other philanthropic buildings are built, its doors will be opened to all the nations and religions. There will be absolutely no line of demarcation drawn. Its charities will be dispensed irrespective of color or race. Its gates will be flung wide open to mankind; prejudice toward none, love for all. The central building will be devoted to the purpose of prayer and worship. Thus, for the first time, religion will become harmonized with science, and science will be the handmaid of religion both showering their material and spiritual gifts on all humanity.”

IX.

AFTERWORD.

AFTERWORD.

Were religion merely a matter of speculation, or of personal preference in choosing the form or ceremony or philosophy that appealed most to ones esthetic and intellectual

faculties, then it would be presumptuous in the extreme, for any man to assume that his own religion was better for humanity than another. But such a premise assumes that religion is outside the realm of reality, and is only a matter of taste, of supposition, superstition or imagination. The Bahai teaching establishes quite the opposite premise and proves that true progressive religion is the most vital of all realities. It is the fundamental spiritual law of the universe and the source of advancement and betterment of the human family, and therefore necessary that for their own good men should know and practice its principles.

To believe that all is good which bears the name of religion is a great mistake. Thoughtful observation finds proof that certain teachings produce progress and bring good results both to the individual and to the society, while other teachings cause retrogression of civilization and morals and therefore are bad for the world. The preceding pages, bore witness that the time is now here when people should cast aside petty personal prejudices, likes or dislikes and should consider true religion from the standpoint of the moral and spiritual motive power for constructive advancement that it gives to the world.

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This spiritual dynamic force is the most needed of all things, in the world of to-day; therefore, in calling the attention of people to religion, the followers of the Bahai Movement are doing so with all assurance that fair-minded persons, when the matter is brought to their attention, will look into the teachings and, seeing for themselves, will accept these universal, vital principles for human progress, recognizing their divine source. It has been explained at length that the Bahai religion is not one of formulated belief and creed, but rather, one of universal spiritual principles and their application in daily life. Therefore, those who are assured that this movement contains within it the power necessary to infuse new spiritual life and energy into humanity, are fearless in their endeavor to bring this cause to the notice of all thinking people, being confident that the unbiased mind will respond to, and will acknowledge these divinely

constructive principles.

The central motive power in the Bahai Movement is the source of its strength and life-giving spiritual energy. This central motive power is the divine mission of its founders, the fact that another great manifestation of spirituality has appeared among men, and has made a new contact between the divine and human spheres of existence. When souls are in contact with this manifested source of illumination they become quickened with a new energy of The Spirit of God, and, for themselves, they see the vital essential realities of the religion of all the human past and their value in present world problems.

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In each great religious cause its prophet or divine manifestation has been the source of spiritual quickening of the people. Jesus, the Christ, was the unique source of divine light in His day, and other divine messengers likewise have illumined their people, with the light of the spiritual kingdom.

Through spiritual contact they inspired a new awakening life in the souls of the people.

This is the message that the Bahais have for the world: That great spiritual light has arisen, and that a new center of divine bounties has appeared and is now in our midst. Through the light of God which

He brings, the power is now given to humanity to rise above its past conditions and to enter into that

state where the Divine will guide, and will direct his human activities. The mission of those who have

found this center of spiritual guidance is to proclaim to all people this coming of the great latter day

Messiah, who fulfills the truths promised in the Holy Books of all religions.

His knowledge and

wisdom are universal, and are adapted to the needs of one and all. The truths of His teachings are

evident and manifest to all who hear them. The people of all races, nations and religions are invited,

encouraged and helped to lay aside all religious prejudice and to study this matter for themselves, with

the assurance that they will recognize the light, and through it be led to

God's Word the source from

whence it comes. Each will find for himself that spiritual assurance and peace which the manifested

spirit of divinity gives to the souls of men.

— Constructive Principles of the Baha'i Movement (Used by permission of the curator)