

STAR OF THE WEST

"We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; that all nations shall become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men shall be strengthened, that diversity of religion shall cease and differences of race be annulled. So it shall be; these fruitless strifes; these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come."—BAHA'O'LLAH.

Vol. 12

Azamat 1, 77 (May 17, 1921)

No. 4

The Temple of Universal Religion—The Fundamental Oneness of All Existing Faiths

Address of JENABE FAZEL, delivered at the Bahai Congress, at Auditorium Hotel, Chicago, Sunday afternoon, April 24, 1921. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, interpreter. Stenographically reported by Frederick H. Gurtler.

IT IS indeed our supreme pleasure and happiness to have the privilege this afternoon to speak before this glowing audience of men and women. Praise be to God, that we are today living in an age, in a cycle, in which the mysteries of God, the secrets of nature, are exposed and revealed so that man may study these laws and gain wisdom. Such mysteries and secrets which have been known to man from time immemorial, these divine, intellectual, spiritual, artistic secrets of the world of God are all exposed by God so that we may gain benefit and attain to perfection.

When, seventy years ago, BAHÁ'O'LLAH, in Persia, laid the foundation of the oneness of religion and declared the possibility, nay, the realization of a universal religion, people who were doctrinaires scoffed at such an idea and thought it was impossible, but today through the diffusion of the light of knowledge and education every forward-looking man and woman has come to the conclusion that the greatest need of the world of humanity is universal religion, and no other.

In those past ages when people lived in the obscurity of ignorance and narrow-mindedness, not becoming acquainted with the contents of each other's sacred book, not realizing that their prophets have all come to teach them

the law of love and unity, they looked upon one another with the eyes of a stranger, they anathematized one another, they thought that they were the peculiar, the sacred, the divine race while the rest of mankind were barbarians, savages, and deprived of the mercy of God.

His Holiness, BAHÁ'O'LLAH, even long before he declared his spiritual mission to mankind in 1863, in all his writings, in all his utterances, likened the religions of the world to so many pure mirrors reflecting the rays of the Sun of Reality. He proved beyond a shadow of doubt through his divine power and spiritual words, creative and inspiring, that all the seven religions of the world were originally like unto pure, crystalline, limpid rivers which were flowing from the heart of God, from the heart of His manifestations through the deserts of human concepts, but as they flowed on and on they gathered the mud, the refuse, they were discolored by human creeds and human imaginations and human fanaticism, and by the time they reached the ocean they were no more the pure water coming out of the Rock of Ages, but they were flowing mud.

Again BAHÁ'O'LLAH likened the world unto a university, the prophets being the teachers and the professors of this college or school, and as it is the aim and

the desire of the teachers to raise the intellectual, the spiritual, the artistic minds of the pupils through the various degrees of accomplishment till they attain to a time when they get their diplomas, so likewise the prophets had one divine plan before them toward which they were working, and for the attainment of which they were educating the children of men, and that was the brotherhood and the unity of mankind.

BAHA'O'LLAH planted the seeds of world citizenship and the oneness of the world of humanity in the hearts of his friends, and he irrigated and flooded these fields to such an extent that these Bahais began to study the sacred books of all the religions, collecting and drawing out of this vast treasure house of sacred ideals those principles which agreed with one another, putting them side by side, writing a textbook, and thus proving that the quintessence, the original teachings of all the teachers and prophets of the past had been one ideal, and these books are being taught to our children in our schools so that they grow up with that universal consciousness and international mind.

Not only have the Bahais been working in this field of investigation but even the scholars and the sages of this country, many of whom I met in the universities and colleges throughout this land, have been working along similar lines, writing textbooks on comparative religions, and showing in the most dramatic, in the most spiritual, convincing manner, that these great teachers of humanity throughout successive ages have taught one universal ideal.

From a philosophic standpoint we can divide the contents of the sacred books of the world into five parts. The first part is in regard to the principle of cosmogony or genesis, the creation of the world, and just as you have in the book of Genesis an account of creation, likewise other religions, Buddhists, Zoroastrians and Mohammedans have similar allegorical stories about the creation of

the world. This first historical part of the religious textbooks of the world, if we read them with the eyes of orthodoxy and literalization, are all unreasonable, not in accord with science or reason, not intellectual; they are like fairy stories that we relate to our children; but if we interpret them with the eye of spiritual symbology and realize that the writers have been teaching humanity in this manner we gain the most spiritual and heavenly knowledge.

The Hindus have a myth that when God created the globe it was in a fluid state and it was moving through space with such velocity that there was no time for the creation of creatures, so Juerrnath, who was one of the gods, offered his services to the Almighty that he would take hold of this globe and keep it in order, giving time enough to God to create the rest of the creatures, but he took hold of the globe and it was so heavy that his two hands fell off. The Hindus have the statue of this Juerrnath in all their temples as a god without two hands. Now if you give spiritual interpretation to this story you have a beautiful lesson; otherwise it is the most unreasonable, fanciful story of the primitive races.

In the Zoroastrian religious books they have similar stories about the stellar globes in the universe, stating that each one of these stars was an intelligent being, controlling, governing and dominating the agencies of the world for a long time.

In the book of Genesis we read that on a certain day the sun was created. Now the day is the result of the motion of the earth in relation to the sun. Inasmuch as the sun was not created up to the third or the fourth day, how could there be any days? Hence these contexts of the religious books of the world must be all interpreted with the modern conception of today and thus put them in line with the universal ideal of our time, and bring them within the harmonious institutions of the concepts of our age.

The second part of the texts of the religious books are all about supernatural things, about spiritual phenomena, belief in God, in the immortality of the soul, in the angel or devil, heaven or hell, resurrection and various other ideas with which we are familiar. This second part is shared in common in all the religious books, and those ideals belonging to the second part, if they are not in accord with reason and science, are superstitions and must be thrown away.

The third part are the miracles or extraordinary events attributed to the prophets by their followers. All the prophets of the past have achieved certain miracles, have performed extraordinary things, but the strange part of this fact is that although the followers of one prophet believe in all the miracles that their own has performed, they negate and deny similar miracles performed by another prophet.

The fourth part are the ceremonies, the rituals, the ecclesiastical rites which are existent more or less in different religions, in different languages. They may speak in various tongues, but they all mean the same thing. Now if these rituals are conducive to the purification of the soul, to the making of citizenship, of manhood, if they give spirituality and independence and responsibility to the worshipper, they are all good, and are rendering their service in their own place, but if they do not do that they are just useless impedimenta, intellectual and spiritual.

The fifth and most important part, which is the kernel of the religions, are the moral and the ethical teachings which are alike and identical in all the religions. If you place side by side the religious books of the world, study them impartially, you will gain this deep insight that they are all teaching the same lesson, they are all inculcating the same fundamental norms. Their lessons consist in spiritual unity of mankind, in the refinement of character, in the etherealization of the soul so that we may learn

common sense and live side by side with the spirit of fellowship, kindness and comradeship.

To illustrate, Moses says, you must love your neighbor. Christ explains the same idea only a step higher, that it is not a great thing for you to love your friend, you must love your enemy; should some one strike you on your right cheek, show him the left also. Confucius declares the same ideal by saying, do not like anything to be done to others that you would not like it to be done to you. Mohammed says, if you are walking along the street and some one comes and curses you, do not seem to hear it, but continue to walk, but if he persists in cursing, you should turn to him and say, "Peace be upon you" (laughter and applause). Again he says, the real believer is that soul from whose tongue and whose hand the people are safe. Thus has the golden rule been explained or taught in different ages, in various languages, with the hope that humanity would practice them.

Zoroaster, the prophet of Persia, takes men to a higher plane when he teaches that it is not your merit to love humanity, because you have to love your own kind, but your merit consists in your love for the animal kingdom. Do not harm an ant which is such a tiny creature because the ant has life and life is precious and sweet. Therefore, all the sacrifices, all the persecutions, all the contumely that the prophets of the past went through was for this one, chief aim, to teach humanity how to act and live peacefully and avoid and shun misunderstandings.

I was speaking with an individual about the prophethood of Mohammed and when I explained to him that Mohammed was also the prophet of Arabia and had come to teach the sons of the desert the knowledge of God he said "I have read the Koran from beginning to end and I have not found there one word about God, but always Mohammed says

'Allah, Allah'." (laughter.) He said, "Now, what kind of a prophet is he that he never says God?" I said, "Well, I am very sorry he did not live in America. The English language had not penetrated into the Arabian peninsula while he was living, so he had to use his own language for the same ideal." The prophets did not come to teach a name, they came to inculcate an ideal, and that ideal they had to explain and utter in their own language according to the conception of their own people, and, therefore, according to the spirit of the age in which they lived.

It has been through the sheer ignorance of men that they have looked upon the prophets are so many generals, as so many commanders leading armies into battlefields and fighting against each other. Do you think if the prophets were to come today, Mohammed and Christ and Moses and Buddha, that they would teach their followers to go and fight and kill, or would they teach them to associate with one another, to set aside all their narrow-mindedness and suspicions and bigotry and backbiting and live in accordance with the ideal of love, harmony and unity? That is, were it possible to have a conference of the prophets of the past they would have no other thought, they would discuss no other theme but to purify the religions of the past from man-made dogmas and creeds and bring them back to that original source of divine contemplation and spiritual realization.

His Holiness, BAHÁ'U'LLAH, appeared in this age for the revealment of this great ideal and he has uncovered this divine mystery and has brought a universal religion but not a new religion, a religion which is the sum total, which is the consummation, which is the gathering together of all the past fragments of truth into one scintillating whole. The precious jewels and gems of realities which were hidden and the thorns and thistles of human misunderstandings are

again exposed and revealed to the sight of men.

Universal religion, therefore, is in need of a universal temple, not a temple where only rites and ceremonies are performed but a temple which is the home of universal love and service dedicating all energies to the work of human salvation. The real temple is the heart of man. When we build this temple in the center of the heart we have the greatest divine temple. The outward temple must be a symbol, an outward expression of that spiritual temple in the heart of humanity. The real temple where God dwells, the abode where the Almighty resides all through eternity is the heart, provided we get hold of the broom of the love of God and sweep from the chambers of this inner temple all the cobwebs, all the dust of the past ages of ignorance, of superstition and imitation. What are the cobwebs and the dust with which the heart of humanity are covered today? They are greed, passion, lust, transgression, sin, all these things are the devils standing at the gateway of the human temple and not letting the angels of self-sacrifice and of self-renunciation and of divine emotions enter into the abode of the Almighty. When the temple of the heart is cleansed with this spiritual broom and all the dust and superstitions are scattered, then man will worship in that sacred shekinah, in that inner sanctuary without the need of outward walls, or using the temporal temple.

One of the great prophets of the orient has uttered a wonderful truth when he said that God told him that, "The heavens and the earth have not a place for Me, they are too small to hold Me, but the heart of a sincere lover, the heart of a believer, is the spacious kingdom of My presence." When the horizon of the heart is broadened, when the intellect of man is expanded, thus allowing the infiltration of the lights of divinity, then those inner temples will become the home of universal conscience and international mind.

BAHA'O'LLAH came to lay the foundation of a universal temple in the hearts of humanity, and because this universal temple is in need of an outward symbol, has instituted this great law of having a physical temple (the Mashreq'ul-Azkar) where all humanity may worship God in accord with their conscience, an exterior, outward temple, the ideals and the aims of which may tally and correspond with that inner, interior temple of the heart. The inner temple universal is a temple where God resides, the outer temple, which is also universal, is a place where there are no priests, where there are no rites, where there are no ceremonies but purely God who is the universal Father of all humanity and is worshipped with the utmost simplicity.

Just as BAHÁ'O'LLAH has opened the door of this inner universal temple so that out of it universal love may issue forth; likewise the door of the physical universal temple must be opened for all and out of its gates the lights of universal love must be scattered to all parts of the globe. Consequently, we hope that through the institution of these two temples always going and advancing side by side the inner temple of the heart, the outer temple of the world, thus through

the co-operation of these two universal temples the world of humanity may be freed from the claws of the ferocious beasts of superstition and fanaticism, the temple of brotherhood, the temple of unity, the temple of spirituality and co-operation to be built in the heart and out of the heart, this outer symbol, thus they may work harmoniously and make this world as one home, the children of men as one flock and God as the universal Shepherd.

In truth, when we listen with the ear of the spirit today we hear the people of all religions crying at the top of their voices that the spirit has left their temples. What was the cause of the banishment of the Spirit from these temples? Because the leaders of the church wanted to organize the Spirit, they wanted to institutionalize the Holy Ghost, and thus they lost the great boon of spiritual spontaneity and unification. God, therefore, has a great gift for the world of humanity today. He has freed the spirit of worship from the chains and fetters of ecclesiasticism so that mankind may grow in this immensity of God's love with the greatest freedom, with the greatest liberty and with the greatest joy and happiness (applause).

The Thirteenth Mashreq'ul-Azkar Convention and Bahai Congress

By LOUIS G. GREGORY

The Feast of EL-Rizwan

CHICAGO, beloved by Abdul-Baha as the spot where the Divine Cause first touched America, was the scene of the Thirteenth Mashreq'ul-Azkar Convention, with its meetings for teaching.

"Let us be silent and turn our thoughts to Abdul-Baha!"

Mr. Albert R. Windust, presiding, opened the Feast of El-Rizwan, commemorating the Declaration of BAHÁ'O'LLAH, with these words. The spiritual melody, "Softly his voice is calling now"

followed, after which prayers revealed by Abdul-Baha were read:

"O my God! O my God! We are servants who have sincerely turned our faces unto Thy Grand Face, severed ourselves from all else save Thee in this great day and are assembled together in this glorious meeting, of one accord and desire, and unanimous in thought to promulgate Thy Word amid Thy creatures.

"O my Lord! O my Lord! Suffer us