

# Talk at Meeting of International Peace Forum Grace...

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



47

## Talk at Meeting of International Peace Forum Grace Methodist Episcopal Church

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When we review history from the beginning down to the present day, we find that strife and warfare have prevailed throughout the human world. Wars — religious, racial or political — have arisen from human ignorance, misunderstanding and lack of education. We will first consider religious strife and conflict.

It is evident that the divine Prophets have appeared in the world to establish love and agreement among mankind. They have been the Shepherds and not the wolves. The Shepherd comes forth to gather and lead his flock and not to disperse them by creating strife. Every divine Shepherd has assembled a flock which had formerly been scattered. Among the Shepherds was Moses. At a time when the tribes of Israel were wandering and dispersed, He assembled, united and educated them to higher degrees of capacity and progress[pg 117] until they passed out of the wilderness of discipline into the holy land of possession. He transformed their degradation into glory, changed their poverty into wealth and replaced their vices by virtues until they rose to such a zenith that the splendor of the sovereignty of Solomon was made possible, and the fame of their civilization extended to the East and the West. It is evident, therefore, that Moses was a divine Shepherd, for He gathered the tribes of Israel together and united them in the power and strength of a great nationhood.



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

When the Messianic star of Jesus Christ dawned, He declared He had come to gather together the lost tribes or scattered sheep of Moses. He not only shepherded the flock of Israel but brought together people of Chaldea, Egypt, Syria, ancient Assyria and Phoenicia. These people were in a state of utmost hostility, thirsting for the blood of each other with the ferocity of animals; but Jesus Christ brought them together, cemented and united them in His Cause and established such a bond of love among them that enmity and warfare were abandoned. It is evident, therefore, that the divine teachings are intended to create a bond of unity in the human world and establish the foundations of love and fellowship among mankind. Divine religion is not a cause for discord and disagreement. If religion becomes the source of antagonism and strife, the absence of religion is to be preferred. Religion is meant to be the quickening life of the body politic; if it be the cause of death to humanity, its nonexistence would be a blessing and benefit to man. Therefore, in this day the divine teachings must be sought, for they are the remedies for the present conditions of the world of humanity. The purpose of a remedy is to heal and cure. If it be productive of worse symptoms, its absence or discontinuance is preferable.

At a time when the Arabian tribes and nomadic peoples were widely separated, living in the deserts under lawless conditions, strife and bloodshed continual among them, no tribe free from the menace of attack and destruction by another — at such a critical time Muḥammad appeared. He gathered these wild tribes of the desert together, reconciled, united and caused them to agree so that enmity and warfare ceased. The Arabian nation immediately advanced until its dominion extended westward to Spain and Andalusia.

From these facts and premises we may conclude that the establishing of the divine religions is for peace, not for war and the shedding of blood. Inasmuch as all are founded upon one reality which is love and unity, the wars and dissensions which have characterized the history of religion have been due to imitations[pg 118] and superstitions which arise afterward. Religion is reality, and reality is one. The fundamentals of the religion of God are, therefore, one in reality. There is neither difference nor change in the fundamentals. Variance is caused by blind imitations, prejudices and adherence to forms which appear later; and inasmuch as these differ, discord and strife result. If the religions of the world would forsake these causes of difficulty and seek the fundamentals, all would agree, and strife and dissension would pass away; for religion and reality are one and not multiple.

Other wars are caused by purely imaginary racial differences; for humanity is one kind, one race and progeny, inhabiting the same globe. In the creative plan there is no racial distinction and separation such as Frenchman, Englishman, American, German, Italian or Spaniard; all belong to one household. These boundaries and distinctions are human and artificial, not natural and original. All mankind are the fruits of one tree, flowers of the same garden, waves of one sea. In the animal kingdom no such distinction and

separation are observed. The sheep of the East and the sheep of the West would associate peacefully. The Oriental flock would not look surprised as if saying, "These are sheep of the Occident; they do not belong to our country." All would gather in harmony and enjoy the same pasture without evidence of local or racial distinction. The birds of different countries mingle in friendliness. We find these virtues in the animal kingdom. Shall man deprive himself of these virtues? Man is endowed with superior reasoning power and the faculty of perception; he is the manifestation of divine bestowals. Shall racial ideas prevail and obscure the creative purpose of unity in his kingdom? Shall he say, "I am a German," "I am a Frenchman" or an "Englishman" and declare war because of this imaginary and human distinction? God forbid! This earth is one household and the native land of all humanity; therefore, the human race should ignore distinctions and boundaries which are artificial and conducive to disagreement and hostility. We have come from the East. Praise be to God! We find this continent prosperous, the climate salubrious and delightful, the inhabitants genial and courteous, the government equitable and just. Shall we entertain any other thought and feeling than that of love for you? Shall we say, "This is not our native land; therefore, everything is objectionable"? This would be gross ignorance to which man must not subject himself. Man is endowed with powers to investigate reality, and the reality is that humanity is one in kind and equal in the creative plan. Therefore, false distinctions of race and native land, which are factors and causes of warfare, must be abandoned.[pg 119]

Consider what is happening in Tripoli: how the poor are being killed and the blood of the helpless is being shed upon both sides; children, made fatherless; fathers, lamenting the death of their sons; mothers, bewailing the loss of dear ones. And what is the benefit after all? Nothing conceivable. Is it, therefore, justifiable? The domestic animals do not manifest hatred and cruelty toward each other; that is the attribute of the wild and ferocious beasts. In a flock of one thousand sheep you will witness no bloodshed. Numberless species of birds are peaceful in flocks. Wolves, lions, tigers are ferocious because it is their natural and necessary means for obtaining food. Man has no need of such ferocity; his food is provided in other ways. Therefore, it is evident that warfare, cruelty and bloodshed in the kingdom of man are caused by human greed, hatred and selfishness. The kings and rulers of nations enjoy luxury and ease in their palaces and send the common people to the battlefield — offer them as the food and targets of cannon. Each day they invent new instruments for the more complete destruction of the foundations of the human race. They are callous and merciless toward their fellow creatures. What shall atone for the sufferings and grief of mothers who have so tenderly cared for their sons? What sleepless nights they have spent, and what days of devotion and love they have given to bring their children to maturity! Yet the savagery of these warring rulers causes great numbers of their victims to be torn and mutilated in a day. What ignorance and degradation, yea even greater than the ferocious beasts themselves! For a wolf will carry away and devour one sheep at a time, whereas an ambitious tyrant may cause the death of one hundred thousand men in a

battle and glory in his military prowess, saying, "I am commander in chief; I have won this mighty victory." Consider the ignorance and inconsistency of the human race. If a man kills another, no matter what the cause may be, he is pronounced a murderer, imprisoned or executed; but the brutal oppressor who has slain one hundred thousand is idolized as a hero, conqueror or military genius. A man steals a small sum of money; he is called a thief and sent to the penitentiary; but the military leader who invades and pillages a whole kingdom is acclaimed heroic and a mighty man of valor. How base and ignorant is man!

In Persia previous to the middle of the nineteenth century among the various tribes and peoples, sects and denominations there existed the greatest animosity, strife and hatred. At that time, too, all the other nations of the East were in the same condition. Religionists were hostile and bigoted, sects were at enmity, races hated each other, tribes were constantly at war; everywhere antagonism [pg 120] and conflict prevailed. Men shunned and were suspicious of each other. The man who could kill a number of his fellow creatures was glorified for his heroism and strength. Among religionists it was esteemed a praiseworthy deed to take the life of one who held an opposite belief. At this time Bahá'u'lláh arose and declared His mission. He founded the oneness of the world of humanity, proclaimed that all are servants of the loving and merciful God Who has created, nourished and provided for all; therefore, why should men be unjust and unkind to each other, showing forth that which is contrary to God? As He loves us, why should we entertain animosity and hate? If God did not love all, He would not have created, trained and provided for all. Loving-kindness is the divine policy. Shall we consider human policy and attitude superior to the wisdom and policy of God? This would be inconceivable, impossible. Therefore, we must emulate and follow the divine policy, dealing with each other in the utmost love and tenderness.

Bahá'u'lláh declared the Most Great Peace and international arbitration. He voiced these principles in numerous Epistles which were circulated broadcast throughout the East. He wrote to all the kings and rulers, encouraging, advising and admonishing them in regard to the establishment of peace, making it evident by conclusive proofs that the happiness and glory of humanity can only be assured through disarmament and arbitration. This was nearly fifty years ago. Because He promulgated the message of universal peace and international agreement, the kings of the Orient arose against Him, for they did not find their personal and national benefits advanced by His admonition and teaching. They persecuted Him bitterly, inflicted upon Him every torment, imprisoned, bastinadoed, banished Him and eventually confined Him in a fortress. Then they arose against His followers. For the establishment of international peace the blood of twenty thousand Bahá'ís was spilled. Their homes were destroyed, their children made captives and their possessions pillaged, yet none of these people waxed cold or wavered in devotion. Even to this day the Bahá'ís are persecuted, and quite recently a number were killed, for wherever they are found they put forth the

greatest efforts to establish the peace of the world. They not only promulgate principles; they are people of action.

In Persia today through the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh you will find people of various beliefs and denominations living together in the utmost peace and agreement. The former enmities and hatred have passed away, and they exercise the utmost love toward[pg 121] all mankind, for they realize and know that all are the creatures and servants of one God. This is directly due to the divine teachings. At most it is simply this: that the ignorant must be educated, the ailing must be healed, those who are as children in the scale of development must be helped to reach the age of maturity. We must not be unfriendly to anyone because of ignorance; neither must we reject the immature or turn away from the sick but administer the remedy for each human need until all are united in the providence of God. Therefore, it is evident that the essential foundations of the divine religions are unity and love. If religion be productive of discord among mankind, it is a destroyer and not divine, for religion implies unity and binding together and not separation. Mere knowledge of principles is not sufficient. We all know and admit that justice is good, but there is need of volition and action to carry out and manifest it. For example, we might think it good to build a church, but simply thinking of it as a good thing will not help its erection. The ways and means must be provided; we must will to build it and then proceed with the construction. All of us know that international peace is good, that it is conducive to human welfare and the glory of man, but volition and action are necessary before it can be established. Action is essential. Inasmuch as this century is a century of light, capacity for action is assured to mankind. Necessarily the divine principles will be spread among men until the time of action arrives. Surely this has been so, and truly the time and conditions are ripe for action now. All men know that, verily, war is a destroyer of human foundations, and in every country of the world this is admitted and apparent. I find the United States of America an exceedingly progressive nation, the government just, the people in a state of readiness and the principle of equality established to an extraordinary degree. Therefore, it is my hope that, inasmuch as the standard of international peace must be upraised, it may be upraised upon this continent, for this nation is more deserving and has greater capacity for such an initial step than any other. If other nations should attempt to do this, the motive would be misunderstood. For instance, if Great Britain should declare for international peace, it would be said that it has been done to ensure the safety of her colonies. If France should hoist the standard, other nations would declare some hidden diplomatic policy underlies the action; Russia would be suspected of national designs if the first step were taken by that people, and so on with all the European and eastern governments. But the United States of America could not be accused[pg 122] of any such selfish interest. Your government has, strictly speaking, no colonies to protect. You are not endeavoring to extend your domain, nor have you need of territorial expansion. Therefore, if America takes the first step toward the establishing of world peace, it is certain to be ascribed to unselfishness and altruism.

The world will say, "There is no other motive than altruism and service to humanity in this action by the United States." Therefore, it is my hope that you may stand forth as the first herald of peace and hoist this banner, for this banner will be hoisted. Raise it aloft, for you are the most qualified and deserving of nations. The other countries await this summons, expect this call to the standard of reconciliation, for the whole world is distressed because of the excessive burden and irreparable damage of war. Taxes are levied to meet its drain. Every year the burden increases, and the people have come to their end. Just now Europe is a battlefield of ammunition ready for a spark, and one spark will set aflame the whole world. Before these complications and cataclysmic events happen, take the step to prevent it.

The foundations of all the divine religions are peace and agreement, but misunderstandings and ignorance have developed. If these are caused to disappear, you will see that all the religious agencies will work for peace and promulgate the oneness of humankind. For the foundation of all is reality, and reality is not multiple or divisible. Moses founded it, Jesus raised its tent, and its brilliant light has shone forth in all the religions. Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed this one reality and spread the message of the Most Great Peace. Even in prison He rested not until He lighted this lamp in the East. Praise be to God! All who have accepted His teachings are lovers of peace, peacemakers ready to sacrifice their lives and expend their possessions for it. Now let this standard be upraised in the West, and many will respond to the call. America has become renowned for her discoveries, inventions and artistic skill, famous for equity of government and stupendous undertakings; now may she also become noted and celebrated as the herald and messenger of universal peace. Let this be her mission and undertaking, and may its blessed impetus spread to all countries. I pray for all of you that you may render this service to the world of humanity.[pg 123]

