

Talk at Church of the Divine Paternity

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



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Notes by Esther Foster

Religions are many, but the reality of religion is one. The days are many, but the sun is one. The fountains are many, but the fountainhead is one. The branches are many, but the tree is one.

The foundation of the divine religions is reality; were there no reality, there would be no religions. Abraham heralded reality. Moses promulgated reality. Christ established reality. Muḥammad was the Messenger of reality. The Báb was the door of reality. Bahá'u'lláh was the splendor of reality. Reality is one; it does not admit multiplicity or division. Reality is as the sun, which shines forth from different dawning points; it is as the light, which has illumined many lanterns.

Therefore, if the religions investigate reality and seek the essential truth of their own foundations, they will agree and no difference will be found. But inasmuch as religions are submerged in dogmatic imitations, forsaking the original foundations, and as imitations differ widely, therefore, the religions are divergent and antagonistic. These imitations may be likened to clouds which obscure the sunrise; but reality is the sun. If the clouds disperse, the Sun of Reality shines upon all, and no difference of vision will exist. The religions will then agree, for fundamentally they are the same. The subject is one, but predicates are many.



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

The divine religions are like the progression of the seasons of the year. When the earth becomes dead and desolate and because of frost and cold no trace of vanished spring remains, the springtime dawns again and clothes everything with a new garment of life. The meadows become fresh and green, the trees are adorned with verdure and fruits appear upon them. Then the winter comes again, and all the traces of spring disappear. This is the continuous cycle of the seasons — spring, winter, then the return of spring. But though the calendar changes and the years move forward, each springtime that comes is the return of the springtime[pg 127] that has gone; this spring is the renewal of the former spring. Springtime is springtime, no matter when or how often it comes. The divine Prophets are as the coming of spring, each renewing and quickening the teachings of the Prophet Who came before Him. Just as all seasons of spring are essentially one as to newness of life, vernal showers and beauty, so the essence of the mission and accomplishment of all the Prophets is one and the same. Now the people of religion have lost sight of the essential reality of the spiritual springtime. They have held tenaciously to ancestral forms and imitations, and because of this there is variance, strife and altercation among them. Therefore, we must now abandon these imitations and seek the foundation of the divine teachings; and inasmuch as the foundation is one reality, the divergent religionists must agree in it so that love and unity will be established among all people and denominations.

At a time when the Orient was rent by religious dissension Bahá'u'lláh appeared. He founded teachings which became the means of uniting the various and divergent peoples. He promulgated principles which removed the cause of their dissension, until today in Persia those who had been constantly at war are united. Christians, Muslims, Zoroastrians, Jews — people of every belief and denomination who have followed the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh — have attained complete fellowship and spiritual agreement. Former differences and dissensions have passed away entirely. Some of the principles of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching are as follows:

First, that the oneness of humanity shall be recognized and established. All men are the servants of God. He has created all; He is the Provider and Preserver; He is loving to all. Inasmuch as He is just and kind, why should we be unjust toward each other? As God has quickened us with life, why should we be the cause of death? As He has comforted us, why should we be the cause of anxiety and suffering? Can humanity conceive a plan and policy better and superior to that of God? It is certain that no matter how capable man may be in origination of plan and organization of purpose, his efforts will be inadequate when compared with the divine plan and purpose; for the policy of God is perfect. Therefore, we must follow the will and plan of God. As He is kind to all, we must be likewise; and it is certain that this will be most acceptable to God.

Second, that truth or reality must be investigated; for reality is one, and by investigating it all will find love and unity. Those who are ignorant must be educated, the ailing must be healed, the undeveloped must be brought to maturity. Shall we reject or oppose

the[pg 128] ignorant, sick or immature because of their incapacity? Is it not better to be kind and gentle and to provide the means of remedy? Therefore, under no circumstances whatsoever should we assume any attitude except that of gentleness and humility.

Third, that religion is in harmony with science. The fundamental principles of the Prophets are scientific, but the forms and imitations which have appeared are opposed to science. If religion does not agree with science, it is superstition and ignorance; for God has endowed man with reason in order that he may perceive reality. The foundations of religion are reasonable. God has created us with intelligence to perceive them. If they are opposed to science and reason, how could they be believed and followed?

Fourth, that religion must be conducive to love and unity among mankind; for if it be the cause of enmity and strife, the absence of religion is preferable. When Moses appeared, the tribes of Israel were in a state of disunion as captives of the Pharaohs. Moses gathered them together, and the divine law established fellowship among them. They became as one people, united, consolidated, after which they were rescued from bondage. They passed into the promised land, advanced in all degrees, developed sciences and arts, progressed in material affairs, increased in divine or spiritual civilization until their nation rose to its zenith in the sovereignty of Solomon. It is evident, therefore, that religion is the cause of unity, fellowship and progress among mankind. The function of a shepherd is to gather the sheep together and not to scatter them. Then Christ appeared. He united varying and divergent creeds and warring people of His time. He brought together Greeks and Romans, reconciled Egyptians and Assyrians, Chaldeans and Phoenicians. Christ established unity and agreement among people of these hostile and warring nations. Therefore, it is again evident that the purpose of religion is peace and concord. Likewise, Muḥammad appeared at a time when the peoples and tribes of Arabia were divergent and in a state of continual warfare. They killed each other, pillaged and took captive wives and children. Muḥammad united these fierce tribes, established a foundation of fellowship among them so that they gave up warring against each other absolutely and established communities. The result was that the Arabian tribes freed themselves from the Persian yoke and Roman control, established an independent sovereignty which rose to a high degree of civilization, advanced in sciences and arts, extended the Saracen dominion as far west as Spain and Andalusia and became famous throughout the world. Therefore, it is proved once more that the religion of God is intended to be the cause of[pg 129] advancement and solidarity and not of enmity and dissolution. If it becomes the cause of hatred and strife, its absence is preferable. Its purpose is unity, and its foundations are one.

When Bahá'u'lláh appeared in Persia, violent strife and hatred separated the peoples and tribes of that country. They would not come together for any purpose except war;

they would not partake of the same food, or drink of the same water; association and intercourse were impossible. Bahá'u'lláh founded the oneness of humanity among these people and bound their hearts together with such ties of love that they were completely united. He reestablished the prophetic foundations, reformed and renewed the principles laid down by the Messengers of God who had preceded Him. And now it is hoped that through His life and teachings the East and West shall become so united that no trace of enmity, strife and discord shall remain.

