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## ADDRESS OF COL. A. C. FISK

Before the Bahá Assembly, in New York City, Giving His Personal Views of What the Movement Means

The Bahá religion is not merely an idealistic theory: it is a practical instrument made for the present age, and as such it has to be preoccupied with different relationships between the different religions. "I swear to you before God: it is not of your kingdoms we wish to dispose, but we have come to dispose of your hearts. Most certainly this is the aim of Bahá." *Kitáb al-Aqdas*, the Most Holy Book, which is considered the principal work of Bahá-ólláh.

In a recent work written by Abdul Baha, explaining the history of Turkey and Persia, show the misfortunes which, in the course of the last century, have weighed upon these two countries, have always had the initiatory cause, the unjustifiable interference of the priests, in the political affairs of the country. He points out how the administration of a government penetrated by a sense of its duties is as necessary for a country as the moral direction which it derives from the religious idea; and how that the two authorities should under no pretext whatever encroach on one another's prerogatives.

Bahá-ólláh, Tablet of Ishraqat, mentions that Kings and Ministers of State have a supreme mission here below entitling them to the respect and devotion of their subjects. "They are the," he continues, "day-springs of the power and dawning-places of the authority of God." That is to say, that in them is manifested to men one of the divine attributes—power.

In virtue of this, as trustees of this attribute, they have a right to the obedience of their subjects; but this divine right, in some way, which justifies their high position, equally imposes upon them sacred duties. In order to be obeyed they should govern with equity; but it is especially their mission to establish on earth the Universal Peace, that peace which Bahá-ólláh came to give to the heart of man.

There are two means of attaining this: by the adoption of an international language, and the creation of tribunals of arbitration to regulate difficulties pending between nations.

In the *Kitáb al-Aqdas* as well as in a number of his earlier and later writings, Bahá-ólláh exhorts the Ministers of State to come to an agreement as to the employment of a universal language and writing, either by choosing one from amongst those already existing, or else by creating one artificially. By this means, international relations being facilitated, people will learn to know one another better, consequently to love one another.

The institution of tribunals of arbitration to suppress the causes which determine war between nations, is connected with the prerogatives of a special council called Baitu-í-Adl, or House of Justice.

However, it is important to note that more than twenty years before the Czar had thought of assembling the Hague Conference, Bahá-ólláh had made these high principles the one basis of his dispensation.

In the Tablet of Ishraqat, Bahá-ólláh says: "We have commanded the Most Great Peace which is the greatest means for the protection of mankind. The rulers of the world must, in one accord, adhere to this command, which is the main cause for the tranquility and security of the world."

"The Bahias have carried obedience to this principle so far—remembering that their Prophet had said, 'It is better for you to be killed than to kill.'"

This universal peace has been the aim of Bahá-ólláh all his life. "That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; what harm

is there in this? Yet so it shall be: these painful strifes, these ruinous wars, shall pass away, and the MOST GREAT PEACE shall come." Thus he spoke in April, 1890.

And this is not all. Internal peace and prosperity, when the struggle between classes will cease.

The Fifth Ishraqat (effulgence) is that governments must be acquainted with the conditions of officials, and must confer upon them dignity and positions in accordance with due measure and merit. To have regard for this matter is obligatory and incumbent on every chief and ruler.

And again he says: "O people of God! Exalted be his glory. Ask God to guard the sources of power and authority against the evil of egotism and lust, and to illumine them with the light of justice and guidance."

In a letter to Queen Victoria, in the early days of Akka, Bahá-ólláh congratulates her on her submission to the decision of Parliament. "Thereby the basis of edifices of affairs is made firm and the hearts of those who are under thy shadow, both high and low, are made tranquil. But it behoves them (allusion to the system of representative government) to be as trustees among the servants of God, and to regard themselves as guardians over whomsoever is in all the earth."

And further on: "We ask God that he will help the Kings to be at peace, verily He is able to do what he willeth. O assembly of Kings; verily we see you increasing your expenditure every year, and placing the burden (thereof) on your subjects above that which they can bear, neither ruin them to build up your places. Choose for them that which ye choose for yourselves; thus do we expound unto you that which will profit you, if ye are of those who enquire."

"Baháism" teaches us not to be attached to the things of this world. It insists just as much on the legitimacy of individual property which alone can assure the progress of societies.

The third Ishraqat commands the executing of the laws, for this is the primary means for the maintenance of the world. The Heaven of Divine Wisdom is illumined and shining with two orbs—consultation and kindness; and the tent of the order of the world is hoisted and established on two pillars—reward and retribution.

The administration of the Bahai Society is entrusted to an organ created by Bahá-ólláh, or House of Justice, whose constitution for each town is ordered by the *Kitáb al-Aqdas*. The rules fixing its province, the spirit which should preside over its deliberations and its acts, make it an instrument essential for the propagation of Bahai principles in the world.

Bahá-ólláh in Ishraqat: "God has imposed on every town the erection of a Baitu-í-Adl, where men are to assemble according to the number of Baha. They should figure to themselves that they are in God's presence, and see the invisible. They should be divine agents in the casual world, the representatives of God for those who are on earth, and defend for love of God the interests of His servants as they would defend their own." Thus, the *Kitáb al-Aqdas* expresses itself.

The men of the House of Justice of God "whic, night and day, gaze toward that which hath revealed from the horizon of the Heaven of the Supreme Pen for the training of the servants, for the upbuilding of countries, for the protection of men and for the preservation of honour."

This provision imposes on the council the care of superintending education. Baháism teaches that man can only approach God by first developing his intellectual faculties, which will permit him to take his share in the amount of knowledge acquired by past centuries.

Bahá-ólláh says: "Deprive not yourself of that which is created for you."

Recently, in the same order of ideas, Abdul Baha, writing to a western believer, showed him that "Baháism is a

religion of healthy and joyful life, a morality based on activity, and not a dogma of contention, a sterile doctrine of renunciation. We were made to be happy and not sad; for joy, not for sorrow. Happiness is life, sadness is death; spiritual happiness is eternal life. It is a light that the night does not extinguish. It is an honor that shame does not follow, an existence which is not resolved into annihilation. For happiness the worlds and contingent beings have been created."

Baháism stands for the emancipation of woman as against the Greek prejudice as taught by the Apostle Paul fifteen hundred years ago. Those teachings must give way to the new dispensation, a more perfect and holy religion. St. Paul wrote intuitively greater things than he knew, and unconsciously portrayed the idolatrous apotheosis of the male elements. You remember however, that St. Paul tells the women that if they want to know anything they must ask their husbands. Until woman is accorded justice, until she stands in, and in reality, as well as in name, squarely on an equality with man, it will be idle to dream of a race higher in soul development and more morally robust than the present.

This long lingering curse of a barbaric past is responsible for a large proportion of the immorality found to-day. With the higher development of manless sensuous and extravagant life, also, justice for woman, including full enjoyment of the right of franchise, for a childhood, resulting from an awakened conscience, the fruit of intelligence and love.

Baháism is a religion of this age and stage of evolution. It teaches not only everything that any other Prophet has taught, but it embraces all good taught in every other religion. It is a unification and synthesis of what is best and highest in all other religion. Everyone receiving the Bahá teachings will think, "How like my own religion."

This is because they are so broad that they include all truths. To-day is the time for the Spirit of Truth. The spirit has passed away from the bodies of the old religions. All the teachings of all the great prophets are sublime, but time changes all things, and while the forms of their doctrines remain, the spirit has fled. These bodies are dead, or dying; but the same spirit is reborn in a new body, that is, the Body of the Law, contained in the utterances of Bahá-ólláh. By the new dispensation a new spirit is infused into these teachings, and when they are understood there will no longer be room for contention.

"Christ told his followers to receive his words in the spirit—not in the letter—and so have all manifestations.

The Bahai view is that the march of evolution is constantly upward. If we examine the history of the world in its religious and philosophical aspects, defining and comparing the successive great cycles of racial development, we find that each is marked by the appearance of the founder of a new religion and philosophy. There is a difference in prophets or manifestations. These is the divine essence, and there is the spirit of that essence. Thus, when the spirit was manifested in the prophets of old, they represented as much of the divine nature as it was possible for the people of those periods to assimilate.

In all other manifestations God sent His Holy Spirit, or Breath, to breathe upon the peoples of the world. "This Breath has been called 'Krishna' by the Indians; 'Logos' by the Greeks; 'Holy Ghost' by the Christians. It is the word of St. John, which, 'in the beginning was with God.'"

Now the world has advanced. It was necessary for the essence, itself, of God, to become manifest, and this it did through Bahá-ólláh. He was the crowning glory of a period in whom the perfect Divine Image was reflected.

Abdul Baha says: "All religions are written symbolically." This is the only

way in which Truth can be written to withstand time and its changes. Languages change, the meaning of words is lost; for these are but the expressions of periods—symbols never change, since they are the expression of man's spirit."

Bahá-ólláh was no exception in this respect. He used symbols and metaphors, and if we would understand him, we must interpret these. But this is the day of enlightenment, and therefore his symbols will be read with the highest conception of truth, and his teachings will throw light upon those of all former manifestations.

The time has now come when men are keenly receptive of spiritual things, and the symbols, metaphors, and allegories can be unveiled and their true meaning understood.

It is to uncover and expose that which lies hidden in time, and the religions of the past, to infuse a new spirit into the peoples of the earth, that the new dispensation has appeared in the world.

If men will put into practice what they themselves believe, it will not be necessary to bear an emblem, or to give it a name.

The present cycle marked the kingdom of heaven on earth. Jesus proclaimed it. Bahá-ólláh was its fulfillment. The study of the social order should be the chief concern of the religious man. For what is religion? Religion is at bottom a social bond, a bond that binds all men into one practical brotherhood on God.

This is the meaning of the new birth; that we must strive to be born out of our brute inheritance, out of satan service, into the brotherhood, and only the selfhood in the fraternal commonwealth kingdom—the fraternal commonwealth furnishes an organ for this new spirit—furnishes a proper organ for the expression of the Christ spirit in things. God's universe is one. All its laws and forces are a grand harmonious whole of divine energy. Every material law, when truly known, is attuned to spiritual progress. The very nature or constitution of human society and all the forces that enter into it, make the kingdom of heaven a consequential necessity. Our Father worketh hitherto and we work.

Modern scientific research is daily demonstrating and justifying the statements and predictions of occult science, or philosophy, as expounded by Buddha, Jesus, Hermes, Zoroaster, Confucius, Moses, and many others, to the great satisfaction of those who have reached the same conclusions by inductive reasoning. All predictions emanating therefrom seem to center in the appearance of one who shall prepare the way.

True altruism is the fundamental law of all life, for God is truly love. We may believe this, but we cannot know it by the sense perception; until our inner senses are opened to those planes of life where its action is clearly manifested at all times and under all circumstances, hence the importance of the development of such senses, which in connection with the right effort and aspirations are unfolded, naturally, surely, safely, when one's life is consecrated to the service of humanity.

Baháism will increase production by substituting for the present anarchy, an organization of the productive forces.

Ninety per cent of the productive energies of the country are wasted in the crude warfare of competition, and in the payment of unearned interest, and in the payment of unearned interest. Baháism will stop this. Baháism will be a completely organized state, wherein the industries of life will be managed with the same, or superior efficiency, economy, and consideration of the public good, as now characterises the management of well organized departments of Government.

In olden times the road to fame was sought in war, in strife, in blood and sorrow. To-day a different spirit fills the heart of man, civilization is more extended and more refined. There are many and more roads to fame and preferment but they do not lie over the destruction of their fellowman. Its a high-

er and nobler life, but just as strenuous, just as noble, and more satisfactory, than that of the warrior or Crusader of the olden time.

The strife for fame and glory in the future will not be to see how many commercial combinations and monopolies can be controlled, for the purpose of exploiting the people; but man will vie with others to see how many of his fellow men he can induce to join, not in strife, but in good fellowship; not in combines to rob his fellow man, but in co-operative organizations to bless his kind.

The Bahá spirit will dominate humanity; strife will disappear. Love will come; instead of fear of hunger and of want, organized productive energy will bring forth bountiful harvests to gladden every heart.

The next step is the resurrection. Rise in the majestic strength of your unvarnished brotherhood, and the obstacles of your progress God himself will roll away. A glorious life awaits you. A life of culture, peaceful industry and pure delight. The time is at hand. The new life can begin now. We want the commonwealth of God established that shall bless all men and women with peace and plenty. Kindliness and helpfulness and mutualism embodied in our economic institutions of society, will reproduce the spirit of brotherhood, the Bahá spirit, an hundredfold. The passing of the old order and the coming of the new will be without observation. Both events are taking place now. Evolution does the work.

We must have the new system of order and justice, and the new spirit of brotherhood. The new time is coming with a purpose—a purpose from the heart of the eternal.