

**THE OLD CHURCHES AND
THE
NEW WORLD-FAITH ***

by

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HAVING identified myself with the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and sacrificed my position as a canon and a dignity of the Church of Ireland that I might do so, I now make this statement on the relation of this Faith to Christianity and to the Churches of Christ.

It is submitted to all Christian people in general but more especially to the bishops and clergy and members of my own communion, with the humble but earnest and urgent request that they will give it their attention as a matter of vital concern to the Church. Only through an impartial investigation of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh will they find, I fully believe, a means of reviving the fortunes of the Church, of restoring the purity and the power of the Gospel and of helping to build a better and more truly Christian world.

Bahá'u'lláh (Whose approaching advent had been announced in Persia nineteen years before by His prophetic Herald, the Báb, Himself a world-famous figure) made His public declaration as a Messenger of God in Baghdad in the year 1863. He affirmed that His appearance fulfilled the promised Return of Christ in the glory of the Father. He brought a Teaching which though ampler and fitted to a more advanced Age was in spirit and purpose the same as that of Christ. He revealed those "*other things*" which Jesus told His

disciples He had to give them but which they could “*not bear*” at that time. His mission was to bring the work of Christ to its completion and realisation, to reconstruct the social order of the world and build the long promised Kingdom of God in very fact.

He addressed individual letters or specific messages to the monarchs of the West and to the members of the various ecclesiastical orders of the Christian Churches, and directed numerous and repeated exhortations and warnings to the entire Christian world. These without exception were ignored by Christendom when they were made, and they have now been set aside and disregarded for some eighty years. During that period the long established influence of Christ in Christendom has suffered a decline so unprecedented, so precipitous that the Bishops gathering for the Lambeth Conference were greeted in the London press with the challenge that “Christianity is fighting for its life”; while the Bahá’í Faith proclaimed at that time by one lone Prophet shut in a Turkish prison has spread through the whole globe, has led the constructive thought of our time, has created a spiritual world-community joining the East and the West, and is fast making good its right to a place in the age-long succession of world-faiths.

“Followers of the Gospel,” exclaimed Bahá’u’lláh addressing the whole of Christendom, *“behold the gates of heaven are flung open. He that had ascended unto it is now come. Give ear to His voice calling aloud over land and sea, announcing*

to all mankind the advent of this Revelation—a Revelation through the agency of which the Tongue of Grandeur is now proclaiming: ‘Lo, the sacred Pledge hath been fulfilled, for He, the Promised One is come!’” “The voice of the Son of Man is calling aloud from the sacred vale: ‘Here am I, here am I, O God my God!’ ... whilst from the Burning Bush breaketh forth the cry: ‘Lo, the Desire of the world is made manifest in His transcendent glory!’ The Father hath come. That which ye were promised in the Kingdom of God is fulfilled. This is the Word which the Son veiled when He said to those around Him that at that time they could not bear it. ... Verily the Spirit of Truth is come to guide you unto all truth. ... He is the One Who glorified the Son and exalted His Cause” “The Comforter Whose advent all the scriptures have promised is now come that He may reveal unto you all knowledge and wisdom. Seek Him over the entire surface of the earth, haply ye may find Him.”¹

Through a period of some twenty-five years from about 1865 to 1890, Bahá'u'lláh sent letters and messages to the monarchs and leaders of mankind proclaiming to them that—however little they recognised it—a world-crisis had already taken shape and profound changes on a world-scale were at hand; the old civilisation would pass away and another take its place; a new race of men would arise, and reverence, unity, peace, justice would become watch-words in a new and happier order. He challenged them in burning words of power to acknowledge the spiritual cause of world-events

¹ Bahá'u'lláh cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 104–5.

already coming into view and to fill the lofty and noble part for which God and Christ had prepared them. He warned them not to let prejudice or dogma or superstition or self-interest or desire for leadership and glory from men deter them from accepting this summons. Again and again He urged on their notice that the true cause of this New Age and its happenings was spiritual and that they would find the key to it in the Gospel which they so continually perused.

In a Tablet to Napoleon III, the most outstanding monarch of the moment, He informed his Majesty that in the providence of God a new age of unprecedented changes in human history was opening. He outlined certain features of its ordained pattern, which would vitally concern a King-statesman, and called on him to arise, humble himself before God, follow the guidance of God's Prophet and take a bold initiative in unifying mankind. This, he wrote, was the Wondrous Age Christ had come to announce. Christ's dominion had spread westward that the West and its rulers might now give a lead in His holy service. Would Napoleon now play the man in the precious Cause of God, he would make himself an emperor of the wide world.

Bahá'u'lláh had already been in communication with Napoleon and had discovered his hypocrisy and insincerity. He makes mention of this, and warns the Emperor (then in the plenitude of his pride and power) to give immediate heed to the Prophet's

word, else, He writes, "... *thy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands Commotions shall seize all the people in that land ... We see abasement hastening after thee, whilst thou art of the heedless.*"¹

The contemptuous rejection of this warning was followed not many months after by the sudden outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, the utter defeat and capture of Napoleon at Sedan, and the collapse of his empire.

To Queen Victoria Bahá'u'lláh sent a letter in the course of which He declared His identity: "*O Queen in London! Incline thine ear unto the voice of thy Lord, the Lord of all mankind He, in truth, hath come unto the world in His most great glory, and all that hath been mentioned in the Gospel hath been fulfilled. ...*

Lay aside thy desire, and set then thine heart towards thy Lord, the Ancient of Days. We make mention of thee for the sake of God, and desire that thy name may be exalted through thy remembrance of God, the Creator of earth and heaven. ..."²

Turn thou unto God and say: O my Sovereign Lord! I am but a vassal of Thine, and Thou art, in truth, the King of kings. ... Assist me, then, O my God, to remember Thee amongst Thy handmaidens, and to aid Thy Cause in Thy lands."³

To Alexander II He wrote, "*O Czar of Russia! Incline thine ear unto the voice of God, the King, the Holy Beware lest thy desire deter thee from turning towards the face of thy Lord, the Compassionate,*

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 72.

² *idem*, pp. 88–9.

³ *idem*, p. 95.

*the Most Merciful.”*¹

“... He, verily, is come with His Kingdom, and all the atoms cry aloud: ‘Lo! The Lord is come in His great majesty!’ He Who is the Father is come, and the Son, in the holy vale, crieth out: ‘Here am I, here am I, O Lord, My God!’ ...” p 84

*“Arise thou amongst men in the name of this all-compelling Cause, and summon, then, the nations unto God”*²

*“Couldst thou but know the things sent down by My Pen, and discover the treasures of My Cause, and the pearls of My mysteries ... thou wouldst, in thy love for My name, and in thy longing for My glorious and sublime Kingdom, lay down thy life in My path.”*³

He wrote to Pope Pius IX announcing that He who is the “*Lord of Lords hath come*”⁴ and that he who is the Rock (meaning Peter), crieth out saying “*Lo! The Father is come, and that which ye were promised in the Kingdom is fulfilled!*”⁵ Bahá’u’lláh bade him—“*Arise in the name of thy Lord, the God of Mercy, amidst the peoples of the earth, and seize thou the Cup of Life with the hands of confidence. First drink thou therefrom, and proffer it then to such as turn towards it amongst the peoples of all faiths.*”⁶ He warned him not to repeat the error of the Pharisees and of the men of learning who on His first coming opposed Jesus Christ and pronounced judgment against Him, whilst he who was a fisherman believed on Him. He called on him to “[s]ell all the embellished ornaments thou dost possess and expend them in the path of God” to “[a]bandon thy kingdom unto the kings, and emerge from thy habitation,”⁷ and should anyone offer him all the treasures of the earth “*refuse to even glance upon*

¹ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 83.

² *idem*, p. 84.

³ *idem*, p. 85.

⁴ *idem*, p. 98.

⁵ *idem*, p. 59.

⁶ *idem*, p. 56.

⁷ *idem*, p. 61.

them”:¹ then, detached from the world, let “*speak forth the praises of thy Lord betwixt earth and heaven*”² and warn the kings of the earth against injustice in their dealings with men.

In the concluding pages of His communication to the Pope which contain some of the most tender, moving and impassioned passages in these writings He expresses the warmth of His desire, the earnestness of His effort to bring the followers of the Gospel into the Most Holy Kingdom of God and to enable the true-hearted to discern its opened Gates. He urges them to rend the spiritual veils that blind their eyes, to cast away everything, everything that prevents them accepting this divine deliverance. He calls them to come out of the darkness into the light poured forth by the sun of the Grace of God. He tells them of the sovereignty that awaits them in the Kingdom on High if they will but heed and obey, of the friendship of God and His companionship in His everlasting realm of Beauty and of Power that He longs to bestow on them according to His ancient promise. The Kingdom is theirs of right. He has bidden them welcome to it, and His heart is sad to see that others enter but they, alas! tarry before its gates in the darkness. How blessed are those who will keep the covenant Christ made with His people, who will watch for their Lord’s return as He bade them, and know His voice when He calls them. Blessed are they who will walk forward in the path Christ laid out for them so straight and true and will take their rightful place in the van of the Legions of Light.

¹ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 62.

² *idem*, p. 61.

Elsewhere in these letters to the kings, and also in other writings, Bahá'u'lláh speaks to the entire Christian world and addresses directly officers of the various ecclesiastical orders in Christendom. For instance: *“O concourse of archbishops! He who is the Lord of all men hath appeared. In the plain of guidance He calleth mankind, whilst ye are yet numbered with the dead! Great is the blessedness of him who is stirred by the Breeze of God, and hath arisen from amongst the dead in this perspicuous Name.”*¹

*“O concourse of bishops! ... He who is the Everlasting Father calleth aloud between earth and heaven. Blessed the ear that hath heard, and the eye that hath seen, and the heart that hath turned unto Him”*² And, *“[t]he stars of the heaven of knowledge have fallen, they who seek to establish the truth of My Cause through the things they possess, and who make mention of God in My Name. And yet, when I came unto them in My glory, they turned aside. They, indeed, are of the fallen. This is, truly, that which the Spirit of God [Jesus] hath announced, when He came with truth unto you, He with Whom the Jewish doctors disputed”*³

Bahá'u'lláh addressed the priests, telling them it was their duty to proclaim aloud the Most Great Name among the nations—they chose to keep silence when every stone and every tree shouted aloud *“The Lord is come in His great glory!”*⁴ *“The Day of Reckoning,”* He wrote, *“hath appeared, the Day whereon He Who was in heaven hath come. He, verily, is the*

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 92.

² idem, p. 92.

³ idem, pp. 69–70

⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 13.

*One Whom ye were promised in the Books of God, the Holy, the Almighty, the All-Praised. How long will ye wander in the wilderness of heedlessness and superstition?”*¹

Bahá'u'lláh warned the monks that they little understood the real greatness of Jesus Christ which had been “... *exalted above the vain imaginings of all the peoples of the earth. Blessed are they that understand.*”² “*If ye choose to follow Me, I will make you heirs of My Kingdom; and if ye transgress against Me, I will, in My long-suffering, endure it patiently*”³ He expressed His wonder at their men of learning who read the Gospel and yet refused to acknowledge its All-Glorious Lord on His appearance.

Again and again, in general statements and in particular prophecies, Bahá'u'lláh warned the rulers of the world and their peoples that if these clear, solemn and public pronouncements went unheeded and the reforms enjoined were not made, then divine chastisement would descend from all sides upon mankind: irreligion would spread and deepen; from it would flow anarchy; authority and power would pass from the priesthood; the social order would break up and dissolve to make place for another which God would guide men to build in its stead.

Whatever “*Lesser Peace*” the war-weary nations might at last arrange among themselves, it would not bring them a final solution of their problems. This would come only with “*The Most Great*

¹ Bahá'u'lláh cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 102.

² Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 50.

³ Bahá'u'lláh cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 102.

*Peace*¹ of which He wrote in His Tablet (or letter) to Queen Victoria, with the creation of a world-commonwealth and with the ultimate emergence of a divine world-civilisation. These objectives could be attained only through acceptance of the Prophet of the Age and through the adoption of the principles, plans and patterns for the new World Order which were transmitted by Him from God.

When no heed was given to Bahá'u'lláh's Declaration that His prophethood was the return of Christ, when His appeal for the examination of His Cause and the redress of cruel wrongs inflicted on Him was ignored; when no one regarded His forecast, so forcefully and so fully presented, that a new Dawn had broken, a New Age had come (new in a spiritual sense, in a moral sense, in an intellectual sense) , an Age which would bring a new outlook and new concepts, an Age of Divine Judgment, in which tyranny would be thrown down, the rights of the people asserted, and in which the social structure of the human race would be changed; when no attention was paid to the vision He opened, to the opportunities He offered, to the bold challenge which He had from prison flung before the mighty ones of the world; then alas! the Churches as the years went by found themselves caught into a current which bore them irresistibly downward at an ever increasing speed and which at the end of eight decades was still to be bearing them down to lower and yet lower levels in their political standing, in their moral influence, in their intellectual prestige,

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 93.

in their social authority, in their numbers and their financial resources, in the popular estimate of the relevancy and the reality of the religion which they taught and even in the vigour and unanimity of their own witness to the basic truth upon which the Church itself had been founded.

No comparable period of deterioration is to be found in the long records of the Christian Faith. In all the vicissitudes of fifteen eventful centuries (and they were many); in all the misfortunes, the mistakes, the failures and the humiliations in which from time to time the Church was involved, no such catastrophic decline is to be traced. The sovereignty which the church had wielded in the Middle Ages had indeed by the nineteenth century become in Western Europe a thing of the past; but the diminution had been gradual and moderate. The loss suffered during the previous eight hundred years can hardly be compared with the vital damage inflicted during the last eighty.

In past crises the foundations of faith and of western society were not shaken; hope remained dominant, and from tradition and memory men drew inspiration. Society remained Christian and to that extent unified. But now the very foundations have gone. Reverence and restraint are no more. The heights of human nature are closed: its depths opened. Substitute systems of ethics, man-made and man-regarding, are invented, dethroning conscience. The dignity of reason and of knowledge is denied: truth itself is impugned.

The story of this calamitous decline is well known to all, and its outstanding features can be briefly summarised.

In the year 1870, not long after the despatch of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to his Holiness, the Pope was through King Victor Emmanuel's seizure of Rome deprived by force of virtually the whole of that temporal power which Bahá'u'lláh had advised him to renounce voluntarily. His formal acknowledgment of the Kingdom of Italy by the recent Lateran Treaty sealed this resignation of sovereignty.

The fall of the Napoleonic Empire was followed in France by a wave of anti-clericalism which led to a complete separation of the Roman Catholic Church from the State, the secularisation of education, and the suppression and dispersal of the religious orders.

In Spain, the monarchy which for so long had been in Christendom the great champion of the Roman Church was overthrown and the State secularised.

The dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy caused the disappearance both of the last remnant of the Holy Roman Empire and of the most powerful political unit that gave to the Roman Church its spiritual and financial support.

In Soviet Russia an organised assault directed against the Greek Orthodox Church, against

Christianity, and against religion, disestablished that church, massacred vast numbers of its hundred million members, stripped it of its six and a half million acres of property, pulled down, closed or perverted to secular uses countless thousands of places of worship and by “a five year plan of godlessness”¹ sought to eradicate all religion from the hearts of the people.

In every land and in all branches of the Christian Church, even where there was no system of Establishment, the rising power of nationalism continually made churches more and more subservient to the interests and the opinions of the State—a tendency brought into strong relief and notoriety in the first world-war.

The gradual decay of the intellectual prestige of religion in Europe had extended over many generations, but it was brought prominently before the public mind in the seventies of the last century, largely through the controversies which followed Tyndale’s Belfast address in 1874. The character of this decay has been epitomised by Professor Whitehead, writing in 1926, thus:

Religion is tending to degenerate into a decent formula wherewith to embellish a comfortable life. ...

... for over two centuries, religion has been on the defensive, and on a weak defensive. The period has been one of unprecedented intellectual progress. In this way a series of novel situations has been produced for thought. Each such occasion has found the religious thinkers unprepared. Something,

¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 104.

which has been proclaimed to be vital, has finally, after struggle, distress, and anathema, been modified and otherwise interpreted. The next generation of religious apologists then congratulated the religious world on the deeper insight which has been gained. The result of the continued repetition of this undignified retreat, during many generations, has at last almost entirely destroyed the intellectual authority of religious thinkers. Consider this contrast: when Darwin or Einstein proclaim theories which modify our ideas, it is a triumph for science. We do not go about saying that there is another defeat for science, because its old ideas have been abandoned. We know that another step of scientific insight has been gained.¹

The loss in the moral and spiritual field has been even more vital and conspicuous, especially of recent years. There is no need to enlarge upon the matter. The sickness at the heart of Christian life and thought which made these humiliations possible has been the decay of spirituality. Love for God, fear of God, trust in God's overruling providence and ceaseless care have been no longer active forces in the world. The religious thinkers find themselves baffled by the portents of the time: when men in disillusionment, in anguish and despair come to them for counsel, seek from them comfort, hope, some intelligible idea as to what this cataclysm means and whence it came and how it should be met, they are completely at a loss. Though the Church for nineteen centuries has proclaimed, and has

¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, pp. 242–3.

enshrined in its creeds, the emphatic and repeated promise of Christ that He would come again in power and great glory to judge the earth, would exalt the righteous and inaugurate the Kingdom of God among mankind, yet they believe and teach that through all these years of deepening tribulation no Hand has been outstretched from heaven, no light of Guidance has been shed upon the earth; that God has withheld from His children in their deepest need His succour, His comfort and His love; that Christ has utterly forgotten His promise or is impotent to redeem it and has permitted His universal Church to sink in ruin without evincing the least small sign of His interest or His concern.

Meantime the Bahá'í Message has kindled once more on earth the ancient fire of faith that Jesus kindled long ago, the fire of spontaneous love for God and man, a love that changes all life and longs to show itself in deeds of devotion and of self-sacrifice even to death and martyrdom. To them who have recognised Christ's voice again in this Age has been given in renewed freshness and beauty the vision of the Kingdom of God as Jesus and the Book of Revelation gave it—the same vision, but clearer now and on a larger scale and in more detail. A new enthusiasm has been theirs, a power that nothing could gainsay or resist. Their words reached the hearts of men. With a courage, a determination that only divine love could quicken or support they rose in the face of ruthless persecution to bear witness to their faith. Fearless, though comparatively few, weak in themselves but

invincible in God's Cause, they have now at the close of these eighty years carried that Faith far and wide through the globe, entered well nigh a hundred countries, translated their literature into more than fifty languages, gathered adherents from East and West, from many races, many nations, many creeds, many traditions, and have established themselves as a world-community, worshipping one God under one Name.

The Bahá'í Faith today presents the Christian Churches with the most tremendous challenge ever offered them in their long history: a challenge, and an opportunity. It is the plain duty of every earnest Christian in this illumined Age to investigate for himself with an open and fearless mind the purpose and the teachings of this Faith and to determine whether the collective centre for all the constructive forces of this time be not the Messenger from God, Bahá'u'lláh, He and no other; and whether the way to a better, kinder, happier world will not lie open as soon as we accept the Announcement our rulers rejected.

*O kings of the earth! He Who is the sovereign Lord of all is come. The Kingdom is God's, the omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting. Worship none but God, and, with radiant hearts, lift up your faces unto your Lord, the Lord of all names. This is a Revelation to which whatever ye possess can never be compared, could ye but know it.*¹

Ye are but vassals, O kings of the earth! He Who is the King of Kings hath appeared, arrayed in

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 210.

*His most wondrous glory, and is summoning you unto Himself, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Take heed lest pride deter you from recognizing the Source of Revelation, lest the things of this world shut you out as by a veil from Him Who is the Creator of heaven. Arise, and serve Him Who is the Desire of all nations, Who hath created you through a word from Him, and ordained you to be, for all time, the emblems of His sovereignty.*¹

*O kings of Christendom! Heard ye not the saying of Jesus, the Spirit of God, "I go away, and come again unto you"? Wherefore, then, did ye fail, when He did come again unto you in the clouds of heaven, to draw nigh unto Him, that ye might behold His face, and be of them that attained His Presence? In another passage He saith: "When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." And yet, behold how, when He did bring the truth, ye refused to turn your faces towards Him, and persisted in disporting yourselves with your pastimes and fancies.*²

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¹ Bahá' u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá' u'lláh*, pp. 211–212.

² *idem*, p. 246.

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