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DEAR FRIENDS:



he First International Congress of the World Fellowship of Faiths was convened in Chicago, August 27, 1933, during the Century of Progress Exposition. The World Fellowship of Faiths lasted for twenty-two days. There were eighty-three meetings with two hundred and forty-two addresses by representatives of all faiths, races, and countries. The sessions were opened by the International President, His Highness the Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda, India, whose subject was "Religion in a Changing World." I had arranged my lecture campaign in Chicago so that it was possible for me to participate in the work of the World Fellowship of Faiths. My opening lecture there is reprinted herewith from the volume of World Fellowship issued immediately after the Congress under the title "True Fellowship of Faiths."

"The religious systems of mankind are not divided one from another by essential elements of faith but rather by elaborate and complicated theological systems. For thousands of years the function of theology has been to divide and confuse. Men who have worked together, suffered together and died together have been divided by schismatic technicalities. There can be no Christianity while five hundred Christian sects compete with each other in the erection of creedal barriers. There can be no Fellowship of Faiths while the several great religions of the world ignore the unity of their spiritual aspirations and emphasise only their sectarian differences. It is neither necessary nor desirable that various religions serving the spiritual needs of different nations and races should merge their identities

into some common institution, but it is absolutely essential to the survival of the spiritual instincts of the race that religious organisations should rise above the small differences that now divide them and unite in the promulgation of essential moral, ethical, social and cultural truths.

"A religious man is not one who merely subscribes to a certain system of theological dogma. Religion is idealism in action and the idealisation of action. A religious man is one who perceives a code of law higher than that of the animal kingdom and attempts to live by this law and to elevate his concerns from animal to a truly human level. Confused by the arguments of a thousand jarring sects, the average individual of to-day must struggle with a dilemma of spiritual values. It is the desire of the average person to live honestly, intelligently and well, but these simple values are so obscured by theological pettifoggery that most mortals must live a life of religious confusion.

"The era of competitive ecclesiasticism, like the era of competitive industrialism, is drawing to a close. The question as to which of a number of cults is most acceptable in the eyes of heaven is exceedingly secondary, if it can be regarded as of any importance at all. The real question is: which of these cults is approaching most closely to the practice of spiritual principles? He who performs most completely the work of the Universal Father is most acceptable in the sight of the Universal Father. Religions are not great because of the vastness of their membership, the wealth of their orders, the complexity of their dogmas, or the smugness of their clergy. Religions are truly great only when they apply spiritual principles to the material problems of the race and make an honest contribution to the ethical betterment of mankind.

"The more we examine into religious principles the more we realise the possibility of religious unity. The differences which have arisen in theology did not exist in the original revelations but have crept in through efforts at interpretation. The narrowness to be found in various creeds comes not from the founders of those creeds but was inculcated afterwards by zealous but bigoted followers who had no comprehension of the original vision. Our religions have become mutilated revelations and it is because of these mutilated revelations that a Fellowship of Faiths is necessary to bring together various creeds which have essentially never been divided.

"Words are dangerous things. Ignorant men are deceived by their appearance of importance. The unabridged dictionary is a foundation of misunderstanding. The more words we have the more opportunity we have to misinterpret each other and misstate ourselves. We prepare great discourses and our every word is the foundation of an argument. We call a man who worships Zeus a pagan, a man who worships Brahma a heathen, and a man who worships "God" a true believer. To the average person "God" is an absolutely meaningless word, conveying no intelligent understanding of any aspect of divine principle. The only virtue of this word, if any, lies in its orthodoxy and its familiarity. We fail utterly to be religious because we fail to realise that Zeus and Brahma, Jehovah, Allah and God

are not different divinities but the same essential Divine Essence interpreted through the language mediums of these different races. Thus, while our ignorance permits us and our theologians encourage us to see differences where there are none, religion as a spiritual force is comparatively impotent.

"Men pray to their gods, often with many words. Their prayers are for the most part detailed statements of their own desires. They beseech divinity to be particularly observant of them and to elevate their concerns above the general good. The prayers of men are most of them monuments to misunderstanding. In spiritual matters we are divided by words, and by terms truths are obscured. In religion, therefore, let us depart from the wilderness of words and enter into a garden of silence. Let us feel and sense values in a gentle camaraderie of purpose. A simple clasp of the hand in sincerity conveys more religion and spiritual solace than a hundred wordy sermons. Co-operation towards a common purpose is the most acceptable sentiment which modern religion can preach to a troubled world.

"Let us conclude with the philosophic prayer of Hermes, a simple direct statement in which the true purpose of man is beautifully and simply revealed:

'Universal Reason! the man Thou hast created awaits the works that Thou wouldst have him do.'

In addition to my talk at the first session of the Congress I spoke again in the seventh section in which the emphasis was upon adult education and prominent social problems of the day. My address on this occasion was entitled "How May Man Conquer Fear." My remarks on this occasion included a reference to the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition which continued to be dedicated primarily to the glorification of the intensive productiveness of the last hundred years. It appeared to me there was very little displayed to indicate ethical, moral, or aesthetic progress. In large measure this was the real reason for the sessions of the World Fellowship of Faiths. In too many cases man has grown skillful but not good, older but not mature, wealthy but not generous, powerful but not kind, more intellectual but not wise.

Most sincerely yours,

*J. Amely P. Hall*

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