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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Mr. Townshend used three versions of the Bible: the King James, the Revised, and the Moffatt translation. It has seemed fitting to retain his quotations in forms familiar to him.

In these days when the truths of Christianity are diluted and compromised to fit the notions of an age admittedly unbelieving, this classic work on the and the Bahá'í Faith speaks compellingly to those who cannot forget the deepest truths in which they were reared, and likewise to those who, deprived of religion in childhood and youth by elders who had forsaken it, yet sense their loss, their ignorance of purpose, the hollowness of days spent only for material benefit.

George Townshend possessed a supreme trust in God, the Creator and Sustainer of all life. His book mirrors his profound contemplation of this central Mystery, his poet's joy in all Its manifestations, a believer's confidence which nothing was able to deflect. He wrote to awaken us to these realities.

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INTRODUCTION

This essay endeavours to follow the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh back to Christ and to let the light of the Gospel shine in its ancient purity upon the darkness of our time. It is conceived and written in the firm belief that any Christian who reaches the heart of the Gospel and understands the true exaltation of Christ will soon discover the way that lies open, through Bahá'u'lláh, to the reunion of the Christian Churches, the re-Christianising of the West, and the regeneration of the human race.

The Bible bears witness that history in its essence is a spiritual thing and cannot be rightly understood except from a spiritual point of view. Realistic as the sacred narrative is, exposing freely all the weakness and wickedness of mankind, it maintains always the spiritual attitude. It never modifies its opening words: 'In the beginning, God'. It shows that the forces which impel history and the laws that govern it, its origin and its ultimate issue, all belong to the spiritual realm. It reveals in human events the presence of a universal continuity which flows on for ever, as a mysterious divine Will works out its gradual purpose upon the

surface of the planet.

The true beginnings of the Gospel are not to be found within the limits of the New Testament. They reach back through the length of the Bible to the Pentateuch, to the time of Moses and of Abraham and beyond. They are

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involved in the design of Creation itself. And its end is revealed only in those prophecies and promises which fill the closing chapters of the Scripture and which through all the vicissitudes of these intervening centuries have warmed the hearts of Christians with expectancy and hope.

If we are to follow the example of the Bible in dealing with the problems of our time, we will regard first their spiritual aspect and will search out the spiritual issues that are at stake, since upon these the material issues depend. We shall be prepared to trace the causes of today's events far back through modern and medieval times to spiritual energies released by our eternal Father in distant centuries.

In His teaching, and particularly in His Book of Certitude* Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that the Bible was given to mankind for the same purpose as that for which the Gospel was preached: to prepare humanity that they might recognise, appreciate, and use with wisdom the supreme crisis which He foresaw, and in which we find ourselves involved today, when, standing at the apex of the corporate history of mankind, we are in a position of unprecedented danger and also of unprecedented opportunity. Bahá'u'lláh explained that the perplexity of our world leaders, their inability to master the problems of the era or tell whence these problems came or why they came or whither they lead or what they mean, is ultimately due to a moral and spiritual cause. It springs from a misunderstanding of the Gospel, and a misinterpretation of the symbolism and the abstruse terms in which many of

* Kitab-i-Iqan (Trans. by Shoghi Effendi. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 2nd ed. 1961.)

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its prophecies, promises, warnings and pronouncements are veiled. This figurative language of Scripture is a touchstone by which God distinguishes and rewards the truehearted and the sincere. It yields up its real significance not to human learning, as is commonly supposed, but to an open and unprejudiced mind, to a pure and devout spirit which seeks the truth for love of God.

. . . Man He writes can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favour, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets. (p. 3)

'Abdu'l-Bahá, expounding this truth, spoke often in the West of the profound importance, and the difficulty, of reaching a true interpretation of Scripture and urged His hearers to learn from the errors of the past. He expressed Himself, for instance, in the following words to a Bible class in New York City:

I have been informed that the purpose of your class meeting is to study the significances and mysteries of the holy scriptures and understand the meaning of the divine testaments. It is a cause of great happiness to me that you are turning unto the kingdom of God, that you desire to approach the presence of God and to become informed of the realities and precepts of God.

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It is my hope that you may put forth your most earnest endeavour to accomplish this end; that you may investigate and study the holy scriptures word by word so that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. Be not satisfied with words but seek to understand the spiritual meaning hidden in the heart of the words. The Jews read the Old Testament night and day, memorising its words and texts, yet without comprehending a single meaning or inner significance; for had they understood the real meaning of the Old Testament they would have become believers in His Holiness Christ, inasmuch as the Old Testament was revealed to prepare His coming. As the Jewish doctors and rabbis did not believe in His Holiness it is evident that they were ignorant of the real significance of the Old Testament. It is difficult to comprehend even the words of a philosopher; how much more difficult it is to understand the words of God.*

How far the Christian Churches have wandered from a true understanding of the Gospel may be judged from the argument of this book. We are living in the Day of God which Christ announced and for which He prepared men's souls; and yet not one among the illustrious learned leaders of the Churches has proved capable of recognising it or has troubled to examine the claims of Bahá'u'lláh when these were drawn to his

attention.

How disastrous may be the results of trusting to human learning rather than to a spiritual mind and a pure heart

* The Promulgation of Universal Peace. Vol. II, pp. 454-5, (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 454-55.)

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For a true interpretation of Scripture may be seen from the fate of Jewry after its rejection of Jesus Christ, or from the humiliations of the Christian Church when it turned away from its Lord on His return.

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