

then remedy specific problems. The nations of the world are constantly developing complex programmes to address the problems of war, disease, poverty, ignorance, and pollution; yet it is clear that these problems continue to proliferate, and new programmes continually have to be devised. These problems, which during past years were not even considered as such are growing more and more every day affecting the entire planet. They cannot be seen any more as the problems of one single nation, that can solve them by itself: for the first time in the history of humanity, the destiny of the world is unique and indivisible; humanity as a whole is facing global problems, whose solution must involve all the nations of the world in a resolute, cooperative, consultative, and common effort.

In the last 150 years, a process has taken place which is still in action, and which is bringing the whole world together. This process has its roots in centuries and centuries of history in which we have seen humanity growing and developing in its material and intellectual aspects. The discovery of the fire, the use of the different metals in the ages of prehistory, the use of agriculture and the settlement of populations in some areas of the globe, the discovery and use of the steam power till the recent discoveries which have taken place in the scientific and technological field have contributed to prepare the physical means to start this process of the unification of the world. In the intellectual field, with intellectual I mean the development of the mind or intellect as one of the faculties which distinguishes man from the other living creatures inhabiting the planet, many changes have occurred in the process of humanity. The development of the power of speech, of writing, of reading, of arts, crafts and sciences, all contributed to the growth of this human faculty.

In all history, in succeeding ages different human groups achieved unusual creativity and then compelled or impelled those around them to alter their accustomed style of life to take account of what have appeared from this new centre of creativity. These centres of creativity were at times individual geniuses, at other times these were due to accidents, climate changes or the breakdown of old habit patterns.

The whole structure of society was based on principles like competition, individualism: a spirit of conquest dominated the mind and the heart of the people. There have been many attempts on the part of different rulers to somehow unite the world or, rather, to stretch the borders of their kingdoms as far as they could. This did not last very long though: at the moment of their death, their successors were not able to maintain and continue what was built by their fathers. In recent years this process evolved in what is known as colonialism: a stronger nation imposes its laws, principles, creativity on others. In this development there was no need of cooperation, consultation in order to solve any kind of problems that would afflict each nation.

Past centuries have witnessed the presence of individuals with extraordinary capacities in any field of human endeavour, who in many cases have changed the course of history; by means of a single discovery they could improve the

economy of one nation, and as a result of this, that nation would gain supremacy over the others. We can find many examples like this in the history of the human community. All these technological and scientific conquests together with the intellectual advancement have created a process of miniaturization of the planet. Because of these developments, it is much easier to travel from one corner of the world to another. We now live in amore comfortable world which provides us with every possible solution for our needs. Communication, information, flow from one country to the other facilitating the relationships between the various nations.

All the human manifestations are based on this technological and scientific contribution which has simplified the relationships between the countries and has speed up the various process characterizing the life of human beings. To all these aspects we have to add the speed of the events of history followed one upon another which are increasing the needs of a common vision of where humanity is going. These two process, miniaturization and increase of speed in the events of history have led humanity to face a third aspect in this process of unification, and that is the increase of complexity of the problems afflicting humanity.

The interaction of all the phenomena continues, as all the problems are interrelated. These dynamics prevent the isolated exam of situations and problems outside a general context, which is a planetary one. The situation is such that a global approach to the problems is inevitable.

We can image a big picture in which there are few geometric figures drawn representing a group of problems as we would have met them sometime ago, when there was no interaction among the nations. Now if we look at the history of the last 150 years, we can see that some kind of interaction has started between the various problems due to this process of growth which has affected everything. The development of this process has created some structures and dynamics of which we are not aware of.

Now, if we keep looking at the various figures or problems, we see that the more the interaction and superimposition of the various figures increases, the harder it for us to distinguish one shape from the other: its looks like a big heap which is impenetrable and in which the various internal relationships are extremely confused and hard to identify. It is only through the creation of a model which will enable us to understand the various problems and all their different faces that we can hope to act in a correct and creative manner.

The scientific and technological advances occurring in this century portend a great surge forward in the social evolution of the planet, and indicate the means by which the practical problems of humanity may be solved. They provide, indeed, the very means for the administration of the complex life of a united world. In the world yet barriers persist: doubts, misconceptions, prejudices, narrow self-interest afflict nations and peoples in their relations one to another. People insist on accentuating their differences and focusing on the superficial factors which divide rather than unite them. Thus, the challenge

before us today is that of achieving oneness. In order to solve the problems afflicting the planet, humanity must develop new forms of behaviour, in which the supremacy is given to consultation, cooperation, collaboration, and service to others. This implies a further step in the development of human capacities: in addition to the material and intellectual side, humanity has to develop its spiritual capacities. The consequence of this is that humanity has to move from egoism to spirituality, through the path called spiritualization. The concept of spirituality or oneness includes the reality of the oneness of mankind, of religion, of God. The idea of oneness of mankind views humanity as one organic body composed of individuals who, according to their unique characteristics and qualities, form the diversified yet harmonious cells and organs. Thus the body of mankind functions through the unified, specialized functions of all its constituent parts. Every human being is part of this organic entity, and his health or illness, his joy or sorrow ultimately affects the whole organism. The oneness of this essential oneness is now apparent in all fields of human endeavour.

The second reality relating to the concept of oneness also calls for a change in our mind-set and is related to conscience, thoughts, and ideas. It is a popular belief that the ideologies and religions emanating from various sources are irreconcilable. But as we are trying to see the various scientific theories as one, we should also apply the same principle to the diverse ideologies and religions, and think that the differences are due to the limitations of understanding, to time and space, and the differences of perspective. The essential issue here is that unity of religion is not only a reality, but also a necessity in the overall movement of humanity towards Peace.

As we have previously seen, man has learned more about the physical world in its march towards peace; it is time for him to develop his insight into spiritual realities. Since war begins in the mind of men, it is in the minds of men that peace must be constructed: until the minds of men became united, no important matter can be accomplished.

The third reality which demands a fundamental change in our mind-set is the concept of the oneness of God. Every human being believed in a god, a god who is man-made, and answers the needs of each person individually. In most cases this god does not even look at the needs of others as long as our needs are satisfied. This god rules people's life, gives them some meaning in life and shapes the qualities and the character of their existence. For attainment of humanity's oneness, however, these gods have to be replaced with the understanding that the oneness of God is the main purpose and the core of every human being's deepest yearning.

This path which humanity has to walk will finally lead it to that "Great Peace towards which people of goodwill throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise..." [1]

2. "THE THREE WAVES OF GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION"

We entered in the last ten years of this extraordinary century, a century in which many changes have occurred and that has forced humanity to find the answers to the manifold challenges which cannot be faced with the usual criteria. The whole situation of the world is changed: it is not any more a political or military issue rather an economical and environmental one. The world is not anymore the arena of battles between communism and capitalism: the main actors of this play have increased. There has been a major change in the quality of production and attempts to solve the problems that humanity is facing. After World War Two there have been many changes which have transformed many societies, affecting also these communities with which they got in touch. Three of these waves of transformation deserve special attention. The first has almost completed its action; the second wave have started as radical changes and both of them have met serious and unexpected obstacles. The third wave did not show off completely, but it is certain that it will come.

The first of these waves can be called decolonization and was animated by great hopes. Its main goal was to release all the old colonies and give them a chance to develop their own identity. The results did not answer the expectations of those who started this process: many of these countries could not face the challenges of the market and so they became extremely poor as their debts have greatly increased.

The second wave has started with the glasnost, which has opened the Second World, that of the communist countries, to the international market, the exchange of energy, information, and technology created by the First World with a process similar to that which opened the Third World. This wave which is irreversible has caused a substitution rather than a transformation of the system. The old communist system is going to be replaced by the capitalistic one, but no one has the absolute certitude that this is the right system that can solve humanity's economical problems. Both the decolonization and the glasnost have generated similar processes, that will lead to the same conclusion if not carefully guided in their development. Few countries in fact have been able to enter in the world market starting from a single level of operation. It calls for great courage and discipline to move from a traditional economy to a more global one.

These two transformations have opened systems which were closed or traditional, exposing them to the sudden impact of modern sciences and technology. Even though the strategies of decolonization and glasnost were moved by good intentions, they were not expected. The one that started these process ignored that when a close system is suddenly opened, this leads to important transformations. The first two waves were just a preparatory process for the coming of the third wave: the systems which were traditionalist and closed needed to be opened so that all humanity can now face a common destiny.

The third process will be world-embracing in its scope, but uncertain as to its origins and final destination, unless we recognize the claims of Bahá'u'lláh

as the Centre from Whom has emanated the input for the establishment of this New World Order. His Words stated almost hundred and fifty years ago clearly testify this: "Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead." [2] "It is towards this goal," Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith clearly states, "the goal of a new World Order, Divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, equitable in principle, challenging in its features – that a harassed humanity must strive." [3] This process, like a tempest, unpredictable in its course, glorious in its final consequences, is pushing the entire world towards a brilliant future, whose glimmering light can be seen at the horizon. As every process of growth must go through periods of crisis and victory, the same principle can be applied to the obstacles humanity must face in its long-walk towards World Peace.

To analyze the various problems affecting the planet would go further than the task assigned to this paper. An attempt will be made in the next section though, to gather the challenges of humanity into six categories which will be briefly introduced.

3. SIX PROBLEMS FACING HUMANITY

1. Technology

We have seen how technology has created the means by which the practical problems of humanity may be solved. Unfortunately, most of the scientific and technological discoveries are applied in the service of war. Of course it is not banning the use of technology of war that humanity's problems can be solved. The principle of moderation must constantly be applied: if something is carried to excess, it will become the cause of destruction. This is what is happening with technology: instead of assisting humanity in its process of unification, it is creating individuals who believe that by means of powerful artificial intelligence, they can overcome any problem. Through cartoons and science fiction movies, the myth of the self-made person, who alone fights against the enemy to save humanity, is reinforced.

Briefly, competition and individualism are taking over the concepts of cooperation and consultation; society again is giving more importance to personal ambition rather than service to humanity.

2. Education

A great amount of work needs to be done in this field in order to unfold new didactic criteria and methods which can help to develop this new vision of where humanity is going. Great steps have been taken to start a sort of peace and global education. Many more systems must be devised to help men to mature his full capacities.

An important aspect of education has to deal with the relationship between men and women. It is impossible to expect unity and peace in the family of mankind until the two halves of the world population, women and man, are truly equal and share the same degree of influence in world affairs. Again an equal relationship calls for cooperation rather than competition, flexibility rather

than rigidity, all qualities which humanity has to develop to achieve peace. Imagine a bird, whose right wing is not as strong as the left one; it cannot fly.

Equality also implies complementarity: both women and men are more capable and insightful in all aspects of their lives if they receive the cooperation, assistance, guidance, and participation of the opposite sex in their endeavors. The development of a new mind-set in respect to the equality of men and women, the collective growth of mankind, and the universal concept of oneness will ultimately lead us to the adoption of new types of behaviour and new approaches towards those issues.

Until the mind of humanity is not transformed, peace cannot be achieved.

3. Racism

A prejudice is a judgment we give a priori, namely before we know a person or a situation. Racism has been the result of misunderstanding of religious, psychological and historical ideals. Things which are different from what we know usually scare us, give us a sense of uneasiness especially if those things are portrayed in a very negative way.

The cause of racism has always been ignorance and attachment to personal ideals, beliefs, customs, country. The problem of racial discrimination arises from failure to recognize the essential unity of all the peoples of the world. Like many other problems, it has its roots in blind prejudice. Consequently, the problem of racism must be faced at its source: the human heart. To eliminate this prejudice, we need to educate the people in the principle of the organic oneness of humanity.

The concept of oneness does not imply uniformity, but unity in diversity, where the diversity must become the corner-stone that must be preserved in the process of consultation and cooperation because the light of truth can be seen only through clash of differing opinions.

4. Population Growth; Poor and Rich

The problem that is the most immediate and striking is the relative poverty of the citizens of the Third and Second World compared to those of the First World. Those in the poorer countries face a vicious circle of problems from which they have no means of escape: poverty leads to starvation or a poor diet; this in turn leads to an increased susceptibility to infections and poor health; this in turn leads to an inability to perform their work efficiently; this in turn increases their poverty; and so the circle goes on. Children are susceptible to the combination of poor diet and repeated infections during childhood caused by poverty. This situation can be seen within the country itself, where a minority concentrates the majority of the resources and wealth: in these circumstances, whatever progress a country makes towards increased prosperity tends to help those who are already wealthy at the expense of the poor. Not only these countries are very poor, but the little wealth they have is under strain from an excessive population growth.

The response for a population growth in those countries are various and complex. Societies that have been used to see large numbers of their children die are geared toward high birth rates. The improvement of the medical care and food distribution have reduced the number of children dying, but it takes much longer for the results of this to effect traditional attitudes. It is not merely a question of distributing a fixed amount of wealth among a large number of population. The issue is that this people need to be educated so that they can develop their own capacities, skills, and attitudes in order to find their own identity.

In its path to achieve the oneness of mankind, humanity must develop a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of our earthly life. Through the application of a rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, they can become self-sufficient and self-reliant.

5. The Environment

Environmental pollution is often thought of as a problem afflicting principally the advanced industrialized countries. On the contrary, poverty causes the destruction of the environment which is in some cases superior to that in wealthier countries. Both rich and poor nations are increasing the damages to the natural resources and the environment. The basic life-support systems upon which all living things depend are showing serious signs at a planetary scale. The air we breathe has remained constant in composition since life generated present world conditions. The carbon removed from the atmosphere and deposited in the earth's fossil deposits by life in ancient times is now used to fuel our industrial and technological civilization. Our consumption of fossil fuels, such as oil, coal, and natural gas, is burning up that carbon and returning it to the atmosphere. Because of this, the temperature of the biosphere is slowly increasing, causing climate changes that could have enormous social and economic effects on agriculture and other human activities. Slow global warming and the destruction of the ozone layer promises to be major issues humanity has to solve in the next years. The air is not only part of the biosphere to suffer from the effects of our industrial civilization at global scale. The waters and seas are equally affected. Water is essential for life but its continuous pollution and the destruction of the forests may reduce its quantity causing the destruction of the planet. The land is also increasingly showing the scars of our negligence. Technology has given us the capacity to move mountains and even displace rivers, and we so it all the time, but not always with due consideration from the consequences to the environment. Large areas which were once very productive have been sterilized by human development.

Western civilization may be sowing seeds of its own downfall through agricultural short-sightedness, that is, if one of our other problems does not catch up with us first.

6. The Decline of Morality

The physical pollution caused by the adoption of technology of the West is accompanied by the psychological and cultural pollution. All around the world

one can witness young people also abandoning their own cultural traditions and values in favour of the glittering materialist paradise held before them by the advertisements, movies, and television of the Western culture. This together with the use of alcoholism, drug-taking, cigarette smoking, the decline in the moral conduct are but a few of a long list of undesirable impacts from the developed world. This problem is gravely underestimated: the risk is in the next years, to have a generation of youth who are attached to materialism, competition, with no vision of where humanity is going, with a mind that is trained to see and hear constantly about war.

The only instrument capable of solving this problem is "the religion of God and His divine law", "the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace if all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God." [4]

4. TOWARDS MATURITY

The situation is not as negative as it may seem at first sight. There are clear signs that humanity is moving towards a global vision, in which consultation and respect for other people's own identity has become its corner-stone.

One of the most challenging concepts put forward by Bahá'u'lláh is that of the collective growth of humanity which Shoghi Effendi describes in the following manner:

The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend." [5]

Adolescence is period of change, chaos, and confusion. It is a time when human passions are strong – emotions which have caused the destruction, disharmony and disorder rampant in today's world. However, as humanity grows from its adolescent stage into a stage of maturity, a new set of circumstances, very important for unity and peace, comes into being. It is toward the achievement of maturity and, therefore, oneness of mankind that we must dedicate our efforts and abilities. This slowly maturing process can be seen operating: there are at least three clear signs of this, but in future months many more will become apparent.

The first is the concept of the global village technology has rendered the flow of information continuous, regular. People can see with their own eyes the consequences of certain actions, such as war, pollution, and many more. They do not see it only through the mass-media, but they also experience it personally.

Manifestation of protest can be seen all over the world against war, pollution, social justice, human rights. The earth is not seen any more as a big planet, but as a village, where the sufferings of one person are those of all the inhabitants of the village.

This thought leads us to the next concept, that of sympathy or rather empathy: the emotional or intellectual identification with another. The continuous efforts to send medicine, food, clothing to help the populations in great need are very clear signs of this sense of sympathy which is growing in the hearts of men. We cry because of war if someone dies; we cry because of child abuse; we rejoice human scientific and intellectual achievements; we share the historical and cultural backgrounds of our countries with others through inter-cultural exchanges.

Finally, today as never before, we can see the efforts to apply the consultative process to solve the various issues humanity is now facing. The environment, the use of drugs, the waging of wars, the economical equilibrium of the planet have all become the main topics on the agenda of the major meetings among the various States men, world organizations, and religious leaders. Slowly a new sense of history is developing, a new perspective of life on the planet. The respect for the environment as a reflection of the Divine is slowly growing in the hearts of men. Racial diversity, differences in ideology and religions are understood as sides of the same coin, seen from different perspectives.

Universal peace is a very important matter and unity of conscience is essential: no important matter will be achieved until the minds of men become united. The words of our Beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, clearly point out to us the path we must walk to find a balance to solve the problems afflicting mankind:

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions. [6]

Notes

1 Universal House of Justice, *To the Peoples of the World: A Bahá'í Statement on Peace* (Toronto: Association for Bahá'í Studies, 1986), p. 1.

2 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 7.

3 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 34.

4 Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), pp. 129-130.

5 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette:

Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 202.

6 Shoghi Effendi cited in Conservation of the Earth's Resource (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. III.

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