

abandon

this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.¹

Religion sees the course of history as an organic process, moving towards the full realization of all the potentialities implanted in man. The vicissitudes, the great advances, the hiatuses it regards as the natural unfoldment of that process just as the succession of bud, leaf, flower and fruit is the natural unfoldment in the life of a tree; or infancy, childhood, youth and maturity in that of a man. Indeed, Bahá'í scripture explains, the process is the same. The sun is the effective agent in the organic life of the earth; religion in that of humanity.

The Sun of Truth is the Word of God upon which depends the education of those who are endowed with the power of understanding and of utterance.²

The creative Word, revealed in each stage of human progress by a Manifestation of God, and conditioned to the requirements of the time, is the effective agent in the long, single process of humanity's development from infancy to World Order.

This truth is enshrined in all revealed religion although it needs the illumination

of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation to enable men to perceive it. The first picture presented in the Bible is that of human unity in its simplest form; that

of a single family. The last picture is that of a unity manifold and universal in which all kindreds and tongues and peoples and nations are gathered into one and unified in the enjoyment of a common worship, a common happiness, a common glory.

¹The great problem which, according to the

¹ Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, The Unfoldment of World Civilization.

² Bahá'u'lláh, Daryáy-i-Dánish.

page 2

Bible, confronts the human race in its progress is that of advancing from the barest, baldest unity through a long experience of multiplying diversities till ultimately a balance between the two principles is struck, poise is gained and the two forces of variety and unity are blended in a multiple, highly developed world fellowship, the perfection of whose union was hardly suggested in the primitive simplicity of early man.¹

This spiritual view of evolution is the constant theme of religion.

Each revelation refers to the past, looks forward to the future and concentrates upon the immediate need for spiritual regeneration and enlightenment. The Prophet evokes in human hearts a sacrificial love which transcends self-interest and causes the early believers to dedicate themselves entirely to the practice and diffusion of the new message. As it spreads it works like leaven in society, reforming its morals, uplifting its vision and promoting a greater diffusion of love in social action.

'World history at its core and in its essence is the story of the spiritual evolution of mankind. From this all other activities of man proceed and round it all other activities revolve.'²

Unlike the revelations of the past, the Bahá'í revelation releases not only the creative Word necessary to the renewal of spiritual vitality in the human spirit, but embodies that divine energy in an administrative order capable of bringing within its shade all the diversified ethnic groups and myriad types of the human race, who may find within its wide embrace a full, happy and purposeful life. Bahá'í activity therefore is directed not only, as in the past, to the spreading of the Word, but to the establishment of the fabric of that Order which, enshrined within the creative Word itself, becomes the chief instrument for the further diffusion and social application of the Divine Message. This World Order, which the Bahá'í Faith exists to establish, is none other than that long-promised Kingdom in which peace, justice and brotherhood shall prevail universally and 'the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.'³ The establishment of this World Order is dependent upon the regeneration of mankind which must turn again to God and recognize His purpose. The two aims of religion are, therefore, interacting and interdependent.

Such a world-shaking transformation cannot be brought about by any movement of reform, however disinterested, nor by any unaided human effort. Modern man has turned away from God, and bereft of his traditional sanctions, has inevitably wrecked his old order which, in truth, is lamentably inadequate to modern conditions and is not susceptible of repair. Soon, as Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic view of our day, will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead. Likewise, The signs of impending convulsions

and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective.

The current aim of religion, embodied in the aims and purposes of the Bahá'í Faith, is the promotion of the next stage in the organic process of human evolution--the coming of age of the human race. The achievement of this maturity will be attested by the unification of mankind and the federation of the world in a single, all-embracing world society of human brotherhood. But great objectives are reached by dedicated pursuit of the preliminary and intermediate stages of the task, without ever losing sight of the ultimate goal, and this has been and is now the occupation of the Bahá'í world community--the completion within specified times of specified goals. These teaching plans to which the Bahá'ís eagerly devote their lives do far more than simply increase the size and consolidation of that world community. They are devised and launched by the head of their Faith, the Guardian and now the Universal House of Justice--and are therefore conceived from a global view, directed to the immediate needs of the great objective, conservative of the community's resources, world-wide in scale permitting the organic development of each part according to its stage of growth but with due regard for the needs of the whole, fostering intensively the unity, the international co-operation, the diversification of the ethnic, religious and social backgrounds of its increasing membership and developing new resources for the next step forward.

It should be noted that none of these plans is isolated in aim or conception but all are directed towards the implementation of three

1 George Townshend, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 1939.

2 *ibid.*

3 Habakkuk 2:14.

page 3

great charters, enshrined in Bahá'í sacred Writings, which authorize and guide the expansion of the Faith and the development of its institutions. In past Dispensations the command to 'spread the Gospel' has been general and unspecified. It was the inspired guidance of the beloved Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith which disclosed to a spiritually delighted and grateful community yet another of the unique features of this Dispensation in the specific guidance given in

these three charters for the implementation of this eternal command.

Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Camel is the charter for the development of the Bahá'í World Centre in the twin cities of `Akká and Haifa, the site of its most sacred Shrines--the tombs of the twin Prophets and of `Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant--its monuments and gardens, and of its `world-shaking, world-embracing, world-directing administrative institutions'.¹

The Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá is the charter for the development of the administrative order of the Faith. In this majestic document, the child of `that mystic intercourse between Him Who communicated the generating influence of His divine Purpose and the One Who was its vehicle and chosen recipient,'² are delineated the structure of the administrative order, its modus operandi, its main institutions, the chain of authority, the source of guidance and the position of every believer vis-à-vis the Covenant. It has been well called the `Charter of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh'.

The Tablets of the Divine Plan, a series of fourteen letters written by `Abdu'l-Bahá to the believers of the United States and Canada, some addressed to the entire company of believers in the North American continent and others to those in named geographical areas of that continent, constitute the charter for teaching the Faith throughout the world. `Abdu'l-Bahá names the places, the people to whom teachers must go, the conditions under which they must travel and settle and He reveals several prayers for those who undertake this all-important task.

All the international plans of the Faith launched so far have set specific goals aimed at implementing these three charters and it is incontrovertibly apparent that never in any preceding Dispensation has the command to spread the Word of God been given, in the sacred text, such explicit guidance and detailed objectives.

As the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh increases in size and influence other aims and objectives become apparent and possible of pursuit. The relationship with agencies, institutions and authorities of the non-Bahá'í world becomes an important consideration once the community emerges from obscurity, and has led to public relations programmes and the development of closer association with the United Nations. The Bahá'í International Community is accredited as a non-governmental agency with consultative status to the United

Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in various ways to other agencies

of the United Nations. The fostering of this relationship has been the goal of all international plans so far, and is visualized as a continuing process.

There

are other objectives related to the special characteristics of Bahá'í life which become more and more important as the Faith grows and engages greater

and greater public attention. They affect Bahá'í individuals, communities and institutions alike. These objectives fall into two groups--those concerned specifically with standards of conduct and those which relate to special

Bahá'í

practices.

The standards of conduct enjoined by the Prophet are invariably different from and sometimes diametrically opposed to the generally accepted ones

of His day. High standards of conduct are, throughout Bahá'í scripture, constantly upheld and urged upon the believers, but the Guardian of the Faith in an essay written in 1938 addressed to the believers in the United States and Canada laid great stress upon the `spiritual prerequisites ... which constitute the bedrock on which "...all teaching plans ... must ultimately rest...'3

He writes of `...a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual

lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed or colour.'4 In his expansion of this theme he declared that `This rectitude of conduct, with

1 Shoghi Effendi, The Spiritual Potencies of That Consecrated Spot.

2 Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.

3 Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice.

4 ibid.

page 4

its implications of justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fairmindedness, reliability,

and trustworthiness, must distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá'í community.'1 `A chaste and holy life must be made the

controlling principle in the behaviour and conduct of all Bahá'ís,

both in their social relationships with the members of their own community, and in their contacts with the world at large.'2 `It requires

total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming

drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of

nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices.'³ `As to racial prejudice, the corrosion of which, for well nigh a century, has bitten into the fibre, and attacked the whole social structure of American society, it should be regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community [of that country] at the present stage of its evolution.'⁴

The regeneration of men--the first objective of religion mentioned in this essay--is therefore seen as the prime objective of the Bahá'í Faith. Membership in the Faith is drawn from that society which permits and indulges itself in all those corrupt, immoral and prejudiced activities which Bahá'ís are required to renounce, and since the Faith is steadily but persistently growing in numbers there is reason to hope that slowly but surely a regeneration will take place.

Further, these Bahá'í standards of conduct are not for individuals alone. They must be the hallmark of Bahá'í institutions and communities. `Such a rectitude of conduct,' wrote the Guardian, `must manifest itself, with ever-increasing potency, in every verdict which the elected representatives of the Bahá'í community, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, may be called upon to pronounce. It must be constantly reflected in the business dealings of all its members, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, and in any service they may, in the future, render their government or people.'⁵

`It must be made the hallmark of that numerically small, yet intensely dynamic and highly responsible body of the elected national representatives of every Bahá'í community, which constitutes the sustaining pillar, and the sole instrument for the election in every community, of that Universal House whose very name and title, as ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, symbolizes that rectitude of conduct which is its highest mission to safeguard and enforce.'⁶

The attitudes deriving from such standards, and from all the varied teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, must pervade all Bahá'í communities and imbue them with distinctive characteristics which can be recognized, amid the welter of opposing or mutually uninterested groups and factions into which modern society is disintegrating, as easily as the features of an

individual
in a crowd.

Those special Bahá'í practices which will inevitably characterize the Bahá'í community, are the regular observances of its Holy Days and Festivals, the abstention from work on nine such days during the year, the observances by all members of the community of the annual fast, of the laws governing marriage and divorce, of daily prayer, of the invariable practice of consultation in all affairs of life, and particularly by the regular observance of the Nineteen Day Feast. The habitual practice of such laws and ordinances is an objective pursued by all Bahá'ís and Bahá'í families.

It is seen that the aims and purposes of the Bahá'í Faith may be stated as the raising up of a world-wide community recruited from every race, nation, colour, religious and social background known on the planet, inspired, united and regenerated by the spiritual teachings and love of Bahá'u'lláh, dedicated to the building of that New World Order which `may well be regarded as the brightest emanation'⁷ of His mind and is none other than that long hoped for, Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth. To prepare men for the gifts of that Kingdom--peace, brotherhood, spirituality--and to raise its very fabric in the world, are the immediate and long-time objectives of the Bahá'í Faith.

The energies of the Bahá'ís therefore, in pursuance of these aims, flow in three major channels: individual spiritual development,

1 Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*

4 *ibid.*

5 *ibid.*

6 *ibid.*

7 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 213.

page 5

conveying the message of Bahá'u'lláh to others, and developing the pattern of world society embodied in the Bahá'í administrative order. All these activities derive from the sacred text and it is the unique feature of the Bahá'í revelation that whereas the first two are common to all revealed religions it is only Bahá'u'lláh Who creates the institutions and reveals the laws, delineates the social order and establishes the

principles
of the civilization to which His revelation will give rise. Neither Moses nor
Christ, Muhammad, Buddha, Zoroaster or Krishna did this, although They all
foretold
that it would be done by Him Who would take the government upon His shoulders
and establish the Kingdom in peace and righteousness.

None of the traditional motives operates to create the Bahá'í
community, neither former associations, political or economic identity of
interest,
racial or patriotic grouping. Only the recognition and love of Bahá'u'lláh
brings into close relatedness and co-operative action people from every human
background, of all types of character and personality, divergent and
diversified
interest. Through their brotherhood in Bahá'u'lláh the old crystallized
forms of human divisiveness to which they formerly belonged, whether of class,
race, religion, occupation, temperament or degree of civilization lose their
rigidity
and eventually disintegrate. The growing Bahá'í community on the
other hand is essentially based on love, is a brotherhood, a family, each
member
delighting in the diversity of its membership, welcoming the former pariah or
outcast as a new flower in the garden, each as proud of his humanity as was
ever
the former chauvinist of his country.

Within such a community the sun of Bahá'u'lláh's
revelation can evoke new morals, new attitudes, new conventions, new hopes and
visions, all enshrined within the text of the revelation itself and which
provide
the spiritual atmosphere and distinctive culture of the new day. Such a
community,
as it grows, becomes more and more a true social order, providing a soil to
human
life, a climate for its best development, an arena for the practice of its
highest
aspirations, and a beacon light to attract and guide the disillusioned,
spiritually
impoverished, frenetic and frustrated peoples of the earth.

The energies of this new culture, guided and conserved to the service
of human welfare by the agencies of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order will
result in the proliferation of new arts and sciences, new social and economic
relationships, new educational methods and a general accession of well-being
and
felicity. The vision of the Bahá'í Faith, though glorious, is a
practical one, and the number of its dedicated promoters grows with increasing
speed. It is summarized in the following words by the Guardian of the Bahá'í

Faith in his essay *The Unfoldment of World Civilization*:

“The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safe-guarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve centre of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. A world language will either be invented or chosen from among the existing languages and will be taught in the schools of all federated nations as an auxiliary to their mother tongue. A world script, a world literature, a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and under-

page 6

standing among the nations and races of mankind. In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will co-operate, and will harmoniously develop. The press will, under such a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversified views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously manipulated by vested interests, whether

private or public, and will be liberated from the influence of contending governments and peoples. The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be co-ordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

`National rivalries, hatred, and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding and co-operation.

The causes of religious strife will be permanently removed, economic barriers and restrictions will be completely abolished, and the inordinate distinction between classes will be obliterated. Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear. The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standards of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

`A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by the universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation --such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.'

back to Bahá'í World volume 18 table of contents

METADATA

Views13384 views since posted 2004-08-24; last edit 2026-04-22 20:13 UTC;

previous at archive.org.../hofman_bw18_introduction;

URLs changed in 2010, see archive.org.../bahai-library.org

Language

English

Permission

© BIC, public sharing permitted. See sources 1, 2, and 3.

History

Typed 2004 by Dianne Bradford; Formatted 2004 by Jonah Winters; Proofread 2004 by Dianne Bradford.

Share

Shortlink: bahai-library.com/2481

Citation: ris/2481

select Collection:

Archives

Articles

Articles-unpublished

Audio

Bibliographies

BIC

Biographies

Books

Chronologies

Compilations

Compilations-NSA

Compilations-personal

Documents

East-asia

Encyclopedia

Essays

Etc

Excerpts

Fiction

Glossaries

Guardian

Histories

Introductory

Letters

Maps

Music

Newspapers

NSA-documents

NSA-letters

Personal

Pilgrims

Poetry

Presentations

Resources

Reviews

Scripts

Software
Statistics
Study
Talks
Theses
Transcripts
Translations
UHJ-documents
UHJ-letters
Video
Visual
Writings

[home](#)

[sitemap](#)

[series](#)

[chronology](#)

[search:](#)

[author](#)

[title](#)

[date](#)

[tags](#)

[adv. search](#)

[languages](#)

[inventory](#)

[bibliography](#)

[abbreviations](#)

[links](#)

[about](#)

[contact](#)

[RSS](#)

[new](#)

— Introduction: Aims and Purposes of the Baha'i Faith (Used by permission of the curator)