



beings are connected together like a chain, and reciprocal help, assistance, and influence belonging to the properties of things, are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings." (2)

And again, "Consider for instance how one group of created things constituteth the vegetable kingdom, and another the animal kingdom. Each of these two maketh

use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential for the life of the other. In other words, the growth and development of the vegetable world is impossible without the existence of the animal kingdom, and the maintenance of animal life is inconceivable without the co-operation of the vegetable kingdom. Of like kind are the relationships that exist among all created things. Hence it was stated that co-operation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness." (3) One could almost write an ecology text with quotations from the Bahá'í writings.

Man is seen as having a special place in the natural world. "The human body is like animals subject to nature's laws. But man is endowed with a second reality, the rational or intellectual reality; and the intellectual reality of man predominates over nature." (4) "...to man God has given such wonderful power that he can guide, control and overcome nature." (5) "Yet there is a third reality in man, the spiritual reality.... That celestial reality... delivers man from the material world. Its power causes man to escape from nature's world. Escaping, he will find an illuminating reality, transcending the limited reality of man and causing him to attain to the infinitude of God..." (6)

Material development is also important, because man "should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature; for as long as man is captive to nature he is a ferocious animal, as the struggle for existence is one of the exigencies of the world of nature." (7)

Bahá'u'lláh warned a hundred years ago about the hazards to the planet of too much material civilization. "The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men.... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation...." (8) He also warned about the dangers of atmospheric pollution.

For Bahá'ís, nature and all the creation reflect the qualities and attributes of God. "When... thou dost contemplate the innermost essence of all things, and the individuality of each, thou wilt behold the signs of thy Lord's mercy in every created thing, and see the spreading rays of His Names and Attributes throughout all the realm of being...." (9)

The spiritual, social and physical environments of man are all interrelated. "We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is

itself also 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."

(10)

Respect for the natural world is also reflected in the Bahá'í prohibition of cruelty to animals: "Briefly, it is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature.... The feelings are one and the same, whether ye inflict pain on man or on beast." (11)

Finally, Bahá'u'lláh linked the beauty and verdure of the country with our spiritual dimension. He said, "The country is the world of the soul, the city is the world of bodies." (12)

Bahá'ís see the world today as evolving rapidly towards a world society, pushed by the technical revolution in transportation and communications which have broken down barriers between nations. Many of our problems are those of this process of transition. We share the view of Professor di Castri that the immediate future will be difficult, but the more distant future will be positive and full of promise.

Scientific understanding is not a significant constraint to the solution of most environmental problems. The barriers to the application of solutions are largely economic, social and political. Changes in behaviour, sacrifices of individual interests in the common good, and major adjustments in society will be required. Many of the necessary solutions have even been agreed by the leaders and governments of the world in Agenda 21, the action plan from the Rio Earth Summit. It is the will to apply these solutions that is lacking, and this lack of will is fundamentally a spiritual problem. A change in values and a restoration of morality and ethical principles are required. The leaders who agree to many declarations of principles and plans of action, without the intention of carrying them out, should listen to the warning of Bahá'u'lláh that "...he whose words exceed his deeds, know verily his death is better than his life." (13)

The Bahá'í Faith has an evolutionary concept of religion.

We believe that all great religions have come from the same source, and represent but different chapters in the same book of guidance for our social and spiritual evolution down through the ages. Even the indigenous peoples have their legends of a great leader or ancestor who brought the principles and values underlying their society. We therefore should all work together to restore this balance of the spiritual and the material in the world.

The belief in God has been dying out in every land. We should acknowledge this spiritual need, and all the religions and ethical systems need to be involved in applying the solution. There is a set of basic values that is common to all the religions: values of unity, cooperation, harmony, responsible behaviour, altruism and respect for the rights of others. These should be universally incorporated into the education of children.

Society needs to be reorganized on a more organic pattern to reflect the diversity and decentralized nature of planetary environments. Both scientific awareness and responsibility should be decentralized, with

widespread

participation, to be as close as possible to the scale of the problem.

Local problems should be addressed at the local level, but with a sense of responsibility that extends to the whole planet.

At the same time, the global nature of the biosphere and of certain environmental problems exceeds the capacity of national governments to respond to them effectively. A rapid transition to a world society, with the establishment of the appropriate institutions of a world federation or commonwealth, will be necessary to address these complex global problems effectively. All humanity needs to recognize its oneness and develop a sense of world citizenship. The central aim of the Bahá'í Faith is to help to lay spiritual foundations for a such world civilization. As Bahá'u'lláh has said, we should become like the leaves of one tree, the flowers of one garden, the waves of one sea.

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