

inequality, violence, superiority, paternalism, competition, etc. Social structures can equally employ science to institutionalise oppression, greed and competition.

Examples of the corruption of science include ‘apologetic science’ proving predetermined hypotheses, ‘ordered science’ researching what industry’s funds dictate not what humanity needs – such as some pharmaceutical researches – and fanatical attachment to a theory even after its falsification – for instance Darwinian evolution. Consider ‘economic man theory’ as another example. An axiomatic article for many social disciplines for decades, this concept portrays humans as self-interested agents seeking to maximise their profits through competition. Such is the definition of rationality. What evidence led scientists to such sweeping conclusions? Nevertheless, we do not blame ‘organised science’ for our social tragedies.

Similarly, current social structures, neglecting the spiritual reality of the existence of humanity, are constructed to correspond only to its material nature. Consequently, social institutions such as government, economy, media, and educational system are erected on the foundations of competition, domination, and greed, and serve to perpetuate such. The elements of such constructs manifest themselves in various ills of our social life. At the heart of war, failure of political systems and violation of human rights is competition. Dominance leads to inequality between women and men, and dictatorship. Greed results in the economic crises, and extremes of wealth and poverty. Social structures not recognising the spiritual reality of humanity institutionalise disunity, injustice, and inequality. Yet, we do not hold ‘organised society’ responsible for our social disintegration.

It is evident, then, that organisation is not the root cause of our ills. We need a kind of organisation that embeds unity and justice in social structures.

Likewise, we should not mistake the organisation that religion proposes through its essential verities with the natural self-organisation of its followers that concerns the exigencies of time and place. Equally, we should not confuse the deeds of adherents with the teachings of religion.

Because of the corruption, superstition, and fanaticism that religious institutions have demonstrated, we doubt and reject any manifestation of authority and structure. This vacuum allows individuals to take the matters into their own hands. Our permissive attitude allows opportunistic religious leaders, utilising the out-dated social structures, to serve personal or political interest and bring religion into disrepute.

The problem with organised religion, then, is not that it is organised. The problem, rather, is that it is not organised enough.

What needs organising is not the individual’s affairs, enjoining good, and forbidding wrong. It is, rather, the empowerment of the individual to read and understand the application and implication of the revealed religious text. It is to facilitate the collective effort of a community to build capacity to

systematically translate revelation into reality through the process of study, consultation, action, and reflection.

Among the world's major religions in this regard, one is particularly striking. The Baha'i Faith not only is not 'organised', it is not a 'religion' either by the above definitions and attributes. Having revolutionised the concept of religion and the relationships that sustain society, it offers a blueprint for a future world civilisation.

Administration

In the Baha'i Faith, administration does not take priority over faith. Baha'i institutions are democratically elected councils or appointed individuals. Their role is to encourage action, foster individual initiative, and promote learning within the Baha'i community as a whole. They invigorate individual and collective efforts to contribute to the wellbeing of society. In the Baha'i elections, electioneering, campaigning, nominations, and parties are prohibited.

Clergy

The Baha'i Faith has no clergy and no professional learned class. With humanity at the threshold of its collective maturity, the Baha'i Faith encourages everyone to read, understand and apply the divine teachings individually, and without intermediaries. In Baha'i spirituality, there is a direct and personal connection between the individual and the creator. In organised religion, interpreting the holy text, prayer, and compensation for sins have been traditionally conducted through the religious institution. The Baha'i Faith abolishes the intermediating role of the religious institution in individual spirituality. Grassroots consultation – a consensus-based system of decision-making – replaces the age-old institution of clergy.

Science

The Baha'i Faith maintains that religion, without science, soon degenerates into superstition and fanaticism. It suggests that if religion is opposed to reason and science, faith is impossible. A belief not in line with reason is ignorant superstition, not faith.

Finality

The Baha'i Faith does not claim to be the exclusive harbinger of truth or seal all knowledge. It, rather, proposes that spiritual reality is revealed progressively over time to suit the needs of humanity in different times and places. Likening religion to nature, it suggests all religions must be replaced after living through their life cycle.

Control

A core principle of the Baha'i Faith is independent investigation of truth. Faith is not hereditary or automatic. No one is born a Baha'i. Children born to Baha'i parents are required to prove their independent investigation in

adulthood should they decide to register as Baha'is.

Dividing line

In organised religion, the followers identify themselves by their organisational label over their faith and distinguish themselves from the public at large. The Baha'i Faith considers all humanity moving along the same path towards one universal cause, one common faith. It diminishes the sharp line between the believers and non-believers.

Ritual

There is no ritual, ceremony, or specific clothing in the Baha'i Faith. Baha'is of every race and culture practise their belief differently. Unity in diversity is the Baha'i way of life. The Baha'i Faith has abolished congregation. It encourages people to commune with their creator in their own privacy.

Dogma

In a far-reaching assertion, the Baha'i Faith scrutinises its own validity unprecedented in religion. It states that religion must be the cause of love and fellowship. Should it become the cause of contention and enmity, its absence is preferable.

Change

The above statement is particularly remarkable in the context of the dialectic of religion and change in religious history. While organised religion is notoriously resistant to change and reform, the Baha'i Faith embraces change. In fact, it has institutionalised change by establishing the Universal House of Justice, its highest governing body, to this very end – to enact and abrogate laws and ordinances according to the changes and requirements of the time.

Laws

Unlike organised religion, the Baha'i Faith is not prescriptive in following set methods and procedures. It does not instil fear in its followers to induce obedience, nor does it depict an ill fate for transgression. The Baha'i Faith encourages its adherents to observe its principles as a natural manifestation of their love. The laws are few and general, and their application is often left to the individual judgement. One need not follow all the teachings perfectly before registering as a Baha'i. The level of their observance will naturally grow commensurate with one's understanding, love, and commitment. The Baha'i Faith prohibits imposing beliefs. It encourages guidance in deeds. It eliminates conformity by imitation and passive participation, and inspires learning in action. The Baha'i Faith is a lenient faith.

The Baha'i Faith has upset the world's equilibrium and revolutionised mankind's ordered life. It is not an organised religion. It is an organic faith.

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