

Science

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SCIENCE AND RELIGION

MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 13 August 1997

From: Research Department

Quotations on Science and Religion

The Research Department has considered the request for references to science and religion which was contained in the electronic mail message of 25 June 1997 from Mr. xxxx to the Universal House of Justice. Mr. xxxx explains that a number of members of the Association for Baha'i Studies who have access to email have "decided to try to study the Baha'i quotations on science and the relation of science and religion". He, therefore, enquires about the availability of a compilation on the subject and seeks information concerning other Baha'is who might be studying this same topic. We provide the following response.

The Research Department regrets that no comprehensive compilation on science and religion is currently available at the Baha'i World Centre. There are, however, many references to this subject scattered throughout the published literature of the Faith, which are easily accessed through such programmes as Refer and Immerse. To assist Mr. xxxx and his group in their study we attach the following items:

1. A compilation entitled, "Selected Extracts on Science and Technology", prepared in response to an earlier request. This compilation, drawn from somewhat less accessible sources, contains extracts from the letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice concerning such subjects as the Baha'i perspective on science, its place in the curriculum, and its relationship to the Faith and to the processes of decline and growth at work in the world.

We call attention to the final extract in the compilation, which we cite below. This passage might well help to provide an overall sense of direction to the discussions of the group:

With regard to the harmony of science and religion, the Writings of the Central Figures and the commentaries of the Guardian make abundantly clear that the task of humanity, including the Baha'i community that serves as the "leaven" within it, is to create a global civilization which embodies both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The nature and scope of such a civilization are still beyond anything the present generation can conceive. The prosecution of this vast enterprise will depend on a progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry. This entails living with ambiguities as a natural and inescapable feature of the process of exploring reality. It also requires us not to limit science to any particular school of thought or methodological

approach postulated in the course of its development. The challenge facing Baha'i thinkers is to provide responsible leadership in this endeavour, since it is they who have both the priceless insights of the Revelation and the advantages conferred by scientific investigation.

2. "Science and Religion", a short (and partial) list of references to books and articles by Baha'is on this subject.

In addition, Mr. xxxx may wish to refer to the compilation prepared by the Research Department on "Scholarship" (Mona Vale: Baha'i Publications Australia, 1995). This collection of texts contains many useful references to science, the scientific method, and the role of scientists.

With regard to the names of Baha'is who are engaged in studying the Baha'i teachings on science and religion, it is suggested that Mr. xxxx contact the Office of Research at the National Baha'i Centre in the United States. It is our understanding that this Office is in the process of collecting information about the research interests of Baha'i scholars.

(19 May 1995, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

SELECTED EXTRACTS ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

From Letters Written by or on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Among the sacred obligations devolving upon the Spiritual Assemblies is the promotion of learning, the establishing of schools and creation of the necessary academic equipment and facilities for every boy and girl.

Every child, without exception, must from his earliest years make a thorough study of the art of reading and writing, and according to his own tastes and inclinations and the degree of his capacity and powers, devote extreme diligence to the acquisition of learning beneficial arts and skills, various languages, speech, and contemporary technology.

(8 June 1925, from a letter by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Persia, translated from Persian) [1]

We had heard through various channels the wonderful way your children had grown to speak about the Cause in public. Shoghi Effendi's hope is that they will, the three of them, become able and devoted speakers on the Cause and subjects akin to it. To do this properly they will need a firm foundation of scientific and literary training which fortunately they are obtaining. It is just as important for the Baha'i young boys and girls to become properly educated in colleges of high standing as it is to be spiritually developed. The mental as well as the spiritual side of the youth has to be developed before he can serve the Cause efficiently.

(28 November 1926, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [2]

In philanthropic enterprises and acts of charity, in promotion of the general welfare and furtherance of the public good including that of every group without any exceptions whatever, let the beloved of God attract the favourable attention of all, and lead all the rest.

Let them, freely and without charge, open the doors of their schools and their higher institutions for the study of sciences and the liberal arts, to

non-Baha'i children and youth who are poor and in need.

...and next is the propagation of learning and the promulgation of Baha'i rules of conduct, practices and laws. At this time, when the nation has awakened out of its sleep of negligence, and the Government has begun to consider the promotion and expansion of its educational establishment, let the Baha'i representatives in that country arise in such a manner that as a result of their high endeavours in every hamlet, village and town, of every province and district, preliminary measures will be taken for the setting up of institutions for the study of sciences, the liberal arts and religion. Let Baha'i children without any exceptions learn the fundamentals of reading and writing and familiarize themselves with the rules of conduct, the customs, practices and laws as set forth in the Book of God; and let them, in the new branches of knowledge, in the arts and technology of the day, in pure and praiseworthy characteristics--Baha'i conduct, the Baha'i way of life--become so distinguished above the rest that all other communities, whether Islamic, Zoroastrian, Christian, Judaic or materialist, will of their own volition and most gladly enter their children in such advanced Baha'i institutions of learning and entrust them to the care of Baha'i instructors. (January 1929, written by Shoghi Effendi to the believers in the East, translated from Persian) [3]

As to your entrance to Reed College as an undergraduate... No one could think more than the Master did of the great need for capacity, knowledge and a broad scientific outlook in the service of the Cause, but as against the hard and dry intellectuals, he wished such knowledge to be coupled with an intense love for the welfare of humanity. (20 September 1929 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [4]

The Revelation proclaimed by Baha'u'llah, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men. The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be, to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though differing in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, "abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith". His Cause, they have already demonstrated, stands identified with, and revolves round, the principle of the organic unity of mankind as representing the consummation of the whole process of human evolution. This final stage in this stupendous evolution, they assert, is not only necessary but inevitable, that it is gradually approaching, and that nothing short of the celestial potency with which a divinely-ordained Message can claim to be endowed can succeed in establishing it.

The Baha'i Faith recognizes the unity of God and of His Prophets, upholds the principle of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all forms of superstition and prejudice, teaches that the fundamental purpose of religion is to promote concord and harmony, that it must go hand-in-hand with science, and

that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, an ordered and progressive society. It inculcates the principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges for both sexes, advocates compulsory education, abolishes extremes of poverty and wealth, exalts work performed in the spirit of service to the rank of worship, recommends the adoption of an auxiliary international language, and provides the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent and universal peace.

(June 1933, from a letter written by Shoghi Effendi to the High Commissioner for Palestine) [5]

It is hoped that all the Baha'i students will... be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Baha'i should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.

(6 August 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [6]

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Baha'is (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Baha'i teachings. What he wants the Baha'is to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Baha'i teachings more deeply. One might liken Baha'u'llah's teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them. We believe in balance in all things; we believe in moderation in all things--we must not be too emotional, nor cut and dried and lacking in feeling, we must not be so liberal as to cease to preserve the character and unity of our Baha'i system, nor fanatical and dogmatic.

(5 July 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [7]