

In his book *The Imperishable Dominion: The Bahá'í Faith and the Future of Mankind* (1983), which is based on a correlation of the Bahá'í teachings to modern, western, secular thought, Dr. Udo Schaefer devotes four paragraphs to Erich Fromm (see pp. 90-91). Schaefer's comments seem to me to be accurate. I will convey the gist of Dr. Schaefer's remarks here, while adding some other observations.

On the surface of it, Fromm's predictive vision seems so remarkably inspired and close to that of the Bahá'í Faith that one has to wonder how Fromm missed it. Bahá'ís, understandably, would read into Fromm's statement a close, perhaps unconscious, description of the Bahá'í Faith by an enlightened, believing spirit of the age. For all the important factors that count in Bahá'í belief seem to be there: evolutionary development, the unification of humanity, progressive revelation, a new teacher, an emphasis on spirituality rather than doctrine, the harmony of faith and reason, etc.

I wish that were true. But as some of you already know, Eric Fromm's statement must fall into the category of a description of a religionless religion. For, to put it simply, Erich Fromm was an atheist. The more complimentary phrase would describe him as a socialist humanist. His statement, as enlightened as it is, reminds me of a phrase from 2 Timothy 3:5 that men in "the last days ... will have a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

The roots of Fromm's thought are in psychoanalysis and Marxism. Although he rejected Freud and his psychoanalytical theory as being too repressive and too bourgeois, his admiration for Marx remained complete. (See his *Marx's Concept of Man*, 1961). His entire psychological project was based on a merger of Marxism and psychoanalysis.

Erich Fromm grew up in a devout, orthodox Jewish home. But early on, he renounced, not only Judaism but all religion, for like many intellectuals who can see only the dark side of religion, Fromm believed that religion had divided humanity and had done more harm than good. He also had a horror of totalitarian systems, having fled Nazi Germany to come to the United States. For him, religion was a repressive, totalitarian system and stifled the freedom of individual conscience.

However, Fromm's dilemma — again like many humanistic intellectuals — was that he could not entirely divest his project of the basic elements of world religion since he realized that religion stood out as one of the permanent features in human history and consciousness. Marx boasted about turning Hegel on his head to formulate his system of dialectical material; Fromm turned religion inside out. But regrettably, his new outside presentation of religion divested it of its most essential elements. Instead, he promoted a new humanistic, non-institutional "religious" consciousness while, as Saint Timothy's prophetic vision of the latter days rightly says it, "denying the power" of its Source.

Thus, the new teacher of the age that Fromm envisions and advocates, is not a theistic prophet, one who speaks on behalf of God (Gk. pro + theos), but a

humanistic teacher, like Karl Marx, who will spread an ideology, however enlightened. The religionless religion that he advocates will come about in a post- religious age.

Was Hugh McKinley Fromm's Bahá'í correspondent?

Further light was cast on this question by Ismael Velasco. The following two emails were received from Ismael on July 2 and 3, 2007:

...I believe that it may very well be that it was a Bahá'í who was responsible for that passage by Fromm. One of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh for Cyprus, Hugh McKinley, living in a little Greek island and writing the literary column of the Athens Daily Times. He reviewed new books in it, and took the opportunity to correspond with their authors, striking solid friendships with great figures such as Kathleen Raine, Helen Shaw and May Sarton. One of these exchanges took place with Erich Fromm, in which Hugh questioned Fromm's dismissal of religion, and engaged in a debate that led Fromm to change his treatment of the subject subsequently. For years I have been meaning to look for the passage in question, and I believe the quote you shared, coinciding perfectly with the timescales involved, is a prime and highly probable candidate. It explains the seeming anomaly of such a Bahá'í description of world religion, precisely in those dates, from an otherwise consistent dismissal of the subject....

...The source is kosher. I heard it many times from Hugh McKinley himself, and I am working on his biography. Bear in mind that the likelihood the passage you sent is the one he had in mind is very high in my view, but I haven't actually done the hard detective work to find the paper trail. In any case, I have no reason to doubt his account that Fromm wrote dismissively about religion and following correspondence with Hugh on the subject changed his treatment of it around the time. The passage you shared, exactly contemporaneous to the events in questions, seems too much like coincidence to me. So, not definite in the detail, yet, but pretty definite in outline, and pretty probable in specifics....

The reader may draw his or her own conclusions.

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