

Humanity's Coming Encounter with Baha'u'llah

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Anniversaries are an invitation to take stock, to review where we have come from. The hope is that we can secure a vantage point from which we can better appreciate what lies ahead.

Centenaries are particularly valuable in this respect, because the perspective they provide is so much longer, and the vantage point, hopefully, correspondingly high.

In reviewing of the unfolding public message of the Cause over the past 100 years it is important to distinguish this message from the Faith's teaching work. There are as many teaching methods as there are Bahá'ís: some five million of them at the present count. There are as many "Bahá'í messages", perhaps, as there are inquirers. Entirely apart from this world-wide effort of individuals to teach other individuals, the Bahá'í community as a body has pursued a parallel, century-long -- and remarkably systematic -- program to create an accurate and favorable image of the Cause in the public mind generally.

There is no one satisfactory term that captures this endeavor. The meaning of the much-used word "proclamation" has, unfortunately, become steadily more blurred as it has been used for various group teaching initiatives. What we are talking about are such activities as public information, government relations, publicity, publishing, media production and public relations, whose aim is to ensure that the society around us gains a reasonably sound understanding of the nature and purposes of the Bahá'í Cause.

When one looks back over the past century with this area of our work in mind, a very interesting realization emerges. It is not only the Bahá'í community that has moved through a series of stages in its development, but also the presentation of its public message. In a sense the image of the Cause can be said to have gone through three -- and perhaps four -- major transformations during these hundred years.

Obviously, the basic message has never changed. We have never stopped

presenting one message
in order to switch to an entirely new one. On the contrary, the process has
been a cumulative
one, and is much stronger for that reason. Nevertheless, it is clear that the
focus has several
times shifted quite sharply, the emphasis has changed and with it the types of
public
information activities which have received priority attention.

THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS If one examines our public message during the first two
or three decades of the century, one discovers a Bahá'í Faith which was
essentially a movement
of peace, of universality and understanding. It took an optimistic and
encouraging view of the
possibilities of human nature because it declared humanity to be fundamentally
spiritual.
Mankind's hope lay in freeing itself from the limitations and prejudices of the
past, and
accepting its fundamental unity.

Inevitably, there were a number of mockers. One American poet referred
dismissively to what
he called the "Sweet Bahá'í-and-Bahá'í". At a much later date we still
heard warnings about
"terminal niceness". Fundamentally, however, the message had great attractive
power: it
planted in the public mind, to the extent that this mind was aware of us, an
identification of the
word "Bahá'í" with a spirit of universality and goodwill.

This image was most fully captured in the immensely appealing figure of the
Master Himself,
during His epic journeys through the West. The possibilities for its promotion
were also most
fully explored by Him in such actions as His address to the Lake Mohonk peace
conference, His
participation at an NAACP conference, His defense of the truth of Christianity
and Islam at
Temple Emmanu-El in San Francisco, the host of interviews He gave to the press,
and in the
unshakable confidence He displayed in the spiritual destiny of the human race.

With the assumption by the Guardian of the responsibilities placed on him in
the Will and
Testament, the focus shifted. For over three decades Shoghi Effendi devoted
himself to a task
which he termed "vindicating the independent character of the Faith". Patiently
and firmly he
freed the Cause from the cultic milieu which had long veiled its true nature.

The Bahá'í Faith

was an independent religion among the religions of the world, he said, and must be recognized as such.

The legal recognition of Bahá'í marriages and Bahá'í holy days was tenaciously pursued throughout the world. Bahá'í institutions were incorporated in civil law. The foundations were laid for a close relationship with the United Nations system as soon as that system came into existence.

At the local and national levels, Bahá'í communities tirelessly organized classes in comparative religion and sought a place in the emerging interfaith movement. "World Religion Day" was created to focus media attention on this theme. Especially designed literature explored, with varying degrees of professional expertise, the concept of Progressive Revelation. (One recalls one small pamphlet whose cover listed the world's surviving independent religions, beginning with "Sabeanism" whose origins were imaginatively attributed to one "Enoch".)

MAJOR

SHIFT IN FOCUS With the triumphant completion of the Ten Year Crusade and the successful establishment of the Universal House of Justice, the image of the Cause again underwent a major shift in focus. The Bahá'í community had become established throughout the entire planet. Suddenly it was everywhere and it was everyone. This immensely rich diversity was given further weight by the dramatic increase in the community's sheer size. Whole Third World villages became Bahá'í, with profound implications for the operation of the Administrative Order.

As the process gained momentum, the community became an increasingly valued collaborator with UN agencies and other non-governmental organizations. Social and economic development projects proliferated. Administrative sophistication expanded, as did the professional resources available.

To use the words of a popular philosopher of the period, Marshall McLuhan, "the medium was the message". A growing array of public information activities emphasized the

fact that the Bahá'í community was a microcosm of the world. It was at home everywhere. It was as indigenous to Africa as it was to America; as familiar a voice in Hindi as in Farsi; as reliable a friend in the South as in the North. It was itself a convincing proof of the validity of the Faith's message.

This century-long series of efforts has been a stunning success. To the extent that people are familiar with the Bahá'í Faith, they regard it as an influence for good, promoting those ideals of global unity and interracial harmony that are increasingly seen as vital to the survival of humankind. At some point in the past several decades a corner was turned in the vindication of its character as an independent world religion; however stubborn the resistance to this idea may be in many parts of the world, crucial agencies that shape public opinion now routinely include the Faith among the distinct religious systems of mankind.

Equally important is the extraordinary reputation which the community's interaction with governmental, non-governmental and United Nations bodies has established. The Bahá'í community is seen as an "honest broker", as genuinely committed to principles of collaboration and consultation, as an international influence that can be counted on for rationality and professionalism in the initiatives it undertakes and the advice it gives. It does what it says it will do. LIKE NEW IMMIGRANTS The Cause is, in short, becoming a familiar and respected feature of the international landscape in the concluding decade of this century, and it is of the utmost importance that we ourselves understand this fact. In a sense we are like new immigrants getting off a plane in North America. In most parts of the world one may live a lifetime -- and his children and grandchildren after him -- without becoming "Italians" or "Japanese" or "Norwegians". But almost the only one who does not assume that the new arrival in New York is an American is the immigrant himself. In much the same way, we are being challenged to "take yes for an answer" in many areas of our public information work. We must

not let the limitations in our own minds prevent us from understanding this development and the opportunities it opens up.

"EMBLAZONING THE NAME OF BAHÁ'U'LLAH" Now, the House of Justice tells us that the moment has come for a dramatic new initiative in the Faith's public presentation of its message. What has so far been achieved creates a setting in which the central truth of the Bahá'í Cause may appear in its proper perspective, a stage upon which the Author of the Cause can Himself address our fellow human beings, their institutions, their information systems, their centers of learning.

All of us have yearned for this day. It will bring together two aspects of our work on which a perceptive public relations specialist remarked two years ago. In an entirely friendly but objective manner he expressed the view that there seemed in fact to be "two Bahá'í Faiths: the one that you share with the public and the private one, the one that motivates what you do. The difference between these two Faiths is Bahá'u'lláh".

Setting aside the circumstances that have made this distinction a wise and considered strategy, it is clear that these "two Faiths" are now converging. What are some of the principal implications of their doing so? In considering them, we would be well advised to keep in mind that wonderful sentence of the Guardian on the necessary limits on our ability to peer very far into the future:

"All that we can reasonably venture to attempt is to strive to obtain a glimpse of the first streaks of that promised Dawn which must, in the fullness of time, chase away the gloom that has encircled humanity."

With this caution in mind, let us try to identify some of the broad lines which an attempt to proclaim the name and mission of Bahá'u'lláh to humankind may seek to pursue. Fundamentally, the summons of the House of Justice requires that we re-examine everything we do in presenting the message of the Cause to the public. Every media interview, every submission to a

United Nations conference, every public event we organize, every audio-visual presentation we create, every piece of music composed, every academic paper, any contribution to the drafting of a national constitution -- in all these activities, we must pose ourselves the question, "How can this be reformulated so as to point to its source in Bahá'u'lláh?" BROAD ARRAY OF INITIATIVES Our task is to set in motion a broad array of initiatives that can establish Bahá'u'lláh's name as a familiar and authoritative voice in human affairs. The goal in the decades ahead is to reach the point where no responsible scholar will undertake work in fields as diverse as social anthropology, systems research, political and economic science, administrative theory, psychological methodology -- without consulting Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and the models He has constructed:

* Where the media will routinely ask, "What does Bahá'u'lláh have to say about X, Y or Z?"

* Where public agencies will have begun to include citations from Bahá'u'lláh's works in support of proposals being advanced or analyses made.

* Where the masses of mankind will have begun to know who Bahá'u'lláh is and the nature of the mission He has undertaken.

Before anything else we need to determine how we are to speak of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. A beginning has been made in the Statement on Bahá'u'lláh prepared, at the request of the House of Justice, by the Office of Public Information. Its numerous citations from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh suggest a number of ways in which our public information work can profitably make a start.

As the statement points out, Bahá'u'lláh was the first Manifestation of God to set foot in the West. This simple fact of history and geography points up one of the great distinctions between His mission and those of the Messengers of God who preceded Him. Bahá'u'lláh is the Prophet of civilization. The greater part of His life was spent not in the Galilean countryside nor among the

desert tribes of Arabia, but in the great cities of His world. He did not reject the world as Buddha did; his mission was to transform and revitalize it. While refusing government appointments, He moved freely in government circles. Those whom He influenced were not only the common people, but the ministers, scholars, diplomats and literary figures who eagerly sought Him out, often traveling long distances for the purpose.

His mastery of both the Persian and Arabic languages and the literary traditions of each matched the ease with which His writings dealt with the great issues of social and political organization. He was the Head of a large household, including family, dependents and servants, and He was able to create around Him an order that defied the privations to which He was subjected. Even to Ali Pasha, the Turkish prime minister who was to treat Him with such injustice, He was "a man of great distinction, exemplary conduct, great moderation" whose doctrine "is worthy of high esteem" and whose influence might help overcome the religious conflict which was undermining Ottoman society. He was seen as a teacher, a saint, a philosopher, a reformer. He was the Master of His world, even when it imprisoned Him. He was neither a recluse nor a fugitive. He did not accept to be a victim.

Second to a realistic presentation of the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, the new stage opening before us requires a fundamental rethinking of our presentation of His teachings. The shift that is called for, however simple in nature, is a radical one. We are challenged to move beyond our current discussion of "Bahá'í principle" to an exposition of what Bahá'u'lláh said, what Bahá'u'lláh wrote, what Bahá'u'lláh called for, what He explained, foresaw, cautioned against, proposed, envisioned. We need to share with others how Bahá'u'lláh suggested we look at this or that issue, how He advised us to approach this or that problem.

Programs of public information must focus, for example, on the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's searching critique of political organization. Interested segments of public opinion must be made

aware of His application of the principles of scientific method to all aspects of human consciousness, including those that are "spiritual". Discussions of the developmental and environmental challenges facing humanity must be related to Bahá'u'lláh's uncompromising assertion that "women and men are and always have been equal". We will find a wide and enthusiastic audience for a presentation of the approach to group decision-making that He conceived and for which the present-day Bahá'í administration presents an early working model. In short, questions of faith entirely aside, we are challenged to introduce leaders of thought and the public generally to the Author of a body of writings that propose radically new approaches to the central issues of life.

Third, Bahá'u'lláh's writings contain an instrument whose impact on the exposition of the Faith's public message cannot yet be dimly imagined. Underlying the body of His principles and concepts, Bahá'u'lláh has created a unified, coherent world view, a universal theory of history, if you like; a comprehensive vision of the nature of man and society. The potentialities of the unique endowment of the Cause are suggested by an examination of the central role which such systems of thought have played in humanity's past. "Where there is no vision", the Bible says simply, "the people perish." There has never been a human society on Earth that has not been founded on a system of belief that gave meaning and purpose to life. When such systems of belief fail, the members of those societies cease to make the required sacrifices to maintain essential social relationships. When this happens a society loses the cohesive power that sustains it, and disintegration sets in. "ON THE ROAD TO NOWHERE" This is the universal condition of our present-day world. A particularly dramatic example is Marxism, both in its political form as the governing authority in certain blocs of nations, and in its intellectual form as an aggressive and dogmatic materialism which, for decades, has imposed itself on academic life everywhere. Its fate was well summed up in a large banner carried through

Moscow's Red

Square on last year's May Day: "Seventy-three years on the road to nowhere!"

The statement is

not merely a political one; it reflects an appalled awareness that the foundations of social and

intellectual certainty have collapsed. Masses of humanity have awakened to the fact that the

fundamental values and concepts of their society, values that demanded decades of heartbreaking

sacrifice -- and on which were reared an array of imposing political, academic, social and

economic institutions -- were not merely fundamentally wrong, but were largely nonsense.

Speaking of this day, the Qur'an says that "the mountains will pass away like the passing of a

vapor in the desert".

UNIVERSAL LOSS OF FAITH The loss of faith in the great world

views on which the social systems of our world are founded is not confined to one part of that

world; it is universal. Whether those systems of thought are pseudo-scientific like Marxism, or

purely pragmatic like capitalism, or humanistic like Liberal Democracy, or quite pathological

like Nazism and Fascism, they have lost their hold on the minds of those who once worshipped at

their altars.

In the words addressed by the Voice of God to Bahá'u'lláh:

"Canst thou discover anyone but Me, O Pen, in this Day? . . . Lo, the entire creation hath passed

away! Nothing remaineth except My Face . . . We have, then, called into being a new creation, as

a token of our grace unto men."

As we explore the public information field thus open to us, we will find that what makes

Bahá'u'lláh's world view unique is that it is truly universal. Unlike all the systems that

preceded it, it embraces not only the entire diversity of the human race, but the entirety of

human experience. Nothing that is truly human is alien to it.

As we ourselves come to understand this resource more clearly, we will be able to communicate

its message to society in general, a society whose search for such a vision will become ever

more urgent. The expectation is not that Bahá'u'lláh's vision will become readily adopted. The

expectation is that it will begin to engage serious minds everywhere and, in popular forms of expression, the attention of the general public. Once this process begins, the eventual outcome is as certain as tomorrow's sun.

The forthcoming publication of the Kitab-i-Aqdas points us to a fourth area in which the historic encounter between Bahá'u'lláh and humankind will take place. It is not merely the prevailing systems of thought that have broken down, but human values themselves. We live in a world that has entirely lost its moral moorings, in which all of the ethical reference points of the past have been entirely swept away. The effect on the masses of humanity, leaders and led alike, has been to create the deepest anxiety of which human beings are capable.

In a famous passage of his writings, the Irish poet W.B. Yeats described our age as one in which "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are filled with passionate intensity". Questions that touch the human heart most deeply, that cry out for reflection and a spirit of consultation, are transformed by battling groups of extremists into rigid formulae and cookie-cutter tests of human decency. In such a world, the majority of society's members withdraw into helplessness and increasingly desperate silence.

Merely to mention this prevailing climate is to make it clear how vital it is that we Bahá'ís not "get in the way", so to speak, but rather help our fellow human beings to find their own relationship with Bahá'u'lláh and the prescriptions He has brought. He is the Physician of the soul, not we. He knows human nature as intimately as He knew the palm of His own hand. He knows the pattern of habits and attitudes that constitutes true human development, and He understands the inner disciplines and social restraints that conduce to this development.

It is in this context, surely, that we must seek to help the institutions of society and the public generally to understand the nature and purpose of the Kitab-i-Aqdas. The Aqdas is not, Bahá'u'lláh explains, "a mere code of laws", a list of do's and don'ts. It

is, in His words, "the choice wine of reunion" with God. And it is through reunion that human minds can ascend to "the station conferred upon their inmost beings, the station of the knowledge of their own selves".

THE COVENANT OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH Finally, because we live in an age which seeks objective evidence -- and which has every support in Bahá'u'lláh's writings to do so -- we need to acquaint society with the real implications of the work which Bahá'u'lláh has done. This work includes the global community He has brought into being. Those around us will be able to appreciate this extraordinary achievement to the degree that they see its relevance to the fate of humanity as a whole.

The key to this understanding is the Covenant. The coming-of-age of the human race has made possible, Bahá'u'lláh says, an entirely new relationship between God and man. As the peoples of the world gradually turn to God and begin to conform their lives to the pattern of human society contained in His Revelation for this day, "a new race of men" will result. The unification of human consciousness will produce a people free of the limitations that created and perpetuated the problems now facing the planet.

This process is irresistible, and its manifestations can be seen in every aspect of contemporary history. It provides the context in which Bahá'u'lláh's creation of the Bahá'í community assumes its proper significance. For Bahá'u'lláh has not merely outlined a theory of social evolution; nor has He contented Himself with the creation of a model. The Bahá'í community, with all its limitations and shortcomings, is itself the nucleus of the emerging "race of men". To the degree that we understand this dimension of the Revelation, to that extent will we be able, in the words of the House of Justice, to "celebrate the achievements of the Covenant, and proclaim its aims and unifying power".

"O people of Baha," Bahá'u'lláh urges, "be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed . . ." The Bahá'í community, even at its present embryonic stage of development,

possesses features that are unique, features that will one day characterize the humanity of our planet's future.

What are they?

The first and most fundamental of them is unity. Unity is the mainspring of humanity's future.

Except for the Bahá'í community, there is no association of human beings on the planet,

religious, political, racial or social -- nor has there ever been one -- that possesses this

attribute. Ultimately, it alone will exert a compelling power of attraction on a world which is

daily coming to realize that disunity is the ultimate source of its dangers and suffering. "So

powerful is the light of unity", Bahá'u'lláh asserts, "that it can illumine the whole earth."

Second only to its unity is the universality of the community that Bahá'u'lláh has created. No

one is left out, no one takes second place. There is no corner of the earth where the pattern of

life taught by Bahá'u'lláh has not taken root; no culture, no people which does not play its full

part. A NEW SYSTEM OF VALUES Third, the emerging human race must be imbued with an entirely new system of values, a new ethos. It must be guided by an inner ethical

orientation relevant to the challenges of the next stage in human development.

Such a

transformation cannot come from legislation and education alone. "Is it within human power . . .

", Bahá'u'lláh asks, "to effect . . . so complete a transformation . . . ?"

Yet, the evidences of just

such a fundamental change are already apparent in the ethos which Bahá'u'lláh has fused into the

worldwide Bahá'u'lláh community, not as an imposed code, but as a pattern of spontaneous moral

response.

Fourth, if it is to assume responsibility for its own destiny, the human race must achieve

collective consciousness. It must be able to think and decide collectively. The Administrative

Order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh endows the community of His followers with this unique faculty.

It exists nowhere else in our world, and is a feature of the Cause that has evoked particularly

warm appreciation from our collaborators and well-wishers. From the grassroots

level in the most remote corners of the globe, up to the central organ of decision-making which the community has raised up on the slopes of Mount Carmel, a unified pattern of consultation provides an early glimmer of what Bahá'u'lláh intended when He spoke of God cherishing in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as "one soul in one body".

The problems confronting the human race highlight the crucial importance of yet another power with which it must somehow become endowed. Nothing has so daunted contemporary efforts to heal and protect our tortured planet than the awareness of the enormity of the exercise of human will that such efforts will require. To realize this is to gain a new appreciation of the significance of the systematic prosecution of the Divine Plan to which the Bahá'í community has devoted itself. For decades, tens of thousands of ordinary people willingly accepted every type of sacrifice, solely out of love for Bahá'u'lláh. Struggling young institutions diverted their best resources to pursuing distant goals which had no immediate relevance to their own needs. That a community of five million people has today become the most widespread religion on earth, second only to Christianity, is a feat of sheer will unparalleled in human history. No body of people has ever set itself such staggering goals and then systematically achieved them, stage after stage, plan after plan.

Nor is it only obstacles and challenges which lie ahead of a united humanity. As contemporary events show all too clearly, there are in the human ego impulses of perversity and selfishness that will resist to the utmost every effort of the race to change course. The religious literature of all peoples is filled with warnings of the titanic struggle between the forces of Light and Darkness that will result. In such a perspective, the Bahá'í community may well reflect deeply on the power of endurance with which it has met recurrent waves of persecution and suffering.

The experience of the Iranian friends over the past 11 years provides a glimpse into the

community's spiritual reserves in this respect. One thinks of the summer of 1983 when the persecution was reaching its peak. In June of that summer the Iranian authorities paraded the entire national leadership of the Tudeh (communist) party on national television. The prisoners willingly confessed to every crime charged against them, and begged for their lives. During that same eventful month 10 Bahá'í women and girls were subjected to similar physical and mental abuse in an effort to force them to recant their Faith. Their persecutors did not dare to put them on television because these brutalities produced not a vestige of compliance. One thinks of Bahá'u'lláh's ringing assurance:

"All praise be to God Who hath adorned the world with an ornament, and arrayed it with a vesture, of which it can be despoiled by no earthly power . . . Say: the springs that sustain the life of these birds are not of this world. Their source is far above the reach and the ken of human apprehension. Who is there that can put out the light which the snow-white Hand of God hath lit?"

GREATEST GIFT TO MANKIND There are several other features of the present-day Bahá'í community that are relevant to humanity's future, but one of gaining particular respect among our friends. The greatest gift of God to mankind, Bahá'u'lláh says, is reason.

Whatever force and faith may have achieved in the earlier stages in the advancement of civilization, rationality is the key to humanity's future. Bahá'ís have reason to feel proud of the informed and balanced contributions that their community is making in international forums everywhere. The development of the faculty is a feature of the growing maturation of the Faith's institutions, a development which the beloved Guardian foresaw as coinciding, in the closing years of this century, with the emergence of the Lesser Peace and the completion of the complex of the structures that constitute the World Center of the Faith.

These capacities do not arise out of any virtue of the constituent elements of the Bahá'í community, much less its individual members. They are purely and simply endowments of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. We manifest them to the extent that we ourselves are

within the
Covenant, but the Covenant does not belong to us. It is Bahá'u'lláh's legacy
to the whole of
humankind: "O people of Baha! That there are none to rival you is a sign of
mercy . . ."

But, as the work of the Covenant, the community of Bahá'u'lláh represents
nothing less than the
arrowhead of the evolution of consciousness. One thinks of similar fundamental
changes at
earlier stages in the evolutionary process. How feeble, how insignificant was
the first
manifestation of sensate life on this planet. And yet it was the future and
everything else had
meaning because of it. It was where evolution was going; the trees and
mountains, however
beautiful and imposing, represented where evolution had come from.

The Bahá'í community, with all it signifies, is Bahá'u'lláh's achievement,
the result of His
vision, His leadership, His teachings. He is its Creator and Sustainer.

BUILDING

BRIDGES Embarking on the task of "emblazoning the name of Bahá'u'lláh across
the planet"

will open up opportunities in each of the areas touched on in the foregoing. In
all of them we will
face a common challenge. Through a century of patient effort on our part, an
image of the Cause
has emerged as a body of people committed to principles of peace and
brotherhood, rational and
trustworthy in their undertakings, and working with other people of goodwill in
programs for
the improvement of the life of humankind. This image is an accurate
representation of the Cause
and one of which we can be justly proud. Now we are about to share with the
society around us
the motivating power of this phenomenon. But Bahá'u'lláh is not merely a
Teacher or Reformer.
He is, in the unforgettable words of the Guardian, "the Judge, the Lawgiver,
the Redeemer of all
mankind".

How do we put this together for our friends? For us, it is all one.
Bahá'u'lláh is the Source of
all the expressions of the Cause, and there is no discontinuity in the
historical, intellectual or
spiritual processes by which they have emerged. But others will not have this
background of

understanding. How will our public information programs bridge the resulting gap in the public mind?

The answers are as many as the questions. Essentially, however, our challenge is to begin energetically to interpret Bahá'u'lláh's mission in the vocabulary and concerns of those around us. Certainly there will be the indisposed. We have already had some experience of the storms of opposition that the proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh's mission will provoke. But a growing majority of those to whom our message is addressed will be people who want to understand, however skeptical, critical or reluctant they may appear.

The challenge is particularly acute for those Bahá'ís who enjoy the advantages of education, opportunity and association. They are called on to relate Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to the concerns of their colleagues; to communicate His vision to leaders of thought; to focus their skills on building bridges between the insights of their disciplines, on the one hand, and the relevant truths in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, on the other. PREOCCUPATION WITH "CONVERSION"

So far, our efforts in the field of public information have not been able to escape a certain connotation of exclusivity that inevitably arises from our parallel efforts at teaching. Given the history of religion, any effort to present a new Faith raises a preoccupation with the issue of "conversion". To discuss a community and its goals similarly tends to focus attention on membership. We should not be surprised if, in the minds of others, a certain sense of "us and them" intrudes.

To realize this is to understand why we must now make an heroic effort to shed all of our parochial views. It has been essential to establish the credentials of the Faith as an independent religious system. But the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh goes far beyond anything that humanity understands by the word "religion". If the ecclesiastical systems of our world are religion, then the Cause is not; if it is religion, then they really are not. It does a disservice to the mission of

Bahá'u'lláh, to the World Order which He has come to establish, to focus our public message in religious categories.

As the Prophet of global civilization, Bahá'u'lláh addresses all of humankind. The principles in His writings, the vision of civilization He propounds, His prescriptions for the moral reformation of society and human nature are a universal legacy, without conditions, without prior commitment. The new Covenant between God and man which He proclaims is not an organization nor an ideology, but a universal reality operating within every soul and between all souls. It is readily accessible to independent investigation and discovery, "the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity". It is reality. Ultimately it will engage the minds and spirits of all people, because the nature of reality is to do so.

— Humanity's Coming Encounter with Baha'u'llah (Used by permission of the curator)