

be solved at a fundamental and enduring level through adoption of the Bahá'í teachings.

The Writings indicate that present-day difficulties are symptoms of a basic problem — disunity — which can only be resolved through the spiritual transformation of the human heart and human society envisaged by the Bahá'í Faith. To attract others to embrace the truth of this Revelation, we need to be able to show the applicability and relevance of the teachings to contemporary needs. More recently the Universal House of Justice called for:

"...the promotion of Bahá'í scholarship, so that an increasing number of believers will be able to analyze the problems of mankind in every field and to show how the Teachings solve them."

(From a letter dated 19 January 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

The purpose of this note is to indicate one possible approach to the challenge of relating the teachings to current issues.

One difficulty which must be faced is that so many contemporary issues are presented in terms of partisan politics, and are generally analyzed on that basis. Bahá'ís addressing these issues are consequently in danger of becoming unwittingly embroiled in a potentially-divisive partisan political discussion, which could convey the erroneous impression that the Bahá'í teachings favour one partisan approach over another. The Guardian faced a similar difficulty in the analysis of world events presented in his World Order letters; his resolution of the problem is described in the following passage taken from a letter written on his behalf:

"There is, however, one case in which one can criticize the present social and political order without being necessarily forced to side with or oppose any existing regime. And this is the method adopted by the Guardian in his 'Goal of a New World Order'. His criticisms of the world conditions besides being very general in character are abstract; that is, instead of condemning existing institutional organizations it goes deeper and analyzes the basic ideas and conceptions which have been responsible for their establishment."

(From a letter dated 2 March 1934, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

A similar approach is demonstrated in the statement "The Promise of World Peace" addressed to the peoples of the world by the Universal House of Justice. The analysis of world conditions is carried out at a deep level, where fundamental issues are exposed, and partisan political comment is carefully and strictly avoided.

2. Possible Approach

One method of addressing the need is through consultation by a group of Bahá'ís, following this sequence of topics:

What are 'the problems of mankind' which are of major concern to the people in this region?

How can these problems be analyzed at a fundamental level (beyond the superficial level of partisan politics) to expose the deep and basic issues?

What Bahá'í teachings are relevant to these issues?

How can this analysis be used to devise means of presenting the Bahá'í Faith to the people in such a manner that they see the relevance of the Teachings to their present-day needs, and the efficacy of the Faith as a solution to the problems besetting them?

It is obvious that a similar approach could be adopted by an individual believer in his own personal endeavours in this regard.

Certain prerequisites hold the key to successful application of this method. We must be well aware of what is happening in the world, i.e., we "need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems." This awareness of present-day world events should be set within the framework of the Bahá'í concept of world social and political evolution disclosed and elaborated by the Guardian in his World Order letters, "The Promised Day is Come" and other works, i.e., the simultaneous acceleration of the processes of integration and decline, the cleavage between liberal and conservative adherents of obsolescent doctrines and ideologies, the broad diffusion of the spirit of a new age through the whole world in addition to its concentrated expression in the activities of the Bahá'í administrative institutions, the long-term consequences of failure to respond to the proclamation call of Bahá'u'lláh in the nineteenth century, etc. A deep knowledge of the Bahá'í teachings is required in order to effectively relate the Faith to the issues of today; a corollary is that use of this approach provides a stimulating motivation for a deeper inquiry into the teachings and can, in fact, make the deepening process "painless". Insight into human nature is required to determine how best the Divine Remedy can be offered to the people of the world without having it seem Utopian, superficial, sanctimonious, or inflexible.

3. Some Examples

The approach set out here can be illustrated by many examples from present-day concerns. Three issues are discussed here, as examples of ways in which deeper issues can be identified.

The Chernobyl Nuclear Reactor Accident

Much of the discussion of this unfortunate incident has been in terms of politics or recrimination. However, it is possible to identify the following deeper issues, to which analysis of the event calls attention:

the existence now of problems which transcend national boundaries (in this case, the diffusion of radioactive particles) and which existing national legal structures are unable to handle;

the occurrence of disasters which are beyond the resources of even a strong nation to handle (e.g., the medical equipment and experience needed to handle treatment of victims) and which necessitate an international co-operation which transcends political antipathies;

the inherent dual possibilities for use of modern scientific developments, i.e., for beneficial purposes or as a source of destruction far beyond that contemplated in past ages;

the need for human values, such as preservation of human life, to be a compelling factor (rather than mechanical efficiency, maximization of output or minimized cost) in the design of sophisticated technology;

the psychological effects of fear about long-term effects of an imperceptible hazard (e.g., possible carcinogenic and genetic radiation effects which may not be evident for decades);

the sense of helplessness experienced by an individual subject to present-day hazards and feeling unable to do anything to ameliorate his condition.

The Bahá'í teachings have much to say on each of these issues, either directly through explicit teachings or indirectly, implied within the aims and purposes of the World Order and the Bahá'í concept of the true purpose of life.

International Terrorism

With the rise of terrorist activity, especially in Europe and the Middle East, has come a growing mass concern which is now being reflected largely in political terms, and which could well be directed to the deeper issues, including the following:

the application of a principle of expediency, that the ends are so worthy that any means are justified in order to achieve them;

the view that the existing social and political structures in the world are inert and cannot be changed by peaceful means, so that one feels impelled to resort to radical and violent action to effect change;

the adversary model which views those who do not support radical aims as being its antagonists, active or passive; so that one can justify the death of seemingly-innocent bystanders on the grounds that their lack, of active support of the radical cause meant they are part of the problems;

the Marxist interpretation of historical change as arising from a dialectic conflict of intrinsically-antagonistic social forces;

the sense of loyalty to people of the same minority, family or class which is so strong that it transcends a commitment to moral values (which allows the terrorist to draw on a network, of safe houses as a base for his clandestine operations;

the breakdown of trustworthiness in social and administrative relations, as

reflected in the bribery of officials and the abuse of diplomatic privilege.

The Bahá'í concept of morality, the universality of our approach to rectitude of conduct, the Bahá'í view of historical development, and the provision in the World Order for peaceful change are all relevant to the issues expressed here.

The Breakdown of Democracy

Over the past few years, peoples of many nations have progressively become disillusioned with the functioning of governmental institutions which are founded on some form of democracy. This development has been centered around the following issues:

the vulnerability of the democratic process to abuse by charismatic politicians who appeal solely to emotions or to base instincts such as greed, revenge or short-term self-interest;

the weakness of governments when the conventional two-party system has fractionated into a multi-party system based on narrow and competing pressure groups, where a small party can hold the balance of power in a coalition and can thus exert a disproportionate influence on policy;

the manipulation or control of government policy by vested interests or by powerful non-elected quasi-governmental forces such as unions or multi-national corporations;

the decline in ethics and public morality, resulting in endemic corruption and the looting of the national treasury by popularly-elected leaders;

the tyrannical influence of a majority in suppressing the rights of a minority, or in reinforcing a mediocracy which discriminates against those who do not conform to the norm.

Public concern about these issues provides a very useful backdrop against which the unique features of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh can be presented in such a manner that it becomes clear how this Divinely-conceived System avoids the problems which are evident in present-day political institutions.

4. Conclusion

Described here is only one possible approach to implementing the advice of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice to analyze present-day problems and to show how the Bahá'í teachings provide the remedy for these problems. No doubt, there are many other means by which this advice may be carried out. The purpose of this note is simply to stimulate more thinking on this subject, so that these various approaches can be identified and developed.

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Views6867 views since posted 2013-02-26; last edit 2014-11-28 22:53 UTC;

previous at archive.org.../khan_faith_current_issues

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