

Basis of the Baha'i Community, The: A Statement Concerning

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After the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921, the Bahá'ís in all parts of the world were grief-stricken at the loss of their beloved Master and leader, and bewildered by the withdrawal of the One who had served as the basis of their unity as well as their educator and spiritual guide.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, however, had prepared a Will and Testament with all necessary instructions to the Bahá'ís for the era following His ministry as Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and Interpreter of His Revelation. In this unique spiritual document, the Master explained the nature of the local, national and international institutions which bind together the Bahá'ís of all nations and races in one great community. To each of these institutions 'Abdu'l-Bahá, applying the laws and teachings revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, attributed a definite function and a definite degree of authority. The Bahá'ís of the world found that they had the privilege of being active members in and workers for a worldwide spiritual society universal in character whose aim is to symbolize peace and cooperation through their obedience to divine teachings and laws. This community has no priesthood nor professional clergy, and its worship and its activities are unlike those of the churches and institutions of past religions.

One supreme head and central figure of this world-wide Bahá'í community is the Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi, in whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament vested the power of interpretation, capacity and authority for directing the development of the community, and the office of chairman of the international Bahá'í body when established.

The Bahá'ís have thus had a continuity of the principle of unity and guidance from Bahá'u'lláh, first as expressed in and through 'Abdu'l-Bahá and then as expressed in and through the Guardian and the institutions (local and National Spiritual Assemblies) developed under his direction since 1921.

This continuing principle of unity is the unique life with which Bahá'u'lláh endowed His world Faith. Previous religions have fallen under control of human ideas and motives after the Founder had left this earth. The glory and power of the Bahá'í religion is that its sustaining life and inspiration, its direction and guidance, have been made constant and continuous for the duration of the cycle lasting until the coming of another Manifestation of God.

In this great body of living faith the individual believer is like a leaf on the tree. The life of the leaf is given it by the tree, but the leaf has a function which contributes to the tree. It lives in this dependence on the larger organism, and if the leaf becomes severed from the tree it falls into decay.

The spiritual life of a Bahá'í is not in isolation, selfishness, independence, but in his unity with the whole body of Bahá'ís throughout the

world. Outside this principle of unity, which derives from the authority of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, there is no way whatever in which human beings can attain permanent spiritual relationship one with another or with the rest of mankind. Bahá'u'lláh has laid the bridge of truth and assurance from the dead world of the past to the new living age of the future. Those who try any other path or try to build their own bridge are doomed to failure, for the distinctive mission of the troubles and calamities now engulfing the world is to destroy whatever prevents mankind from attaining the blessing of obedience to God.

In the light of these Bahá'í teachings, there is little need to point out the complete absence of truth in the position assumed by the leaders of the New History Society. These persons were formerly members of the Bahá'í community and were well informed concerning the basic Bahá'í teachings, including the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Less than a dozen Bahá'ís left the Faith in order to join the New History Society. Their arguments have carried weight only with persons uninformed of the Bahá'í Teachings.

These New History leaders, who refused to heed the Master's explicit instructions concerning unity with the Bahá'ís and acceptance of the Guardian's function and authority, founded their own organization through which to express their personal and incomplete conception of the Bahá'í Faith. In claiming to serve the Bahá'í Faith, in purporting to represent its aims and ideals, and in pretending to convey its teachings, the leaders of the New History Society contravene the most sacred and vital ordinance of the Faith and their attitude is one which the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the decisions of the Guardian flatly condemn. The passages from Bahá'í writings quoted below are more than sufficient to show how such persons betray themselves in claiming any allegiance to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

The situation presents no problem or issue to Bahá'ís familiar with the teachings and the history of their Faith. It is self-evident that only the Founder of a religion can lay down the qualifications of faith and of membership in the spiritual community He creates. A Bahá'í is one who meets the qualifications of this universal religion. Outside these definite qualifications of this universal religion. Outside these definite qualifications a person is free to choose his own religion or sect and worship in whatever manner he may desire. The Bahá'ís have no concern with those who prefer acceptance of other standards of truth. They do, however, have the great privilege of clarifying any issue forced upon them which in any way beclouds or twists or suppresses fundamental Bahá'í teachings in the mind of the public.

One brief word with reference to a legal action taken by the National Spiritual Assembly against the founders of the New History Society in order to prevent their misuse of the term "Bahá'í".

In taking this action, the Assembly found that the courts in the United States

are not authorized to decide religious questions or to determine what are the true Bahá'í teachings or true application of the teachings. The Assembly was therefore compelled to limit the action to other questions relating to use of the Bahá'í name by the founders of the New History Society in conducting a book shop and collecting contributions. By this action, although limited, the Assembly hoped to prevent the founders of the New History Society from creating the false impression that they are authorized to represent the Bahá'í cause.

The court took the view, however, that the case involved the right to use the name of religion and therefore involved a religious question which could not be decided by the court. This result prevented the Assembly from attaining its aim through legal means, but in no wise affected the essential spiritual question of obedience to the basic laws and principles of the Bahá'í Faith.

When, therefore, the New History Society claims victory or vindication from this court action, there is no basis for the claim except the refusal of the court to try the case. There was no decision on the merits of the case. The only question in dispute was whether a religious question is in accordance with the doctrine of freedom of worship and was not disputed.

For the Bahá'í Faith is not any intellectual doctrine or philosophy which can be made an end in itself, but a relationship to the body of fellow-believers throughout the world based on newly-revealed spiritual, ethical and social truth. He upholds the principle of the Bahá'í community because only in the community can these truths have vital life and application.

Spiritual authority, in this cycle, is vested in the Assemblies elected democratically by all the believers, men and women alike. Aside from the Guardian appointed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament, there are no Bahá'í "leaders". The Spiritual Assembly alone has power to represent the community, and the Assembly is composed of nine persons who act under the principle of consultation and majority decision.

Nothing on earth is more reassuring of the future welfare and peace of humanity than these Bahá'í Assemblies whose membership reconciles different races, classes and creeds. More than six hundred of these elected Assemblies now exist in East and West. In North America, the Bahá'ís have established nearly one hundred Assemblies these being coordinated by an elected National Spiritual Assembly; and besides these institutions the American Bahá'ís are completing the House of Worship (which 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself dedicated in 1912) and have organized a large Publishing Committee and four Summer Schools where throngs of young people and those of mature age ardently perfect their knowledge of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.