

**SOUNDING**  
**Asking Questions:**  
**the independent investigation of truth**  
*Edwin McCloughan*

**The Faith's Primary Principle**

Commenting on the independent investigation of truth, J.A. McLean states: "... this teaching, next to the oneness of humanity... is the primary teaching of the Bahá'í Faith... yet the implications of this teaching have largely been overlooked. With few exceptions [Gary L. Matthews], Bahá'í scholars have written little on this key teaching compared with other areas of Bahá'í scholarship..." (*Dimensions in Spirituality*, p. 3, emphasis added).

Few introductory books on the Bahá'í Faith devote very much space to the independent investigation of truth; nor, to take one specific example, do any of the ten essays in *Circle of Unity: Bahá'í Approaches to Current Social Issues* (Kalimat Press, 1984), discuss it at all, probably because it is not - like feminism, human rights, racial injustice, economics or Marxism - seen to be a principle with as obvious a social application. Yet it clearly has social consequences, as can be seen from the following observation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "All the peoples have a fundamental belief in common. Being one, truth cannot be divided, and the differences that appear to exist among the nations only result from their attachment to prejudice. *If only men would search out truth, they would find themselves united*" (*Paris Talks*, p. 129, emphasis added).

Not nearly enough has been written about this unifying aspect of the independent investigation of truth nor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's encouragement to "Seek the truth, the truth shall make you free!" (ibid., p. 137). "Truth," writes McLean, "is a dynamic force, capable of rendering both individuals and society more progressive, just, united, peaceful and loving; that is, free" (*Dimensions*, p. 40). By independently investigating the truth, one frees oneself from ignorance, which is identified in the Bahá'í Writings as "indisputably the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice" (*Peace: More Than An End To War*, p. 22). Indeed, one of the twofold purposes of the Manifestations of God is "to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding..." (*Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 79).

In *The Prosperity of Humankind*, the document issued by the Bahá'í International Community in 1995, it is pointed out:

At the individual level justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh avers, Justice is 'the best beloved of all things' since it permits each individual to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the knowledge of his neighbour or group [Hidden Word, Arabic 2]... (p. 9).

Thus the independent investigation of truth equates to justice, “the best-beloved of all things in the sight” of God. Justice can be said to be the motivation for each individual’s spiritual and intellectual development in that it requires each person to use their own God-given faculties to determine reality, to find out what is beneficial (serving and showing compassion to others, promoting amity and co-operation and helping the poor and destitute) and what is harmful (perpetuating prejudices based on ignorance and clinging to traditions and entrenched orthodoxies that hinder genuine social progress). It follows that it is just to use one’s faculties in this way insofar as one has thereby used one’s God-endowed capacity for seeking and finding the truth and for distinguishing truth from falsehood or, in moral terms, right from wrong.

Conversely, not to see with one’s own eyes or to use one’s own mind is to be, in a very clear sense, wilfully unjust, in that one’s divine potential remains unrealised or unfulfilled. This failure can, in many cases, be due to such social pressures as conforming to well-established but possibly obsolete conventions, and not deviating from what Bahá’u’lláh in another instance called “those rules, customs, habits, and ceremonies... current amongst men” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 238). Bahá’u’lláh inveighs against these conformist pressures when He writes:

If, in the Day when all the peoples of the earth will be gathered together, any man should, whilst standing in the presence of God, be asked; ‘Wherefore hast thou disbelieved in My Beauty and turned away from my Self,’ and if such a man should reply and say: ‘Inasmuch as all men have erred, and none hath been found willing to turn his face to the Truth I, too, following their example, have grievously failed to recognize the Beauty of the Eternal,’ such a plea will, assuredly, be rejected. For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself (*Gleanings*, pp. 142-3).

Rather than recognising, independently of others and the dead hand of tradition, “the Beauty of the Eternal,” this facile following the example of others can be said to encapsulate much of the history of religion, as delineated by George Townshend with reference to the unique and final incarnation of God in Jesus Christ:

The followers of every world religion have invented for themselves a similar belief in the uniqueness and finality of their own Prophet. The result has been that no religion has acknowledged a Prophet of a later religion. The Hindus do not acknowledge Buddha, the Buddhists do not acknowledge Christ, nor yet do the Zoroastrians. The result of this delusive belief has been that the world religions have not tended to the unifying of mankind but rather to its further division (*Christ and Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 26).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá puts it very strongly: “He whose father was a Zoroastrian is a Zoroastrian. He whose father was a Buddhist remains a Buddhist. The son of a Muslim continues a Muslim, and so on throughout. Why is this? Because they are slaves and captives of mere imitation. They have not investigated the reality of

religion and arrived at its fundamentals and conclusions” (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 272). In contrast to those who investigate the validity of a religion or religions is “the imitator, who... dependeth upon the sight, the hearing, and the conscience of others and hath no will of his own” (*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 29).

At a broader social level, justice finds its brightest expression in the practice of unity, which can be realised by investigating as fairly and open-mindedly as possible the beliefs and values fundamentally shared by most people. Thus ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, during His talk at the Central Congregational Church in Brooklyn on June 16th, 1912, said:

If Christians of all denominations and divisions should investigate reality, the foundations of Christ will unite them. No enmity or hatred will remain, for they will be under the one guidance of reality itself. Likewise, in the wider field if all the existing religious systems will turn away from ancestral traditions and investigate reality, seeking the real meanings of the Holy Books, they will unite and agree upon the same foundation, reality itself. As long as they follow counterfeit doctrines or imitations instead of reality, animosity and discord will exist and increase (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 198).

Bahá’u’lláh states categorically:

The essence of all that we have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye (*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 249).

We can therefore be said to be just or faithful to ourselves and to our Creator when we investigate the truth of any matter independently and without “either love or hate” (*Gleanings*, p. 264) or attendant sexist, racial, class, religious and political prejudices, each and all of which inform and shape the particular milieus in which people live. Indeed, investigation in this manner acts as a powerful corrective to the “social assumptions and religious formulae” (*Peace: More Than An End to War*, p. 10) that have spawned so much exclusivity, division and hatred, the distortion or negation of true religion.

### **Applying the Principle**

The first teaching of Bahá’u’lláh is the duty incumbent *upon all* to investigate reality. What does it mean to investigate reality? It means that man must forget all hearsay and examine truth himself, for he does not know whether statements he hears are in accordance with reality or not (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 62, emphasis added).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Does this primary teaching apply to people who are raised as Bahá'ís? The above emphasis strongly suggests that it does, as does Shoghi Effendi's stating that the Bahá'í Faith "enjoins upon its *followers* the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth..." (*Guidance for Today and Tomorrow*, p. 4, emphasis added). In practice, does the teaching apply to people who have *not* been raised to be Bahá'ís? Here the principle poses something of a dilemma: in its Ridvan Letter of 2000, the Universal House of Justice mentions Bahá'í parents who "believe that in order to preserve the independence of children to investigate truth, the Faith should not be taught to them" (p. 9), a belief that is deemed incorrect. As many or most people are born into and raised in a particular socio-religious milieu, their belief system is not likely to be by choice or reasoned conviction, however, as demonstrated by the following speech from the eponymous character in Joseph F. Girzone's novel, *Joshua: A Parable for Today*:

"If people take religious leaders too seriously, they become rigid in their thinking and afraid to think for themselves, and must always refer decisions to the clergy. Even as adults they still cling to the religious practices of their childhood, and when even ceremonies and mere customs change they panic, because they have been led to believe these things *were* their faith..." (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1987, p. 74).

Does investigation here apply only to religion? In "Spiritual Search and the Seeker," the first section of Laméh Fananapazir's *Prove All Things* (pp. 3-56), the principle is related exclusively to the quest for religious certitude under six headings. Fananapazir traces the principle of the independent investigation of truth to certain passages of the New Testament in the first of these subsections (e.g. Matthew 5:3, 5:6, 7:7-8, 13:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, Romans 12:2). (It is noteworthy that most of these passages appear in Matthew's Gospel, which was specifically addressed to, and carefully organised for, a Jewish readership that still awaited its Davidic Messiah.) Udo Schaefer continues this link when he states in the Introduction to his paper, "Infallible Institutions": "Revealed religion is inseparably associated with a claim to truth. If it is the Word of God that is proclaimed, it cannot but be truth..." (*Bahá'í Studies Review*, Volume 9, 1999, p. 17). George Townshend concludes *Christ and Bahá'u'lláh* with the following urgent plea:

The Bahá'í Faith today offers the Christian Church with the most tremendous challenge ever offered them in their long history: a challenge, and an opportunity. It is the plain duty of every earnest Christian in this illumined Age to investigate for himself with an open and fearless mind the purpose and the teachings of this Faith and to determine whether the collective centre for all the constructive forces for this time be not the Messenger from God, Bahá'u'lláh, He and no other... (p. 116).

And the first of McLean's "Seven Criteria of Truth," gleaned from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, is this: "Truth is expressed in its highest and purest form as divine revelation" (*Dimensions*, p. 40).

Another understanding is that it cannot apply solely to religion, for Bahá'u'lláh enjoined people to “look into *all things* with a searching eye” (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 249, emphasis added). In the Tablet of *Tarázát* (Ornaments), revealed around 1889 and partly in response to the largely erroneous reports about Him appearing in newspapers, He enjoined journalists to “enquire into situations as much as possible and ascertain the facts, then set them down in writing” (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 40): their responsibility is to mirror the truth objectively. Likewise in the case of Assembly consultations, the facts in a case that requires a decision must be presented before the spiritual principles involved in that situation are found and discussed (Moojan Momen, *Buddhism and the Bahá'í Faith*, p. 80). In both these instances, one secular and the other spiritual, “Truth is verifiable” (*Dimensions in Spirituality*, p. 40). It could equally well be argued that Divine Revelation is itself the lens through which we apprehend and learn from reality (the physical world reflecting and disclosing attributes of the Divine) and understand the purpose of human life (to know, love and worship that transcendent Divinity). Of His own Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh stated: “Peerless is this Day, for it is as the eye to past ages and centuries, and as a light unto the darkness of the times” (*The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 79): His Revelation gives both a perspective of history as a single, God-guided process (in Bahá'í terms, progressive revelation) and an epistemology for making sense of a humanity whose development is analogous to that of an individual human being now coming of age.

What precisely does the adjective “independent” denote? Autonomous? Free of preconceptions, prejudices or even inhibitions? Unfettered (the adjective used by Shoghi Effendi)? The latter adjective implies that the inquirer should have full access to accurate information about the Faith while he or she is investigating it, such as might be found in feature articles in newspapers and magazines, on Internet websites or in books that provide information on religion.

“Investigation,” on the other hand, implies a thorough study, analysis, questioning, evaluation or sifting of evidence of a phenomenon with a view to arriving at some kind of conclusion as to its validity. The Bahá'í Faith itself is described by the Guardian as “scientific in its method,” which would be consonant with the process of investigation - corresponding to what McLean terms “the facts and values of truth” (*Dimensions*, p. 40) - undertaken by both individuals and Spiritual Assemblies in, for instance, the role of the latter as decision-making bodies. One of the spiritual requirements of the procedure for these consultations is laid down by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as follows: “They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden” (*Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, p. 43).

In answer to Pilate's perennial question, “What is truth?” (John 18:38), the Bahá'í could reply by quoting part of Christ's Sermon on the Mount: “Seek, and ye shall find” (Matthew 7:7). Possessed of the “Most Great Infallibility” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 36-7), the Manifestations of God are Themselves “the truth” (John 14:6). By recognising Them after a process of investigation that serves to purify preconceptions (the superiority of one belief system or ideology to all others), one can be said to have attained truth in its “highest and purest form” (McLean,

*Dimensions*, p. 40). One is then required to translate this recognition into action by observing the Manifestation's "commandments and prohibitions" (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 19). These inseparable twin duties of recognition and obedience are the truth that every individual has been created and divinely gifted to achieve: every individual has the capacity to recognise God in the Person of His Manifestations; if people do so by independently investigating Their claims and teachings, they will, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, find themselves united (*Paris Talks*, p. 129). In a talk at the Baptist Temple in Philadelphia on June 9th, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

If the nations of the world investigate reality, they will agree and become united. Many people and sects in Persia have sought reality through the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh. They have become united and now live in a state of agreement and love; among them there is no longer the least trace of enmity and strife (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 180).

Bahá'u'lláh makes clear that "every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, the Glorified" (*Gleanings*, p. 142). The independent investigation of truth (whether of religion or anything else) is first and foremost a process of spiritualisation. It is always relative to, and dependent on, the individual seeker and the degree of their "earnest striving... longing desire... [and] passionate devotion" (*Gleanings*, p. 267) to ascertaining truth. It is, or should be, an active and ongoing process: though "there is an absolute truth, our understanding of it is relative" (McLean, *Dimensions*, p. 40). "There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the Writings, the more truths we can find in Them, the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous," observes Shoghi Effendi (*Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, p. 11). And it serves to unite different people when they come to appreciate that, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "truth is one." This basic ethical oneness to which He referred is enunciated variously but consistently in the Golden Rule - we should treat others the way we ourselves would wish to be treated - and in the sanctity of human life. At both an individual and collective level, it enshrines justice, respectively embodied in using our God-endowed potential to see with our own eyes and to think for ourselves and thereby achieving unity in diversity, the watchword of the Bahá'í Faith: "The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity amongst men" (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 67).

### **The Need for Detachment**

Detachment is necessary for a proper investigation of the validity of religions: "Purge your sight, that ye may perceive [the glory of God's Cause] with your own eyes, and depend not on the sight of any one except your self, for God hath not burdened any soul beyond its power" (*Gleanings*, pp. 106-7). This detachment is evident in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's impartial discourses on the civilising and constructive power of religion in many of His Western addresses, in which He sought to dismantle religious and inter-denominational sectarianism, as well as in His outlines of the lives of Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh to illustrate Their unique educative influence in *Some Answered Questions*; at one point He says:

Muhammad was reared among these [Arab] tribes, and after enduring thirteen years of persecution from them, He fled [to Medina]. But this people did not cease to oppress; they united to exterminate Him and all His followers. It was under such circumstances that Muhammad was forced to take up arms. This is the truth: personally, we are not bigoted, and do not wish to defend Him, but we are just, and we say what is just. Look at it with justice... (p. 20).

How, though, can any seeker *entirely* leave behind their so-called baggage when investigating the Bahá'í Faith? The assumption often seems to be that such baggage is nearly always deleterious to both the person's search and the adapting of their lifestyle to the Faith they have chosen. Yet scholars, for example, can bring their own specialist disciplines to bear in advancing an understanding of the Bahá'í Faith in relation to such topics as political science, anthropology/sociology, psychology/education, economics, linguistics, English literature, science, philosophy, law and history (*The Bahá'í Studies Review* Volume 3, 1994, pp. 91-4). Of course, one does not have to be a qualified or professional theologian to discuss or write about religion: "In contrast to most institutionalized religions, the Bahá'í Faith teaches that theology is logical and that we should examine our religious beliefs with the same rational faculties and rigorous standards with which we probe the phenomenal world. From such a view questioning is not deemed heresy but is, rather, an essential tool for acquiring belief" (John Hatcher, *The Purpose of Physical Reality*, p. 3).

What has come to be known as "The Tablet of the True Seeker" (*Gleanings*, pp. 264-70) appears in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (the Book of Certitude), Bahá'u'lláh's expository response to four questions posed by the Báb's maternal uncle, Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muhammad, concerning Shi'ih eschatology and the veracity of his martyred nephew's Divinity. The demands and rewards of this quest - where the seeker ultimately reaches the City of Certitude or Word of God - form a key component of Bahá'í spirituality. (For a discussion of the theological significance of this latter term, see Michael Sours's *Without Syllable or Sound*, pp. 16-40, wherein he stresses the Word's transhistorical and transformative potency and the importance of detached investigation of Scripture as a prerequisite of the search. See also Adib Taherzadeh's *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh Volume One: Baghdad, 1853-63*, pp. 18-44.) Related to the principle or methodology of investigation is this statement by Shoghi Effendi:

To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation must... remain the first obligation and the object of the constant endeavor of each one of its loyal adherents... We can... derive fresh inspiration and added sustenance as we labour for the propagation of His Faith through a clearer apprehension of the truths it enshrines and the principles on which it is based (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 100).

Is the principle still operative once a person declares and becomes involved in the community's events and obedient to its administration? Or is there too often a tacit assumption that no further investigation or search is required since "I now possess 'all truth'" (John 16:13)? For, having recognised Bahá'u'lláh as God's Vicegerent for this age, the seeker thereby reaches "this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory" (*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 19), after which he or she must "observe every ordinance of Him is the Desire of the world" (ibid). The words "constant endeavour" in the above quotation from Shoghi Effendi clearly rule out any complacency about understanding the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's "stupendous Revelation." For those preparing to teach, the Guardian stipulated that they "must devote special attention to the investigation of those institutions and circumstances that are directly connected with the origin and birth of their Faith, with the station claimed by its Forerunner [the Báb], and with the laws revealed by its Author (*The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 41), as well as striving "to obtain a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islam," its parent religion, and to study the Qur'án. From this, it can be inferred that passivity, intellectual or otherwise, runs totally counter to the spirit of the Bahá'í religion.

Is it not much easier "to believe in," for instance, the oneness and unity of religions *without* having to independently investigate the lives of their Founders, teachings and histories so as to validate such a belief? It would appear to be relatively easy to acknowledge this "central tenet" of the Bahá'í Faith (*The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 166) at a purely intellectual level, but not so straightforward to verify it, as it usually requires considerable patience: Pilate famously did not wait for the reply to his question (John 18:38) from Christ's "truth-speaking... mouth" (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 14). Ironically, truth in its purest form stood right before him, awaiting sentence. In the first of *The Seven Valleys*, that of Search (*talab*), one must ride the steed of patience in the diligent quest for the soul's Beloved (*The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys*, p. 5). For some, investigating the Faith and recognising Bahá'u'lláh may take years, while for others it may be weeks or even days.

Bahá'u'lláh suggested an active role for the inquirer in relation to his or her religious search when He stated to Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muhammad, who subsequently became a believer:

If thou wilt observe *with discriminating eyes*, thou wilt behold Them [the Manifestations of God] all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith (*Gleanings*, p. 52, emphasis added).

As Gary L. Matthew constantly makes clear in the second half of *He Cometh With Clouds* (George Ronald, 1996), his "love letter to all who love the Lord Christ and who cherish a belief in His Second Coming," Bahá'u'lláh does not ask us to accept Him blindly, but to test the proofs or "fruits" of His prophetic station and His predictions so as to ascertain whether they are true, a criterion found in the New Testament concerning false prophets or messiahs (e.g. Matthew 7:15:20).

Is it adequate to investigate the Faith by just reading about it? Or is the affective or experiential principle equally or more important? Could the Faith's at best sporadic expansion in Western Europe and North America be attributed to an imbalance in these twin teaching strategies? Or is this primary principle of investigation given enough emphasis in the first place? In two sample surveys conducted in New York (1953) and in Los Angeles and the United Kingdom (1979) and adapted and published in sociologist Peter Smith's *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions* (Cambridge University Press, p. 189), 3.4% of the respondents in Los Angeles and 2.6% in the United Kingdom found the principle of the independent investigation of truth an initially attractive element of the Bahá'í Faith. Smith comments:

Only a few individuals listed the presumed lack of dogma and the Bahá'í doctrine of the independent investigation of truth, a paucity which may possibly indicate that absence of epistemological individualism once so prominent in the Western Bahá'í communities (p. 190).

Does the "illiberal" ethos (Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium*, p. 201) now apparently characterising many Bahá'í communities not seriously undermine its first teaching, the "one developed to a great extent by 'Abdul-Baha" (*Dimensions*, p. 3) and the one capable of uniting people long divided by man-made theological differences and religious leaders' "erroneous and conflicting interpretations of the pronouncements of the Prophets of God" (*Peace: More Than An End To War*, p. 7)? 'Abdu'l-Bahá lovingly urged His audiences to go back and read for themselves their own and other Holy Books (the Old and New Testaments and the Qur'án) from which their present beliefs and sacerdotal institutions were in large measure originally derived, with this guideline: "It is easy to read the Holy Scriptures, but it is only with a clean heart and a pure mind that one may understand their true meaning" (*Paris Talks*, pp. 56-7). (This "clean heart" and "pure mind" constitute detachment.) These talks may be read in context as sensitive challenges designed to stimulate His Western audiences to start pondering why they believed as they did and as open invitations to consider fairly the novel claims of His Father's Faith. He pointed out in relation to Christ's ministry:

Had they [the Pharisees] investigated sincerely for themselves, they would surely have believed in Him, respected Him and bowed before Him in reverence. They would have considered His manifestation the greatest bestowal upon mankind. They would have accepted Him as the very Savior of man; but alas, they were veiled, they held to imitations of ancestral beliefs and hearsay and did not investigate the truth of Christ (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 62).

Near the end of His (Arabic) Tablet to the exemplary believer and teacher, Ahmad, Bahá'u'lláh, Who some two years before in 1863 had declared Himself to be *Man-yuzihirhu'lláh* ("He Whom God Shall Make Manifest") promised by the Báb, observed that "the people [Bábís] are wandering in the paths of delusion, bereft of

discernment to see God with their own eyes, or hear His melody with their own ears.” This situation is archetypal: veiled by “superstitions” or literal interpretations and imaginary expectations of Scripture and stultified by what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called “imitations of ancestral traditions and hearsay,” people in every religious Dispensation refuse to investigate the truth - the Manifestation and His Revelation - and continue to unquestioningly follow their clergies. In the incisive words of Joshua:

“Religious leaders constantly fall into the pitfall of wanting to control religion and people’s practice of religion, and not allowing people to think for themselves for fear of losing control over them” (*Joshua*, p. 75).

### **An Opportunity for Everyone**

For Bahá’ís and non-Bahá’ís alike, the opportunity is there to discover the “innumerable pearls of great price, of surpassing luster” concealed in the ocean of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation; this discovery, though, will be “in proportion to the eagerness of [their] search and the efforts [they themselves] exert” (*Gleanings*, p. 326).

The crucial importance of such investigation by everyone as a means to exemplifying justice, “the best-beloved of all things” in God’s sight, eliminating man-made prejudices and insularities and thereafter achieving unity is spelt out thus by ‘Abdul-Bahá:

Reality or truth is one, yet there are many religious beliefs, denominations, creeds and differing opinions in the world today. Why should these differences exist? Because they do not investigate and examine the fundamental unity, which is one and unchangeable. If they seek reality itself, they will agree and be united; for reality is indivisible and not multiple. It is evident, therefore, that there is nothing of greater importance to mankind than the investigation of truth (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 62-3).

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