

Perspectives on the Inseparable Twin Duties Prescribed in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* by Eamonn Moane

Abstract

The teachings of the world's religious traditions, as interpreted over time, differ in the relative importance they place on faith versus good works, the grace of God versus human strivings, and their own exclusivity, in the scheme of salvation. The Bahá'í teachings state that to attain salvation in this day, both recognition of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, the Manifestation of God for today, and obedience to His laws are inseparable twin duties, neither of which is acceptable without the other. However, recognition is more important than deeds because it is the foundation of all else. Deeds are acceptable to the extent that they are motivated by spiritual detachment and purity. Faith and recognition, and the effect of deeds, depend on the grace and acceptance of God, Who in turn rewards the individual for his or her effort. Recognition and salvation are everlasting processes of spiritual development. The Bahá'í Revelation offers the most complete means of salvation for the individual and for the world, and is the divine standard by which the fate of every person is determined.

Introduction

The question of what is required for the individual to ensure his or her spiritual 'salvation' in this life and in the next is a fundamental issue in religion. Salvation means saving one's immortal soul, the real self, from one's lower nature, attachment to the material world and the condition of sin, that is, 'Hell', and attaining a higher state of spiritual awareness in this life, and eternal life or 'Heaven' after death.

The world's religious traditions generally teach that there are two main requirements for salvation: faith and good works. Faith is conscious belief, with assurance and conviction, in the station of the Founder of the religion and His teachings as the divine standard for each individual. Good works follow from faith and recognition, and result from obedience to His laws and teachings. However, while the individual's faith and good works result partly from personal striving, such strivings depend primarily on the grace of God; the individual cannot 'earn' this grace through their own unaided efforts.

Faith has generally been regarded as more fundamental and important than works, because it involves the individual, of his or

her own conscious free will, striving to find, and accepting the truth about, God and His Will. It is an inner spiritual and psychological condition or orientation, resulting from a capacity and propensity to accept the divine truth as a result of the image of God engraved on the individual soul. Works follow from, and are the fruit of, faith, and are effective only to the extent that they are based on faith, the love of God, and purity of motive, rather than self-interest.

However, the religious traditions differ in their emphasis on the relative importance of the above requirements for salvation. Christianity, particularly its Lutheran and evangelical traditions, has emphasised the primacy of faith in Christ alone through the grace of God, while Judaism and Islam have attached relatively more importance to good works and individual efforts. The Bahá'í teachings clearly state that the individual's first duty is to recognise the station of Bahá'u'lláh, and that without this the individual has gone astray and his or her good deeds fall short. The individual's second duty is observance of Bahá'u'lláh's laws and teachings, and without this, recognition is not acceptable. God's grace is essential for recognition, good deeds and salvation, but that grace is received through the individual's faith and deeds.

This paper aims to survey these particular issues, primarily in the light of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (the Most Holy Book). It does not deal with the wider aspects of the Bahá'í teachings on the divine redemptive scheme of progressive revelation.

Salvation in Previous Religions

Hinduism affirms the primacy of faith in the power of the Manifestations of God (*avatars*) to guide one to ultimate self-realisation. The *Bhagavad Gita* states: 'without faith, whatever offering or gift is made or work done or penance performed, it is reckoned "not being" both now and hereafter.'¹ Buddhism teaches that the practice of the doctrine (*Dharma*) is necessary for salvation, but this can be achieved only through recognition of the Buddha and faith in the power of His teachings as the perfect path to salvation.

Judaism teaches that faith in and love for the one monotheistic God, Who revealed Himself to His 'Chosen People,' is essential for salvation. Obedience to the Law is also necessary because carrying out the Law and the commandments makes the

individual holy before God. However, faith is at the centre of a righteous life. The righteous should live by his faith a life of good deeds, and not merely profess faith: 'But the just (righteous) shall live by his faith'² and also: 'In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy path.'³

Christianity appears to emphasise the primacy of faith, with Christ stating: 'He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.'⁴ Yet deeds are also essential: 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.'⁵ Individual striving will also be rewarded: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'⁶

In its early history, Christianity developed the most exclusivist claim as the only path to salvation, based on Christ's saying: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.'⁷ Its theologians constructed the doctrine of the Fall of man, through Original Sin,⁸ from an 'original state of holiness and justice.'⁹ Man's justification (the forgiveness of sin and freedom from its power) and salvation came only by God incarnating Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ, and by Christ making atonement for the sins of the world by His crucifixion and bodily resurrection. Faith, good works and salvation result mainly from the unmerited grace of God; unaided by grace, a person cannot earn salvation.

Christianity's understanding of St Paul's very subtle teachings on faith and works over-emphasised his statements that faith in Christ through grace is essential for salvation, and that good works are mere human efforts that alone cannot lead to salvation. Paul said: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of your selves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.'¹⁰ However, the theme of Romans 6 is the necessity of freeing ourselves from sin, with Paul asking: 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?'¹¹ Indeed, James, who became head of the church at Jerusalem, states: 'For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.'¹²

The relative importance and nature of faith and works in human justification became a fundamental point of contention between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth-century

Reformation. Luther's doctrine of *Sola Fide* taught that one was justified by faith alone, by God's grace alone through the atonement of Christ. This saving faith is a faith of obedience that produces good works because of what it is. The Roman Catholic Church also stressed the importance of works, including participation in its own sacraments and ceremonies as channels of God's sanctifying grace, and one's own efforts and cooperation, clarifying that they added to this justification. However, the 1998 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* issued by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church arrived at a consensus in fundamental truths of the doctrine of justification. Both churches agreed that justification comes by God's grace through faith in Christ. The person's earning or merit of salvation comes from the gift of the unmerited grace of God, not from their own innate human abilities. There is no possibility of earning grace. However, without the renewal of one's way of life and the good works that follow from justification, faith does not exist. The document states:

In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God ... By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works ...

We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation. We confess together that good works – a Christian life lived in faith, hope and love – following justification are its fruits.

The Catholic Church's controversial document, *Dominus Iesus*, issued in 2000, reiterated its claim to represent the fullness of the means of salvation. The one Church of Jesus Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church, and other churches derive their grace from its grace and truth. The document rejected the idea that one religion is as good as another and that Christ is only 'one way' of salvation. The sacred writings of non-Christian religions often reflect a ray of the Divine Truth, receiving from the grace of Christ the good they contain. Moreover, the saving grace of God can come to individuals 'in ways known to God.'

Dominus Iesus is an unequivocal but charitable statement by the Catholic Church, the world's largest religious denomination, of its doctrines and beliefs in this vital area, which, it argues, is essential for genuine inter-religious dialogue. The following passage provoked strong reactions from commentators within and without the Church. Yet from a Bahá'í perspective, if one substitutes the name Bahá'u'lláh for Christ, and the Bahá'í Faith for the Church, its theology – that there is one divinely ordained, most complete path to salvation – rings true in a profound way:

With the coming of the Saviour Jesus Christ, God has willed that the Church founded by Him be the instrument of the salvation of all humanity. This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way ... the belief that one religion is as good as another. If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation. However, all the children of the Church should nevertheless remember that their exalted condition results, not from their own merits, but from the grace of Christ. If they fail to respond in thought, word, and deed to that grace, not only shall they not be saved, but they shall be more severely judged.¹³

Islam claims to be the most complete but not the only path to salvation. It teaches that man is saved by faith in, and obedience to, Muhammad, the Bearer of the most exalted Revelation so far. Salvation extends to all believers in a monotheistic religion of the Book who do right:

It is He Who hath sent His Apostle with 'the Guidance' and the religion of truth, that He may exalt it above every religion ... Muhammad is the Apostle of God ... To such of them as believe and do the things that are right hath God promised forgiveness and a noble recompense.¹⁴

Verily, they who believe [Muslims], and they who follow the Jewish religion, and the Christians, and the

Sabeites – whoever of these believeth in God and the last day, and doeth that which is right, shall have their reward with their Lord ...¹⁵

The individual depends on the grace of God: ‘He guideth whom He will into the right way.’¹⁶ Yet their efforts will be rewarded by the grace and justice of God: ‘And whoso maketh efforts for Us, in Our ways will we guide them: for God is assuredly with those who do righteous deeds.’¹⁷

Muslims tend to emphasise right action while Christians tend to focus on right belief. Muslims nevertheless believe that good deeds can ‘earn’ merit and salvation only if one has faith. Shi’ih Islam, within which the Bábí Faith originated, placed more emphasis on recognising the right Leader after Muhammad, i.e. the Imams, and on faith in them. Sunni Islam tended to downplay the station of Muhammad and to emphasise good deeds.

The Bábí Faith, the primary purpose of which was to prepare the way for the coming of Bahá’u’lláh, affirms the importance of both faith and deeds. The Báb states: ‘man’s highest station, however, is attained through faith in God in every Dispensation and by acceptance of what hath been revealed by Him ...’¹⁸ The Báb also emphasises the priority of faith over deeds:

deeds are secondary to faith in Him and certitude in His Reality.¹⁹

We are cognizant of thy righteous deeds, though they shall avail thee nothing; for the whole object of such righteousness is but recognition of God, thy Lord, and undoubted faith in the Words revealed by Him.²⁰

The Bahá’í Faith: The Inseparable Twin Duties of Recognition and Obedience

The human race has not fallen from an original state of perfection, but has been guided forward by successive Manifestations of God Who have enabled human beings, collectively and individually, to evolve spiritually, manifest Their potential, and attain salvation. The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* opens by prescribing the inseparable twin duties that are necessary for salvation in this day. The first duty, and the foundation of everything else, without which one has ‘gone astray,’ is recognition, based on faith, of Bahá’u’lláh’s station as

the representative of the Godhead for today. The second duty is observing His laws and ordinances, the standard for good deeds:

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other.²¹

In other Writings also, Bahá'u'lláh emphasises that these inseparable twin duties of faith and deeds are inextricably linked. He states that 'the essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds'²² and that 'the essence of religion is to testify unto that which the Lord hath revealed, and follow that which He hath ordained in His mighty Book.'²³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá similarly states that: 'by faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds.'²⁴

Indeed, the first sentence of the short obligatory prayer sums up the purpose of one's life, to recognise God and to worship Him through deeds:

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee ...²⁵

In *Tablets revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh emphasises that true recognition cannot be complete without obedience to the laws of the *Aqdas*:

True belief in God and recognition of Him cannot be complete save by acceptance of that which he hath revealed and by observance of whatsoever hath been decreed by Him and set down in the Book by the Pen of Glory.²⁶

For man's knowledge of God cannot develop fully and adequately save by observing whatsoever hath been ordained by Him and is set forth in His heavenly Book. ²⁷

In other Writings, Bahá'u'lláh talks about triple duties – recognition, followed by steadfastness, and then observance of His laws.²⁸

Essentially, therefore, constancy in belief, observing the laws and practising good deeds complete the process of recognising Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God, and hence of knowing God.

Primacy of Faith and Recognition

Recognition is an interior level of spiritual understanding and perception, an intuitive experiential knowledge, which goes beyond the rational process. It follows from our faith and striving, and is a response to the image of God engraved on our soul. Recognition is more important than deeds, for 'whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed.'²⁹ Bahá'u'lláh also states that 'Man's actions are acceptable after his having recognised the Manifestation,'³⁰ and that 'Unless one recognise God and love Him, his cry shall not be heard by God in this day.'³¹

But does the above not appear unjust? Why are good deeds alone not sufficient? 'Abdu'l-Bahá elaborated on the meaning of the *Aqdas* verse about going astray, saying that the conscious knowledge (recognition) of God is the foundation of truly good deeds, spiritual development and salvation, and that without this awareness, good deeds do not have complete effect:

This blessed verse means that the foundation of success and salvation is the knowledge of God, and that the results of the knowledge of God are the good actions which are the fruits of faith.

If man has not this knowledge, he will be separated from God, and when this separation exists, good actions have not complete effect. This verse does not mean that the souls separated from God are equal, whether they perform good or bad actions. It signifies only that the foundation is

to know God, and the good actions result from this knowledge ...

Therefore, the blessed verse means that good actions alone, without the knowledge of God, cannot be the cause of eternal salvation, everlasting success, and prosperity, and entrance into the Kingdom of God.³²

It appears that good deeds must be spiritually pure and motivated by faith. Deeds performed outside of pure-hearted recognition and spirituality may appear to be, and may well be, good, but they fall short of the ultimate ideal divine standard. Recognition of Bahá'u'lláh is conducive to the highest standard of righteousness because His teachings represent the Will of God for this mature stage of human evolution. Without recognising Him, it is simply not possible to achieve this standard.

In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh elaborates on how recognition leads to spiritual rebirth and the path to salvation:

Whosoever in every dispensation is born of the Spirit and is quickened by the breath of the Manifestation of Holiness, he verily is of those that have attained unto 'life' and 'resurrection' and have entered into the 'paradise' of the love of God. And whosoever is not of them, is condemned to 'death' and 'deprivation,' to the 'fire' of unbelief, and to the 'wrath' of God.³³

An important theme in Bahá'u'lláh's Writings is that as each person has been endowed with the capacity to recognise God, he or she is responsible for their own faith and will be called to account if they fail to recognise Him because they merely followed everybody else:

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.³⁴

Spiritual Prerequisites for Recognition

But what leads the individual to recognise the station of Bahá'u'lláh? It appears to be primarily a pure-hearted search for the Divine Truth. In the *Íqan*, Bahá'u'lláh elaborates that purity of heart and detachment from all things are fundamental prerequisites for recognition:

No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth ...

no man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious ... unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets.³⁵

God wishes to distinguish between those who seek Him as a result of their own efforts, using their God-given powers, and those who do not:

'If God had pleased He had surely made all men one people.' His purpose, however, is to enable the pure in spirit and the detached in heart to ascend, by virtue of their own innate powers, unto the shores of the Most Great Ocean, that thereby they who seek the Beauty of the All-Glorious may be distinguished and separated from the wayward and perverse.³⁶

Bahá'u'lláh explains how God tests to distinguish the good from the bad, by the outward powerlessness of the Manifestation of God,³⁷ and by the use of symbolic language in previous Scriptures foretelling His coming.³⁸ He frequently refers to men's idle fancies and vain imaginings, evil passions and corrupt desires, preventing them from recognising God.

Purpose and Nature of Bahá'u'lláh's Laws

The laws, ordinances and principles prescribed in the *Aqdas* aim to bring about a transformation in consciousness, attitude and behaviour for the individual and society, rather than a pattern of outward obedience to a mass of detailed laws and legalistic rituals. They make known the Divine Will and the path to holiness, and are the spiritual foundation and essential practical means by which the individual and society should live. For this reason, Bahá'u'lláh significantly states that the ordinances of God 'constitute the fruits of the divine Tree.'³⁹ The laws of the *Aqdas* are far more than a mere code of laws:

Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of my loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures ... Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.⁴⁰

Bahá'u'lláh describes His laws, significantly, as 'the water of Life to the followers of every faith'⁴¹ and 'the chalice of salvation.'⁴² His ordinances 'constitute the mightiest stronghold for the protection of the world and the safeguarding of its peoples.'⁴³ Shoghi Effendi stated that the *Aqdas* 'may well be regarded as ... the Charter of His [Bahá'u'lláh's] New World Order.'⁴⁴

In vehement language, Bahá'u'lláh rejects the idea that people should have the 'liberty' to decide their own moral life, because the 'pettiness' of their unguided minds leads them to seek harm and reject the good. True liberty, and hence salvation, consists, paradoxically, in submission to His commandments and 'complete servitude unto God':

That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker. Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness.

Regard men as a flock of sheep that need a shepherd for their protection ...

Say: True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it ... The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth.⁴⁵

Those from a Christian – particularly Protestant – background are unused to the emphasis on the ‘Law’ in Judaism, Islam and the Bahá’í Faith. Indeed, the relative lack of emphasis on the Law in Christianity is puzzling. Christ did abrogate much of the Mosaic Law, perhaps as an antidote to the overly legalistic, rabbinical outlook of the Judaism of His time. It was also in part a man-made development, due to over-emphasising St Paul’s stress on faith, rather than good works, as the basis of salvation. Yet Christ said to the crowds: ‘Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.’⁴⁶ Were the laws of the Old Testament, modified in accordance with progressive revelation, intended to continue in the Christian Dispensation, as they did in Islam? Whatever the answer, Bahá’u’lláh’s laws are a divinely ordained balance between the harshness of the Old Testament and *Qur’anic* law, on the one hand, and the relative absence of such laws in Christianity’s development, on the other.

Good Deeds Depend on God’s Acceptance

Bahá’u’lláh makes the startling statement that, from this earthly life, ‘good deeds alone shall endure.’⁴⁷ However, He stresses that the effect of our good deeds depends on the grace and acceptance of God. The Naw-Rúz prayer states:

Make known this Thy station, O my God, unto Thy servants, that they may be made aware that the excellence of all things is dependent upon Thy bidding and Thy word, and the virtue of every act is conditioned by Thy leave and the good-pleasure of Thy will, and may recognize that the reins of men’s doings are within the grasp of Thine acceptance and Thy commandment.⁴⁸

He further states: 'should the fragrance of My good pleasure not be inhaled from him, his works would never be acceptable unto God ... Say: The very life of all deeds is My good pleasure and all things depend on Mine acceptance.'⁴⁹

But how can our deeds attain the 'good pleasure' of God and be 'accepted?' It seems that there are three essential conditions. The first is absolute, unqualified recognition of God, which means recognizing that He does what He wills and shall not be asked why:

Blessed is the man that hath acknowledged his belief in God and in His signs, and recognized that 'He shall not be asked of His doings'. Such a recognition hath been made by God the ornament of every belief and its very foundation. Upon it must depend the acceptance of every goodly deed ... Such is the teaching which God bestoweth on you, a teaching that will deliver you from all manner of doubt and perplexity, and enable you to attain unto salvation in both this world and in the next.⁵⁰

In a later Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh similarly states that 'full recognition cannot be obtained save by faith in the blessed words: "He doeth whatever He willeth."⁵¹ The second condition seems to be love for God as the motive for obedience to His laws: 'Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty.'⁵² The third condition appears to be absolute detachment and purity of motive in one's worship and deeds. The Báb states that we should worship God with no thought of reward or punishment: 'That which is worthy of His Essence is to worship Him for His sake, without fear of fire, or hope of paradise.'⁵³ In His farewell address to the Letters of the Living, He said: 'The time is come when naught but the purest motive, supported by deeds of stainless purity, can ascend to the throne of the Most High and be acceptable unto Him.'⁵⁴ Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us in the Hidden Words:

O Children of Adam! Holy words and pure and goodly deeds ascend unto the heaven of celestial glory. Strive that your deeds may be cleansed from the dust of self and hypocrisy and find favour at the court of glory; for ere long the assayers of mankind shall, in the holy presence of the

Adored One, accept naught but absolute virtue and deeds of stainless purity ...⁵⁵

While, of course, the Justice of God requires a Divine scheme of reward and punishment for one's deeds, Bahá'u'lláh significantly states: 'unto them that are rid of all attachments a deed is, verily, its own reward.'⁵⁶ Only then will one's deeds attain the 'good pleasure' of God, and be 'accepted' by Him. Only then might the following verse of Bahá'u'lláh apply: 'He whose deeds attain unto God's good pleasure is assuredly of the people of Bahá and is remembered before His throne.'⁵⁷

The Central Role of the Grace and Mercy of God

The infinite grace and mercy of God is a central theme throughout Bahá'u'lláh's Writings. The individual's unique capacity to know God is a result of the grace and mercy of God, and is 'the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.'⁵⁸ The Manifestations of God are 'the channels of God's all-pervasive grace,'⁵⁹ and They appear 'as a token of His mercy.'⁶⁰ Similarly, our recognition God's Manifestation depends on His grace. Bahá'u'lláh states: 'Glorified is He Who guideth whomsoever He pleaseth unto His path,'⁶¹ and that 'Whosoever turneth his face towards Thee doeth so by Thy grace.'⁶²

However, each of us has different spiritual capacities. Bahá'u'lláh states: 'The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle.'⁶³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that 'the difference of station among mankind is not blameworthy, but the loss of faith and assurance is blameworthy.'⁶⁴ He has further stated that 'the progress of man's spirit in the divine world ... is through the bounty and grace of the Lord alone ... ⁶⁵ While Divine justice demands that humanity suffers for its wrongdoings, yet 'God's hidden and most loving providence, however, hath, through both visible and invisible agencies, protected and will continue to protect it from the penalty of its wickedness.'⁶⁶

A theme of the *Aqdas* is that its laws and ordinances are a mercy from God for our own good:

Consider the mercy of God and His gifts. He enjoineth upon you that which shall profit you, though He Himself can well dispense with all creatures.⁶⁷

Dynamic Concept of Recognition, Obedience and Salvation

One crucial aspect of salvation given more emphasis in the Bahá'í teachings compared to previous religions is that of 'salvation as motion.'⁶⁸ Recognition and salvation are ever-evolving processes, rather than an event or static state in which one either is or is not. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that this follows from the very nature of God's creation:

Know that nothing which exists remains in a state of repose – that is to say, all things are in motion ... this state of motion is said to be essential – that is, natural; it cannot be separated from things because it is their essential requirement ...⁶⁹

Both before and after putting off this material form, there is progress in perfection but not in state.⁷⁰

Hence salvation is a never-ending process of spiritual development as a result of conscious striving in both this life and the next. It is a dynamic, ever-changing spiritual condition, not a static condition awaiting us after death. There is no point of 'final' salvation in either world. The same applies to recognition. It is a continuous process of independently investigating the truth of one's faith, deepening our understanding of it, and enhancing our degree of recognition of Bahá'u'lláh's station. It is not just a one-time act of 'accepting,' or 'declaring' our belief in, Him. The individual should continually advance spiritually through the teachings of the Manifestation, but his or her success depends on their own efforts (made possible by the grace of God):

Through the Teachings of this Day Star of Truth every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed.⁷¹

Success or failure, gain or loss, must, therefore, depend upon man's own exertions. The more he striveth, the greater will be his progress.⁷²

The Salvation of Humankind

As the Bahá'í Faith is the eschatological fulfilment of all previous religions, its mission is the salvation of the human race by establishing its organic and spiritual unity, and thereby the Kingdom of God on earth. Shoghi Effendi referred to Bahá'u'lláh as the 'Redeemer of the human race.'⁷³ Bahá'u'lláh addresses Pope Pius IX:

Verily, He [Jesus] said: 'Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.' In this day, however, We say: 'Come ye after Me, that We may make you to become the quickeners of mankind.'⁷⁴

Even more than in previous religions, the Bahá'í concept of salvation extends to humanity at large. Bahá'u'lláh states that 'All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.'⁷⁵ The Bahá'í achieves his or her own salvation by working for the salvation of humanity through serving and teaching the Faith. The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are full of exhortations to do this; it is an integral aspect of obedience to His teachings.

In his final 1957 Ridván message, Shoghi Effendi, in a clear reference to the Biblical story of Noah and His Ark of salvation,⁷⁶ wrote that the building up of the Bahá'í Administrative Order

is contributing, unnoticed by a generation forgetful of its God, and already in the shadow of His Visitation, to the building up, slowly but irresistibly, of that Ark of human salvation, ordained as the ultimate haven of a society destined, for the most part, to be submerged by the tidal wave of the abuses and evils which its own perversity has engendered.⁷⁷

He also clearly stated that the essential condition to the ultimate salvation of the world was 'the spiritualisation of the masses, consequent to the recognition of the character, and the acknowledgement of the claims, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.'⁷⁸

Salvation of Individual Bahá'ís not Guaranteed

The high station that Bahá'u'lláh says is possible for His true followers to attain should not lull any Bahá'í into a false sense of superiority or complacency. The spiritual station of any individual results from a combination of the grace of God, the individual's capacity, their striving, and the circumstances of their life, and is inscrutable to all save God. Being enabled to recognise Bahá'u'lláh is a tremendous privilege and bounty that brings an awesome obligation and responsibility to live up to His standards and to serve and promote His Cause. His writings are clear that salvation requires both ceaseless effort and the grace and mercy of God. A believer can fail to fulfil his or her potential and can lose their faith.

Bahá'u'lláh warns that the true seeker 'must never seek to exalt himself above anyone, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory,'⁷⁹ and that 'He should forgive the sinful, and never despise his low estate, for none knoweth what his own end shall be.'⁸⁰ In the Hidden Words, He also strongly warns:

O Son of Being! How couldst thou forget thine own faults and busy thyself with the faults of others? Whoso doeth this is accursed of Me.⁸¹

While Bahá'u'lláh's teachings provide the fullness of the means of salvation for this day, the degree of salvation of each Bahá'í, indeed, of everyone on earth, depends on the life they lead in relation His standards. Esslemont quotes 'Abdu'l-Bahá as follows:

The man who lives the life according to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is already a Bahá'í. On the other hand, a man may call himself a Bahá'í for fifty years and if he does not live the life he is not a Bahá'í.⁸²

In a passage on life after death, Bahá'u'lláh says that the state of the souls of His followers after death 'must depend upon their faith and their conduct.'⁸³

Conclusion

The standard set by God for determining the degree of salvation of every individual is their response, in thought, word and deed, to Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. This applies whether the individual's response is conscious or unconscious, whether they have heard of the Bahá'í Faith or not, whether they have been brought up as Bahá'ís or have found the Faith themselves. Bahá'u'lláh makes the following startling statement in the *Aqdas*:

Say: This is the infallible Balance which the Hand of God is holding, in which all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth are weighed, and their fate determined, if ye be of them that believe and recognise this truth.⁸⁴

The path to salvation is to continuously seek and strive to truly recognise, know and obey God, by recognising the station of Bahá'u'lláh and observing His laws and teachings. Notwithstanding our own efforts, salvation is primarily a bounty given to us as a gift through the grace of God. From that grace, by the justice of God, we may earn our degree of salvation as a result of our own conscious efforts. Our degree of salvation is secured by our faith, whose acceptance by God depends on our obedience and our striving towards righteousness.

Both in this life and in the next, there is a continuum of ever-evolving spiritual conditions. These range from the lowest depths of hell, remoteness from God and the fire of deprivation and remorse, to the highest states of heaven, spiritual joy and nearness to God. After death, there is immortal existence for all, but not necessarily, at least initially, the higher state of entrance into the Kingdom and eternal life.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings clarify, in an extraordinarily clear and compelling manner, the inseparable requirements of both faith and good deeds in the divine plan for individual and collective salvation. His station as the One foretold by previous faiths, Whose mission would be the salvation of all of humankind and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, adds to the power and appeal of His teachings.

Perhaps the above fundamental theological principles of our Faith should be given more emphasis in our own study and deepening of it, and in our teaching work. The Faith is too often

presented in the West as a set of principles about peace, love, unity, equality and tolerance. Bahá'ís may be more inspired in their own lives, and the world may well respond to and respect the Bahá'í Faith better, if its fundamental theological doctrines, including those on the salvation of the individual and the world, are clearly understood, and are presented and defended in a clear and firm, but also wise, tactful and humble, manner.

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