



VOLUME 3

SOLAS

A PUBLICATION OF THE
ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES,
English-speaking Europe, Irish Edition
2003

Community Life

Dawn Staudt on Creating Environments that Enhance Spirituality

Comparative Religion

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Spiritual Footprints in the Sands of Time by Kevin Brogan

Abstract

Viewing the spiritual evolution of humankind, one is struck by the arrival of great Leaders, Who have given birth to great civilisations like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism and others which predate them. Why did They come to us when They did, what was Their message, and what was Their legacy? The present Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh has in a short time brought about revolutionary changes in scientific and technological advancement and more especially in how we relate to each other spiritually, emotionally, culturally and socially. One of the core theological teachings of the Bahá'í Faith is that of progressive revelation, which explains that God sends Messengers at strategic times to renew and add new life to His covenant with humankind. This paper examines this covenantal relationship between God and humankind by investigating the lives and the work of these Luminaries and by examining the common features of each of the dispensations listed above. By examining the societies in which These Messengers lived, how They led Their followers in times of tribulation, Their courageous dedication to God's Revelation, and Their hazardous journeys to bring whole civilisations back to God's covenant, it is hoped that readers may better understand the legacy bestowed on us by Bahá'u'lláh.

Introduction

For some time I have been intrigued by the appearance of the Founders of the great religions at crucial points in history; it is 'through the rise of these Luminaries of God the world is made new, the waters of everlasting life stream forth, the billows of loving-kindness surge, the clouds of grace are gathered, and the breeze of bounty bloweth upon all created things.'¹ I found that the Bahá'í doctrine of Progressive Revelation answered my questions about these 'Luminaries of God.' Their appearance at strategic points in humankind's evolution demonstrate that 'Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, "abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith."² Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, explained it succinctly in his

Summary Statement to the Special UN Committee on Palestine in 1947:

Bahá'ís believe that religious revelation is continuous and progressive and that, from the very beginning of human history, God has periodically sent divine educators to the world to guide mankind. The appearance of these divine educators - Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad and, in our own age, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh - has signified the founding of a new religion, and yet none of these religions is really new; they are stages in the unfoldment of the same religious truth proceeding from the same God. They teach the same, unchanging spiritual principles, and they differ only in their social teachings, which vary according to the needs of the age in which they were revealed.³

On examining what has been recorded of these Messengers in greater detail, one finds common threads running through Their lives and that They seemed to arrive at a low ebb in humankind's existence. Their arrival served to give birth to a rise in both physical and spiritual welfare. An examination of these features is the objective of this paper. Despite the fact that very often the lives of these Leaders are so shrouded in legend and myth as to limit the accuracy of the research, one can still determine some truth. Indeed, the Universal House of Justice, quoting from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, states that: 'We cannot be sure of the authenticity of the scriptures of Buddha and Krishna ... ' (25 November 1950); and in reply to a question as to whether Brahma is 'to be considered as referring to absolute deity' and Krishna 'as the Prophet of the Hindu Religion,' the Guardian's secretary wrote: ' ... such matters, as no reference occurs to them in the [Bahá'í] Teachings, are left for students of history and religion to resolve and clarify' (14 April 1941).⁴ It must also be recognised that there were probably hundreds of these Luminaries, most of Whom are consigned to anonymity. For this reason, I have confined this paper to the eight Messengers listed above.

The Common Features

One of the first features one recognises when examining the Messengers is the pattern of Their lives. Each One lived a relatively normal life like others in Their society. This society was usually in a state of decline and there was some evidence that the civic and religious structures were in disarray. Reports of the time indicated that these Luminaries displayed personalities that manifested intelligence and wisdom beyond Their years as They were growing up. At some time in Their adult lives, They received a call or experienced a revelation or gained some enlightenment which was to change Their lives and launch Them on the road to teaching others. Another central feature was the concept of journey, a leaving of the land of Their birth, which often brought Them great suffering. In many cases, there was also a temptation not to answer the call, whereby the Messenger was urged by a devil or 'evil one' to return to Their former lives and to ignore Their calling. Their teaching encapsulated a central message, which set out to change the adherent of the new Faith and to teach him or her how to relate to God and ultimately to their fellow human beings. Finally, there is evidence that when these Messengers departed from this world, usually a civilisation arose which brought spiritual, social and economic prosperity to the lands which adopted the teachings of the religions They had founded.

In examining the lives of the Messengers of God, it is important first to examine the society into which They came and in some way to try to explain, albeit with scanty information, the milieu in which They grew up.

Setting the Scene

In many or most cases, the societies into which the Messengers of God came were in moral decline, often war-torn and, in some cases, the religion of a previous Dispensation was no longer effectively answering the needs of its followers. Abraham, Whose life is said to date back to a period between 2000-1500 BCE,⁵ is thought to have been a member of a semi-nomadic tribe, living in tents, raising sheep and goats, moving their flocks to different pastures in an area between Mesopotamia and Canaan,⁶ much like the Bedouin tribes do today. It was a time of survival, with the Egyptians building lines of fortresses; in one case, we are told that Abraham went to Canaan to seek survival.⁷ Also, there was some

strife between Abraham's herdsmen and His nephew Lot's herdsmen.⁸ Moses lived in the period from the fourteenth to the tenth century BCE at a time when the Israelites were enslaved by the Egyptians. The story is well-known to us through the Old Testament. He was born to a slave, hidden because there was a decree that all male children should be killed, was found and raised by the Pharaoh's daughter. The plight of the 'people of Israel' was grave and 'they groaned under their bondage and cried out for help and their cry under bondage came up to God.'⁹

In Jesus' time, the Jewish Faith and, more particularly, Mosaic Law were fragmented into different groups like the Pharisees, who believed in cultivating piety through strict and, according to synoptic Gospel accounts, ostentatious observation of the law, the Sadducees, who were strictly conservative and adherents to the law, the Zealots, who urged violent resistance to outsiders (especially the Romans), and the Essenes, who were austere mystics. Following three hundred years of consolidation of Jewish worship and ruthless enforcement of the Mosaic Law, there began persecution, first by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Hellenistic monarch of Syria, and later in 37 BCE, when the Romans invaded. Jesus was born into a very depressed society, and this continued after His death with the extinction of the Jewish nation, the sacking of Jerusalem by the Roman forces under the general, Titus, in 70 CE, and the subsequent dispersal of the Jewish nation after a revolt in 132 CE.

In pre-Mosaic Iran, Zoroaster (the Greek rendering of the Persian name Zarathustra) and His dispensation dated back to between 650 and 1700 BCE. It is thought that He lived in the area on the borders of modern Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. Tradition has it that he was the son of a camel merchant and grew up in a society which practised a number of polytheistic religions. Little is known of this society, as it is difficult to pinpoint accurately the exact time of His presence on earth.

However, five hundred years after the time of Jesus Christ and in a different part of the Middle East, in modern-day Saudi Arabia, Muhammad also was born into a society that had fallen into decay, like that of Israel in the time of Jesus. The larger part of the Arabian population had reverted to a nomadic existence.¹⁰ Religious practice among the Arab tribes combined both polytheistic and animistic elements and there was a cult of sacred

stones from which power was said to emanate.¹¹ The Quraysh tribe to which Muhammad belonged paid special reverence to Al-Uzza, a prominent deity associated with the present Ka'aba in Mecca. The Ka'aba was a cube-like structure built over a black stone and in it were many images of gods and goddesses, although it did not contain an image of what worshippers saw as the distant high god, Allah (Arabic 'the God'). There is evidence that tribal warfare was very common because, as has been noted by Ninian Smart, each year there was a truce between the tribes for four months to enable tribes from outlying areas to visit the shrine.¹² It is highly probable that Muhammad would also have come in contact with Jews and Christians in the cities of Mecca, Medina and Taif: half of the population of Medina was Jewish, while the Monophysite and Nestorian Christian Churches were gaining converts in Mecca. It was into this melting pot of religions that Muhammad was born.

Moving further eastward to the Indian traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, it is extremely difficult to examine the environments in which their Founders were born. This is particularly true in the case of Krishna, partly because His life is surrounded in myth and also because Hinduism combines many different theological and cultural traditions. Tradition does tell us, however, that He was the son of a local chieftain in a setting where constant battles raged between tribes. Siddhartha Gautama, whose name was later changed to Buddha (the Enlightened One), was also born into the family of a chieftain in Kapilavastu, just inside the borders of what is now Nepal in 563 BCE.¹³ We are told that His father tried to shield Him from the facts of old age, sickness and death,¹⁴ which might also give some indication of the segregated society in which He grew up.

There seem to be strong indications, therefore, that the settings for the early lives of the Messengers of God were at best turbulent and at worst both dangerous and inhumane, places where violence, persecution, and man's inhumanity to man were the order of the day. Religion was either at a primitive stage (as with Abraham and Zoroaster) or the established religion had degenerated into a stage of decadence where the institutions seemed to have lost sight of the central message of the Founder (as with Buddha, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad). Such was the case also when the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh lived in nineteenth-century Iran. By the eighteenth century, all the largest Muslim empires –

Mughal, Ottoman, Safavid, Moroccan and Central Asian – had ‘degenerated politically, militarily, economically and culturally from their heydays in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ... were subject to increasing economic instability, and were increasingly dominated by entrenched hereditary elites, including those among the landed gentry, palace guards, military castes, local princes, religious leaders and Sufi orders.’¹⁵ At that time Iran was ruled by the Qajar tribe from 1794 to 1925, and provincial governors had considerable power, while the urban areas were ruled by the military and high-ranking *‘ulama* (leading clergy) and the people were to a large extent illiterate. In the countryside the tribes of nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists ‘came and went as they pleased, frequently dominating the settled population.’¹⁶ Who, then, were these diverse Messengers of God?

To a large extent, research has found that They experienced the same childhood as Their contemporaries. It could be pointed out that some of Them had a more privileged upbringing than other children of Their time. Moses lived a life of nobility, as did Krishna, Buddha and Bahá’u’lláh, which would have meant that They probably received some education. However, it is stated by J.E. Esslemont that Bahá’u’lláh never attended school.¹⁷ Jesus and Muhammad were born into families that had a trade – Jesus’ stepfather, Joseph, was a carpenter, while Muhammad’s merchant father, Abdullah, died before His birth and His grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, worked providing water from the sacred well of Zamzam. The Báb was born into a family of merchants and traders.

Despite their often privileged upbringing, there is evidence that They were distinguished from other children of Their tribe or society in that They displayed extraordinary qualities in Their childhood. Jesus at twelve years of age amazed the religious leaders in the temple,¹⁸ while Zoroaster as a young person showed ‘a keen interest in religion ... had a compassionate nature, especially towards the elderly;’¹⁹ Muhammad was also said to be ‘of a specially religious disposition. It was his habit to go to the hills to practice prayer and meditation.’²⁰ In the case of the Báb, ‘several accounts emphasise the boy’s extreme piety,’²¹ while Bahá’u’lláh at ‘thirteen or fourteen years old He became renowned for His learning. He would converse on any subject and solve any problem presented to Him. In large gatherings He would discuss

matters with the ‘ulama and would explain intricate religious questions.’²²

God’s Revelation

When one examines the events surrounding God’s revelation, one can be struck by the resemblances. The Book of Genesis reported that God spoke directly to Abraham a number of times and told him to go to Canaan and that ‘I will make of you a great nation, and I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.’²³ In this way, Abraham became the Founder of the Jewish Nation when God said to Him: ‘for all the land which you see I will give you and to your descendants for ever.’²⁴ Often an angel or a stranger appeared. It is related that Zoroaster received a vision on the banks of the Daitya River when a large figure who identified himself as Vbhu Manah took Him into the presence of the wise lord, Ahura Mazda, who in turn instructed Zoroaster in the true religion.²⁵ Moses, Who was to become the Founder of the Jewish religion, received His calling when ‘the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.’²⁶ His mission was to ‘bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt.’²⁷ Moses was spoken to by God on a number of occasions. The most eventful was when He received the foundations of the Jewish Faith in the form of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.²⁸ When Jesus was being baptised at the Jordan by John the Baptist, the Spirit of God ‘descended like a dove and alighted on him; and lo, a voice from the heaven saying “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”’²⁹ Again, the angel Gabriel visited Muhammad, as He prayed in the Cave of Hira on Jabal Núr (the Mount of Light’) overlooking Mecca. The Báb’s declaration that he was a Messenger of God followed a number of visionary dreams ‘in one of the most dramatic of which he saw the severed head of the Imam Husayn.’ The Imam Husayn had been killed about the end of the eighth century CE and his death was a terrible blow to Shí’ih Islam, of which the Báb was a member. The Shi’ite Muslims believed that the Twelfth Imam would return from occultation, and the Báb declared that he was this awaited Imam – the Mahdí (the Guided One) – and gradually the Bearer of the new divine revelation. He felt as if the spirit of God had permeated and taken possession of His soul. After the Báb was executed, Bahá’u’lláh, Who was a prominent member of the Bábí community, was imprisoned in the

Siyáh-Chál (Black Pit) in Teheran. It was while He was in chains in the stench of this dungeon that he received a revelation from God. In Bahá'u'lláh's own words:

One night, in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: 'Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Ere long will God raise up the treasures of the earth – men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him.'³⁰

It was also reported that Bahá'u'lláh 'felt that a torrent flowed down from [His] head over [His] body and every limb was set afire.' He then 'recited what no man could bear to hear'. He also saw a sweet-voiced heavenly maiden who informed all in creation that he was the 'Beauty of God' and the power of his sovereignty.³¹

There seems to be a common thread running through the reports detailing the Messengers' call from God. They seemed to Their contemporaries to have been extraordinary people to begin with. They were devoted to religion and were found to be practising it among Their people. The theophanic call or revelation often included intermediaries like an angel, a stranger, a dove or a maiden.

What of the Messengers farther east? Tradition does not tell us how Krishna received His revelation. This may be because it is the Hindu belief that he was the eighth incarnation of Vishnu (the Preserver of the universe). However, Buddha is said to have reached enlightenment, not through any visitation or revelation, but by putting Himself into a trance under a bodhi tree. His enlightenment did not take place in the context of a belief in God, and, indeed, Buddhism neither affirms nor rejects belief in God. Unlike Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Islam and the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, the Buddha did not view His enlightenment in the context of a covenant with God. Indeed, there is the common thread of 'the covenant with God' running through all of the dispensations mentioned, with the exception of Hinduism and Buddhism; it is interesting to note that these two religions do not

contain reports of theophanies in the same way that the other major religions do.

The Concept of Journey

One of the common features in the lives of the Messengers was that on experiencing the revelation from God, they embarked on a journey, either by choice or by force. Abraham, on instructions from God, travelled from Ur to Haran near present-day Syria and then to Canaan. On fleeing Egypt, Moses moved to Midian near Sinai, and then returned to Egypt when told by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Then began the forty-year journey to the Promised Land. Zoroaster at the age of twenty left his parents' house in search of answers and reached enlightenment ten years later. In the case of the ministry of Jesus, if one tracks the progress of the Gospel narrative, one can see that Jesus travelled from his home territory of Galilee to Jerusalem where he was crucified. Muhammad travelled from Mecca in response to severe opposition and journeyed to Medina where His ministry was more successful. Then He led the triumphant march on Mecca in late 629 CE. The Báb in 1841 closed His business and embarked on an extended pilgrimage to the Shí'ih shrines in Iraq where 'his fervent devotion attracted some attention,'³² including that of some individuals who were later to become His disciples. Bahá'u'lláh spent forty years in prison and in exile after His revelation from God in the autumn of 1852. Regarding the Buddha, His escape from the city castle of his father led Him to enlightenment and from there to Benares, near the Ganges, and on to the borders of present-day Nepal.

Allied to this, there is evidence that at some stage on this journey the Messengers spent time in isolation, as a preparation for the task They were to undertake. Moses, after his self-imposed banishment from Egypt, settled in the land of Midian, worked as a shepherd and married the daughter of a priest, Jethro. It was in this isolation that God spoke to him at Mount Sinai and instructed him to lead His people out of Egypt. Also, we are told in the Book of Exodus that the Lord instructed Aaron, the elder brother of Moses, to 'go into the wilderness to meet Moses.'³³ After being baptised, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness as a prelude to his ministry.³⁴ During that time we are told of the temptations facing Him, which may be understood to indicate the choices open to Him: to look after the temporal needs of people or to take the

thornier path and establish a new dispensation. Muhammad often went into the hills to pray and meditate. Likewise Bahá'u'lláh spent two years in the mountainous wilderness of Kurdistan in north-west Iran (1854-56).

The Covenant with God

Among the Messengers from the Middle East – Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh – one frequently reads or hears of the term ‘covenant’ (*brit*). This covenant developed from a mere agreement between tribes in the Old Testament to become an agreement with God. For example, Yahweh (God) makes a covenant with Noah in the Book of Genesis³⁵ whereby He would not bring a deluge again if the people stopped eating blood and engaging in homicide. We are told that to mark the covenant, a sacrifice would be offered to Yahweh. The covenant as it came down through the time of Abraham and Moses is a recurring motif in the Old Testament, but it developed from a pragmatic tribal agreement into a personal relationship between God and His people. It maintains the Israelites’ observance of the Law as instructed by God through Moses at Sinai. The Book of Deuteronomy states: ‘And He [God] declared unto you His covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is the ten commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.’³⁶ It is also seen by His people as a reason for His anger and when He is seen to punish His people. It is used by the Israelites as a reason why God should help them in times of distress. According to Deuteronomy: ‘Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.’³⁷

Jesus came not to annul the old covenant but to continue the covenant made to Abraham and Moses.³⁸ He came to fulfil the covenant, but the obligations of the old law disappear with the coming of the new, and Jesus’ death exceeds in virtue any means of redemption in the old covenant. Jesus ‘is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.’³⁹ Instead of a sacrificial lamb, Jesus was the Lamb of God, because God ‘so

loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.’⁴⁰

Muhammad subsequently came to confirm previous scriptures, particularly the Semitic ones. God had revealed His Will to the Jews and Christians, but they had disobeyed God’s commandments. The purpose of Muhammad’s dispensation was therefore to bring humankind back to the true religion and to restore man to the covenant with God, which demanded absolute resignation (*islam*) to the will of God. Allah is a righteous God Who passed judgments on the sinner, but He is also a merciful God. Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb confirmed this covenant with God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Son of Bahá’u’lláh and appointed Interpreter of His revelation, summarised this covenantal relationship as follows:

Diffuse the glad-tidings of the Kingdom far and wide to the ears, promulgate the Word of God, and put into practice the advices and covenants of God; that is, arise ye with such qualities and attributes that ye may continually bestow life to the body of the world, and nurse the infants of the universe up to the station of maturity and perfection. Enkindle with all your might in every meeting the light of the love of God, gladden and cheer every heart with the utmost loving-kindness, show forth your love to the strangers just as you show forth to your relations. If a soul is seeking to quarrel, ask ye for reconciliation; if he blame you, praise him; if he give you a deadly poison, bestow ye an all-healing antidote; if he createth death, administer ye eternal life; if he becometh a thorn, change ye into roses and hyacinths. Perchance, through such deeds and words, this darkened world will become illuminated, this terrestrial universe will become transformed into a heavenly realm, and this satanic prison become a divine court; warfare and bloodshed be annihilated, and love and faithfulness hoist the tent of unity upon the apex of the world.⁴¹

Bahá’u’lláh Himself speaks of people having violated the ‘Covenant of God by breaking His commandments, and have turned back on their heels, these have erred grievously in the sight of God, the All-Possessing, the Most High,’⁴² which indicates that

His understanding of the term 'covenant' is continuous with that of previous Messengers.

The concept of covenant as a relationship between God and the human being and the responsibilities of humankind in fulfilling the elements of that covenant emphasise the unity that exists among the Messengers of God. Their lives were given to teaching humanity that it must abide by the laws of that covenant. Moses taught the ten commandments, Jesus taught love for God and one's neighbour, Muhammad enjoined absolute resignation to the will of God, and Bahá'u'lláh taught that we should 'recognise that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples.'⁴³ 'In the Word of God,' writes 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'there is still another unity, the oneness of the Manifestations of God, His Holiness Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. This is a unity divine, heavenly, radiant, merciful; the one reality appearing in its successive manifestations.'⁴⁴

The Legacy

When one examines the major civilisations that have endured the test of time, one cannot but be struck by the longevity of those civilisations engendered by religion. Already mentioned was the fact that Abraham was the Founder of the Israelite nation, while Moses was the founder of the Jewish Faith. It is important to note that following the death of Moses, the worship of God had to survive alongside the polytheistic worship of several gods. Judaism survived because the Hebrews looked back to the heritage of Moses. Society also changed as a result of the new Faith. There was a change from nomadic agriculture to settled cultivation in this new, rich land of Canaan. Also because of its location at the cross-roads between Europe and Asia and Africa, there were many invasions which eventually dispersed the Jewish nation in the second century CE.

Christianity also grew from humble beginnings. Starting out as a small group on the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire, it managed to become the state religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. Ninian Smart offers one reason for this rise: 'The Christian mode of life spread an enlightened and effective morality without getting itself bound to the complex rules which had made the Jewish code so hard to follow in the wider world.'⁴⁵ These

communities were representative of all strands of society, as Christianity became the spiritual authority of the empire. Hospitals, colleges and hostels were erected and the charitable work of the Christian communities reached new dimensions. Even as the Empire itself declined, Christianity rose in importance, spreading to the Germanic nations in the fourth century, the Franks in 500 CE and as far west as Ireland by the fifth century.

By the time that Muhammad had passed away, He had succeeded in uniting the many warring tribes in present-day Saudi Arabia and His armies had reached the Mediterranean in the west and much of the Middle East. In another thirty years, the Muslim armies had conquered the Persian Empire and had reached the Caucasus. Why such an immediate success? Smart offers the following reason: 'The Arab conquerors did not treat their new subjects harshly: their rule appeared preferable to that of the Byzantines and Persians ... The Arabs exacted milder taxes, and Christians and Jews, though prevented from proselytising, were allowed to continue the practices of their religions.'⁴⁶ He goes on to say that the vast majority of the Middle Eastern population became Muslims without compulsion.⁴⁷ Islam also contributed to society in other ways. In its first two centuries, a number of different schools interpreting Islamic Law were established. These schools of Islamic Law led to the creation of solid political and social institutions. Present-day Baghdad became a place of cultural achievements in science, mathematics, astronomy and medicine. Folk literature and the arts entered a glorious age and trade flourished with the East and the West.

Further east saw the rise of Hinduism and Buddhism. Little is known of the immediate effects of Hinduism on the Indian subcontinent. This was because Hinduism is such a varied grouping of different religions. In the case of Buddhism, however, what started as a small movement in northern India had by 270 BCE spread over the whole of northern and central India and later as far as Macedonia, Ceylon and Syria, until it reached China by the first century CE, and Tibet in the seventh century CE. As it spread, it also disappeared from India, due to the upsurge of Hinduism and the merging of the best in Islam and Hinduism within the Sikh religion founded by Guru Nanak (b. 1469). As Buddhism spread, it established monastery cities or *sanghas*, which were places of learning and meditation.

But what have been the effects of the most recent dispensation, the Bahá'í Faith? By 1992, the one hundredth anniversary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, the Faith had been established in 205 countries, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of that year, making it second to Christianity as the most widespread religion. Due to the importance that the Bahá'í Faith places on world unity, Bahá'ís have become influential in committees of the United Nations, especially its non-governmental agencies. It is interesting to note that the principles of the Faith – the oneness of humanity, the equality of men and women, universal education, religious tolerance, a world commonwealth of nations, an international auxiliary language – all of which were unheard of or not properly grasped during the time of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry – are now taken for granted to be the basis of all civilisation, and every country's constitution in the free world contains these principles. Thus it can be said that in its one hundred and fifty years, the Bahá'í Faith is progressing in much the same direction as the other major religions before it.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the lives of the Founders of the main religious movements – Abraham, Zoroaster, Krishna, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. These Messengers are by no means unique, as there may have been others Who founded religious movements and Whose Names and influence have disappeared with the passage of time. What this paper has tried to show is that these great Luminaries of God manifested common traits – a youthful wisdom beyond Their years coupled with a strong sense of religious devotion; a calling from God which set Them on a journey which often brought severe persecution for Them and Their followers. Their teachings emphasised a reaching out to God, a relationship with the one true God, or in the case of Buddhism, the search for spiritual enlightenment and detachment from earthly cravings. That relationship with God or that enlightenment was then to be a springboard for how one interacted with one's fellow human beings. With the passing of the Messenger, the Faith invariably grew and with the increase in numbers, a change took place in the world with the tremendous efflorescence in learning and in the construction of ethically based civilisations.

These Messengers came at times of upheaval, when the civilisation that had been inspired by the previous Messenger was in decline. The Bahá'í Faith teaches that these Messengers of God are periodically sent to renew our relationship with God. As we evolve and develop, the Messenger develops our individual and collective relationship with God; this relationship is always commensurate with our stage of development. In examining the similarities of Their lives and the creation of great civilisations as a direct consequence of Their coming and Their teachings, it has been shown that God's revelation to the human race has been progressive – bringing humanity by the hand and leading all of its members to a greater understanding of our role in God's plan.

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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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The Making of *Portraits of Some Bahá'í Women* by O.Z. Whitehead by Wendi Momen

O.Z. 'Zebby' Whitehead was an established author at George Ronald, Publisher, by the time I arrived as a part-time editor in 1984. His first book, *Some Early Bahá'ís of the West*, had been published in 1976 and *Some Bahá'ís to Remember* in 1983. His books were popular: people liked his easy, narrative style and the books sold well. They were not strictly scholarly, as Zebby drew largely on secondary sources for his information, but as many Bahá'ís did not have access to such materials as *Star of the West*, the American *Bahá'í News* or even the various volumes of *Bahá'í World*, his essays on early Bahá'ís were much appreciated, particularly by new Bahá'ís.

In 1984 the George Ronald offices were at High Street, Kidlington, Oxfordshire, and the business was run by Mark Hofman, the son of the late founder of GR, David Hofman. Among the various projects handed to me was the 'Zebby Whitehead box'. This was literally a cardboard box filled with typed notes, some handwritten materials I couldn't quite read, essays and various other bits and pieces. The box was full and I was asked to deal with it in due course.

Having much to do and being new to the publishing world, this box sat in the office for quite a time. *Some Bahá'ís to Remember* had only just been published, so there was no rush to publish another of Zebby's books – I was reminded that George Ronald was not a one-author publisher! Zebby called from time to time to enquire about the essays but no progress was made as we worked on other projects.

The essays and pieces in the box were unrelated to one another. Some were about Bahá'ís but some were not – the essay on the actress Lillian Gish is an example of this – and some were incomplete. Zebby had no overall theme in mind for a new book – he just wanted to make sure all that he *could* write he *did* write – and the box of articles was the result.

Time passed. Zebby sent a few more articles and essays for 'the box' and we talked now and then on the telephone. Whenever Zebby came to London he would take me to lunch at his club, always a rather grand event for me and a little daunting, as women were not allowed in every part of this men's club and we

had to meet elsewhere before going to the club, otherwise I could not be admitted. On one occasion we met at Brown's Hotel in its rather long corridor that runs between the two entrances. There sat Zebby talking to an elderly, highly made-up woman dramatically dressed in a leopard skin coat, a long-draped and flowing gown, a feather boa and a gigantic hat. Zebby introduced her to me, then went off to collect his coat. As I waited for his return, the woman asked me whether Zebby was my father – or perhaps grandfather? – and when I replied that I was his publisher, she looked relieved and said he had been talking and talking about some new religion and perhaps he was a little dotty? Dressed as she was in such a remarkable way in the middle of the morning, I was impressed that she could have formed such an opinion. Zebby later told me she had been a well-known actress in her day so perhaps this accounts for it.

At these luncheon meetings Zebby and I would talk about the essays and what might become of them. We tried to find a way to combine all the essays in one book but, really, no book emerged. Was there a link that would make these individual essays – written over a long period for different reasons – a book? As Zebby was very keen on the idea of having the word 'some' to begin the title, we even considered *Some Essays Written by O.Z. Whitehead!*

The 1980s became the 1990s. By this time, things had changed at George Ronald. May Hofman, Mark's sister, had taken over the business and Erica Leith was in charge of the office. Along with the long-time secretary, Wendy Manners, we realized that we were an all-women outfit. We were interviewed by a researcher doing work on publishers and this impressed her. We began to think about this unique situation. At one of our editorial meetings, we talked about the need for young Bahá'ís to have female role models from the West. In a casual conversation with a young Bahá'í, Robert Weinberg, in 1990, I mentioned this and said that George Ronald would be interested in publishing more books about female Bahá'ís, especially European ones. He took up the challenge immediately and began to research the life of Ethel Jenner Rosenberg, the first Englishwoman to become a Bahá'í.

At the same time, preparations were beginning to be made for the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in 1995. Becoming involved in these arrangements, we began to think

how George Ronald might link the publication of its books with such an important event, as its contribution to the worldwide effort. We thought of all our outstanding projects: which of those might be suitable? Rob Weinberg's, if he could finish his research in time, but what others?

I remembered the Zebby Whitehead box and this time looked at the essays from the point of view of celebrating the lives of women. Yes, there were a few essays that could be worked up into a book. Were there enough? Were they long enough in themselves? Would Zebby accept a book focusing only on women? Would he be content to leave a number of the essays in the box, unpublished?

Zebby and I went to lunch again and this time I put it to him that perhaps we might extract from the box just those essays whose subject was a woman. He agreed and was quite excited about the idea – in fact, he loved it. Many of the essays in his earlier books had been about women or had woman at their core and the idea of having one just about women was intriguing. He asked the same questions: Were there enough essays? What was the link? Only women? Was that a strong enough connection?

We recalled that many of the early Bahá'ís were women, that they had been the pioneers, the path-beaters, the ones who had shown the way. Women had come into their own in the twentieth century. We had quite a good discussion around this theme.

We set some criteria for the book. It would be about the same length as Zebby's other books. The essays would be about Western women, but not only Americans. We would concentrate on women whose main contribution had been made in the twentieth century. We would look at the services of these women, rather than other accomplishments, such as artistic or scientific. We would not repeat any of the articles published in the other books Zebby had written. We would focus on women, not men or cities or uplifting themes. There would be a combination of well-known and little-known women. The book would contain photographs.

We selected a number of essays that might go into the book. Zebby began to rewrite them with a view to recasting them to emphasize the overall theme. We were still a little doubtful about the strength of the essays. Zebby very much wanted to include the essay on Lillian Gish, but it was hard to see how she fitted in with

the article about the Philadelphia Bahá'ís. Zebby edited the Philadelphia article to focus on the Revell sisters. The Lillian Gish article was edited, too, but it was still very different from the others. Most of the essays now centred on Bahá'í women. Could Zebby find a link with the Lillian Gish article? Reluctantly, we decided he could not and we abandoned her.

Now we had a cast of characters for the book: Emogene Hoagg, Claudia Coles, Anna Kunz, Amelia Collins, Kate Dwyer, Ella Bailey, Ella Quant and the Revell sisters. As Zebby worked on the essays, we also tried to find suitable photographs. We had lots of Lillian Gish to choose from, had we included her – studio shots, publicity shots, snapshots – but very few of some of the Bahá'í women. We decided to limit the number of photographs to one of each woman. We found studio portraits of some of the women while of others we had only blurry snapshots. The only one we could locate of Ella Bailey by herself had her standing rather oddly behind a flowering bush so that only her head could be seen. Neither of the photographs of Kate Dwyer was very good so we decided to use both of them so that at least something of her features could be made out. We were delighted to be given a photograph that showed two of the women, Anna Kunz and Ella Bailey, at a going-away party given for Marion Holley in 1945 – especially interesting to us was Marion leaving the United States for England, where she would marry the founder of George Ronald. Marion herself had been the editor and manager of the business for a number of years. Zebby and I could not resist including this photo!

As 1995 drew closer, we realized we would not be ready to publish Zebby's book in time for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The material on the Revells was very sketchy – Zebby had originally written about the development of the Philadelphia community, not the Revell sisters, and so had more research to do. Bouts of illness prevented him from doing this at any great speed. Rob Weinberg finished his book, however, so we pulled it forward and published it in the summer of 1995, just before the World Conference, and scheduled Zebby's book for the next spring.

But we still did not have a title. One idea was to call it simply *Bahá'í Women*. Somehow that was not quite right – the book wasn't about Bahá'í women in general but about *some* Bahá'í women. In any case Zebby wanted to have the title begin with the

word 'some' to link up with his other books, but the title *Some Bahá'í Women* was also very odd-sounding. We tried *Some Bahá'í Women: Essays*; *Some Bahá'í Women: Stories*; *Some Bahá'í Women: Glimpses*; *Some Bahá'í Women of Interest (of Note, to Remember)* but none of these worked. I asked Zebby to abandon the idea of using 'some' to begin the title and instead suggested we consider titles around the idea of the essays being thumbnail sketches of these women. We thought how these essays were about looking into the lives of these women. We couldn't use *Glimpses into the Lives of Some Bahá'í Women*, as we were using the word 'glimpses' as part of a subtitle for a book by Barron Harper on the Hands of Cause (finding a title for this book was another major drama – we finally decided on *Lights of Fortitude*). But we worked around this general area. As we were doing the pictures at the same time, we hit on the idea of 'portraits'. I liked the idea; Zebby wasn't sure. He still wanted 'some' to start the title. One idea was *Some Bahá'í Women: Portraits*. This was better but did not really appeal to me.

The GR promotional leaflets tell the story. By September 1995, when we sent the leaflet off for printing, the title was *Portraits*, which was as far as we could agree. After much discussion, including with others in office, we all agreed that *Portraits of Some Bahá'í Women* had a good ring to it, described the book well AND had the word 'some' in the title.

Time sped up, as it does when a deadline looms. The book had a title and was edited and typeset. But when we came to look at the typeset version of the essay on the Revell sisters, we realized there was just not sufficient material there. Zebby agreed that the essay was too thin and did not compare well with his other work. Reluctantly, we agreed that it would go the way of the Lillian Gish article, leaving us with only seven essays but of a very high standard.

And so the book *Portraits of Some Bahá'í Women* was published in April 1996 – a tribute to Zebby's careful research and his commitment to the principle of the equality of women and men found in the Bahá'í Faith he so loved.

Postscript: The following review by Edwin McCloughan appeared in the 'Reader's Choice' in *The Irish Times* of Tuesday, 8 October 1996:

Actor, arts patron, raconteur, O.Z. Whitehead is also the author of three books, the latest of which, *Portraits: Of Some Bahá'í Women* (George Ronald, £9.95), was published recently. As with his previous books, this is a collection of seven essays about prominent or distinguished members of the Bahá'í Faith, the youngest of the world's independent religions, this time focusing on women believers, the hitherto unsung stars of virtually every faith-system. This is a superbly written book for anyone – not alone Bahá'ís – who enjoys reading about women in a short, compelling space.

Two days later, he received a letter from Zebby, part of which reads as follows: 'Dear Edwin, I was thrilled yesterday to read your ... review of *Portraits of Some Bahai Women* in *The Irish Times*. I cannot adequately express the happiness that I felt when I read what I know you honestly felt ... Thank you again for your warm and generous act. I will never forget it. Forever your friend, Zebby.'

After a long illness, Zebby died at the age of 87 on 29 July 1998 at New Lodge Bloomfields Nursing Home, Donnybrook, Dublin, and was interred at Mount Jerome Cemetery Chapel.

Visits of the Hands of the Cause of God to Ireland by Betsy Omidvaran

Abstract

This paper presents an overview of all known visits by Hands of the Cause of God, the highest-ranking officers of the Bahá'í Faith, to Ireland, and reviews the many sources available to a historian who wants to delve into this fascinating but largely uninvestigated topic – including back issues of New Day and national newspapers. Included is a timeline of the known visits between 1952 and 1986.

Introduction

The Hands of the Cause of God have played a role in the progress of the Bahá'í Faith that is unique in religious history and the Bahá'í community in Ireland was a part of this. For the first time in an independent religion, there was a clear line of succession from the Founder to His successors, and an appointed group of people was specifically charged with protecting its coherence during a transition period between the appointed successors and the clearly delineated elected body charged with governance of the religion into the future.

There were at least four believers referred to as such by Bahá'u'lláh and at least four by his appointed Successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. As with many other aspects of the development of the administration, however, it was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's successor, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian, who clarified and systematised the appointment, roles and purposes of the Hands of the Cause. He appointed at least ten posthumously, and then, between 1951 and 1957, appointed 32 during their lifetimes, of which 27 were still alive when he died on 4 November 1957. Most of these 32 were appointed in three contingents, but five were appointed individually during the period. The three contingents were 12 appointments on 24 December 1951, seven appointments on 29 February 1952 and eight appointments on 2 October 1957.

These 27 men and women led the world-wide Bahá'í community through the last five and a half years of the Ten Year Plan up to the election of the Universal House of Justice in April 1963, a period which is often termed the interregnum (literally 'between reigns,' that is, between the ministries of the Guardian and then of the House of Justice).

The Ten Year Plan was one of a series of Plans for the development of the Bahá'í Faith. As the Guardian systematised the institution of the Hand of the Cause, so he systematised other aspects of the Bahá'í administration, devising a series of Plans, each with specific goals. At first, these were varying plans assigned to individual National Spiritual Assemblies. The Ten Year Plan was the first worldwide plan, lasting from 1953 to 1963. The Guardian passed away in 1957, before this plan was completed, and the 27 Hands of the Cause administered the world Bahá'í community until the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963.

This was followed by a succession of plans decided by the House of Justice. After a one-year hiatus, there was a Nine Year Plan from 1964-1973. Then after another one-year hiatus, there was a Five Year Plan from 1974-1979, a Seven-Year Plan from 1979-1986 and a Six Year Plan from 1986-1992. The latter saw the last visit of a Hand of the Cause to Ireland.

In Ireland for many years there had been the smallest handful of believers. In 1948, a Local Assembly was formed in Dublin and slowly the Bahá'í community in Ireland began to grow and to spread.

Visits by Hands of the Cause to Ireland

The connection of the Hands of the Cause with the Faith in Ireland is most strongly felt through the presence of George Townshend, a Church of Ireland clergyman and convert, who left the ministry in 1947 and was appointed a Hand of the Cause in December 1951 with the first contingent of twelve. He passed away a few months before the Guardian in 1957.

The first to set foot in Ireland, other than George Townshend, was Leroy Ioas, who was born in 1896. His parents both became Bahá'ís in 1898. The family was very active in the Bahá'í community and they all met 'Abdu'l-Bahá during his travels in America in 1912. Leroy was appointed by the Guardian to the International Bahá'í Council in 1950 and as a Hand of the Cause in the first contingent in December 1951. He arrived in Haifa in March 1952 to act as the Secretary-General of the International Bahá'í Council, as well as assistant secretary to the Guardian, and

rendered services in many aspects of the work in Haifa over the following years.

His first visit to Ireland was very brief. In February (or March) 1952 on his way to the World Centre, he stopped in Shannon airport¹ and phoned George Townshend, who was living in Dublin.

His second visit to Ireland was in 1955, when he came for one day to visit George Townshend. In her book about her father, Anita Ioas Chapman says the following concerning the last two years of his life, when he was ill much of the time:

He thought back on the long years of struggle to build communities and develop strength in the believers ... He remembered his travels and the long day spent in Dublin with fellow Hand of the Cause George Townshend – whose dearest wish was to meet Shoghi Effendi – when Leroy talked hour after hour about the Guardian and Haifa and led Townshend on a visit to the World Centre right from his sick bed.²

In 1961, during the interregnum, he visited for the third and last time, for the Summer School which took place at Mourne Grange, Kilkeel in Northern Ireland from 26 August to 5 September. It was part of a trip to the British Isles to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911. He arrived at the Summer School, accompanied by his wife, Sylvia, who was also a member of the International Bahá'í Council, on 3 September, in time for the exact anniversary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's arrival in the British Isles. A special programme had been prepared on the life and Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, including a reading of his first public talk in the West. There was a special letter from the Hands of the Cause in Haifa to the British community and a cable to the School.³ Mr. Ioas passed away 22 July 1965.

Another Hand of the Cause who played a role in significant developments of the Faith in Ireland was Mr William Sears. He was born 28 March 1911 and died 25 March 1992 and was appointed a Hand of the Cause with the last continent in October 1957, one month before the passing of the Guardian. His first visit to Ireland was in October 1968. He spoke at a Conference at the Hazíratu'l-Quds in Dublin, 41 Morehampton Road, for all the

Bahá'ís in Ireland north and south, over the weekend of 11-13 October.

He was received by President Eamon de Valera on Tuesday, 15 October and presented him with a copy of his book, *God Loves Laughter*. This was announced in the Social and Personal column of *The Irish Times* of 16 October (p. 13) as follows: "The President yesterday received Mr. William B. Sears, California ... ' It was also mentioned in *The Irish Press* (p. 10). Mr Sears recounts this experience in his book, *Tokoloshe*.⁴ 'I had coffee with President Eamon de Valera during his final days in the presidential residence in Dublin, and he told me that one of the first ambassadors he had appointed had been named Sears. I left him an autographed copy of GOD LOVES LAUGHTER, my light-hearted book about the Bahá'í Faith. "I'll have my secretary read it to me," he said. "There's nothing in here that could embarrass a young girl, is there?"' He says that when he and Phil O'Brien returned from touring the grounds, the President rapped on the window and invited them to have a photograph taken with him. This photo has hung in the National Bahá'í Centre with other photos of Irish Presidents and may do so again.

Mr Sears then travelled to Northern Ireland, where he met the Bahá'ís there in the Local Bahá'í Centre in Belfast, the Local Assemblies of Belfast, Bangor and Castlereagh on the sixteenth and all the friends on the seventeenth. This was part of a major trip to the British Isles from 7 September to 31 October.

His second and last visit to Ireland was in 1972, when he represented the Universal House of Justice at the first National Convention of the Republic of Ireland.⁵

A third Hand of the Cause who played a significant role in the development of the Cause in Ireland was Mr John Robarts, who was born 2 November 1901 and died 18 June 1991. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause in the last contingent in October 1957.

He visited Ireland at least five times. The first visit was in October 1970, when he visited Belfast 22-22 October, then Limerick and then was present at a weekend school in Dublin, 24-25 October. Intensive efforts to make the Bahá'í Faith known had been taking place in Limerick. The first person converted after Mr Robarts's visit and this was swiftly followed by an individual in

Dublin and others in Limerick. Mr Robarts visited again with his wife Audrey in 1976 for the Summer School in Newtown School.

He visited again 23-24 May 1981, where he delivered a message from the Universal House of Justice on the importance of daily prayer. There are a number of photos of this, including a very large group photo.⁶

He attended the Dublin International Conference on 25-27 June 1982, with Collis Featherstone, another Hand of the Cause who was representing the Universal House of Justice. During the Conference, he spoke about 'The Local Spiritual Assembly – A Divine Institution' and on the subject of teaching.⁷

His last visit, the last visit of any Hand of the Cause and the only one during the Six Year Plan, was in 1986, when he and Audrey made an extensive tour of the country. They were in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal for the inauguration of the local Hazíratu'l-Quds, where they were photographed planting a tree. They also visited Co. Limerick, where there was a special gathering for older people. They met the National Assembly in Adare, Co. Limerick, then went to Cork, the National Hazíratu'l-Quds in Dublin and to the Northern Ireland Summer School.⁸

Mr Collis Featherstone, mentioned above, visited twice. He was born on 5 May 1913 and died on 29 September 1990 in Kathmandu. His first visit was from 8-10 June 1973. The only record I have found of this visit was that it was announced in the Feastletter in May of 1973.

His second visit was as the representative of the Universal House of Justice at the International Conference in Dublin from 25-27 June 1982. He also attended the International Conference in Manila in May as part of a four-month round-the-world trip. At the Dublin Conference he spoke on 'The Pattern of Bahá'í Life' and on the role of the individual believer. During the Conference there was a reception for prominent people, including the Ambassador of Australia, which was where Mr Featherstone came from.

In addition to Mr Ioas, two other Hands of the Cause visited during the 1950s. Hermann Grossmann visited three times. He visited George Townshend for one day in February 1955, the day before Leroy Ioas came. He was at the Summer School in Northern Ireland in 1956 and visited again in the summer of 1958. I have no other information about these visits, two of which were during the Ten Year Plan and one during the interregnum. Mr Grossmann

was born in 1899 and died on 7 July 1968. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause on 24 December 1951 in the first contingent.

The other Hand of the Cause to visit during the 1950s was Dhikru'lláh Khadem. This was either in 1952 or 1953. *New Day*, in an article written at the time of his second visit in 1984,⁹ says that it was in 1953, but his biography, written by his wife, Javidukht Khadem,¹⁰ says that it was in August of 1952. There is a photo of this visit. She also says that he had 'a deep love for Ireland that only grew more intense with subsequent visits.'¹¹ With regard to the use of the plural 'visits', however, there is no detail of more than one subsequent visit.

Mr. Khadem's second visit was for the Summer School, 11-18 August 1984.¹² *New Day* for July/August for that year says that he gave most of the sessions at the school, which took place in Kings Hospital in Dublin. There is a photo of the Summer School. Mr Khadem was born in 1904 and died on 13 November 1986. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause with the second contingent on 29 February 1952.

Besides Mr Grossmann and Mr Ioas, the only Hand of the Cause to visit during the Interregnum or the Ten Year Plan was General Shu'á'u'lláh Alá'í, who visited three times altogether. General Alá'í was born in Iran on 16 November 1889 and died on the same date in 1984. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause in the second contingent in 1952. According to *The Bahá'í Journal* (August 1961), he visited on 10-12 April 1961, but there are no details as to exactly where he went. He visited again on 12 June 1967, as recorded by O.Z. Whitehead in *New Day* of February 1993.

His third and final visit was in the week following National Convention in 1975.¹³ National Convention that year was the weekend of the 26-27 April. During this visit, he addressed two meetings, one in Limerick, attended by Bahá'ís from Cork, Galway, Clonmel, Wexford, Waterford, Carlow and Kilkenny, and another meeting in Dublin. There is a photograph of him in the National Hazíratu'l-Quds in 1975.¹⁴

There was a one-year period between the end of the Ten Year Plan with the election of the Universal House of Justice and the beginning of the Nine Year Plan, which lasted from 1964 to 1973. During that year two Hands of the Cause visited Ireland. The first was Abu'l-Qásim Faizí, who was born in Iran in 1906 and died 19 November 1980. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause with the

third contingent in 1957. Mr Faizí visited Ireland three times altogether.

The first time was in late May 1963, the month after the election of the first Universal House of Justice and the Bahá'í World Congress. O.Z. Whitehead describes this in his article on the visits of Mr Faizí, which was serialized in four editions of *New Day*, April, May, June and July/August 1993. On the evening of his first day, there was a meeting for the Bahá'ís of Dublin in the late Adib Taherzadeh's sitting room. On his second day, Mr Faizí, Zebby and Adib went to St. Patrick's Cathedral and in the afternoon, Adib took him to Belfast to meet the friends there.

The second visit was in 3-4 January 1966, with his wife, Gloria. In the evening they gave a talk in the home of Weston and Mary Huxtable, in which Mr Faizí addressed the difficult situation in many European countries. The next day, they went to Belfast. Zebby concludes his essay by describing Mr Faizí's ability to encourage individual believers and the sixteen letters that Mr Faizí wrote to him during the remainder of his life. Of interest to our subject here, Mr Faizí strongly encouraged Zebby to write about the early believers and spoke about the importance of everyone doing so as much as possible. He quotes him as saying,

it is my firm belief that in future the people of the world will prove thirsty to read books and recollections about the followers of the Bahá'í Faith in all lands. They will no more read books which are detrimental to the souls, hearts and minds of themselves and their children.' (*ND* July/August 1993, p. 4)

He urged Zebby to follow the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who 'spent many a night in giving sketches of the lives of early believers ...'

Mr. Faizí's final visit to Ireland was 10-15 September 1974, as part of extensive travels in the US and Europe. He visited Dublin, Bray, Waterford and Limerick. In Limerick, he spoke to believers from all over the island.¹⁵

Also during the year between the Ten Year Plan and the Nine Year Plan, in January of 1964, John Ferraby paid his first of four visits to Ireland. O.Z. Whitehead has described these four visits in an unpublished essay. His next visit was in December of 1964. He

visited again 11 to 14 April of 1967 and 14 January of 1969. [Zebby says 1971, 'about three years later,' but this probably refers to the visit of 1969.] Mr Ferraby was born 9 January 1914 and died on 5 September 1973. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause with the third contingent in October 1957.

During the Nine Year Plan 1964-73, there was a steady flow of visits by Hands of the Cause. Tarázu'lláh Samandarí was born 16 October 1875 and was the only Hand of the cause who had met Bahá'u'lláh. Thus his presence was particularly special to the necessarily small number of Bahá'ís who were on hand to meet him during his visit in 1965 at the age of 90. I do not know the exact dates or the venue of the meeting(s), but the British *Bahá'í Journal* of July 1965 says 'a few weeks ago.' He gathered friends from all communities north and south. Mr Samandarí was appointed with the first contingent in 1951 and passed away 2 September 1968.

Jalál Khazeh was the special guest at two Summer Schools held in the Hall School, Monkstown, the first and second in the Republic, 13-27 July 1968 and 5-15 July 1969. Mr Khazeh was born 24 February 1897 in Iran. From 1963-1968 he lived in South America. In 1969, he made an extended visit to Europe before moving back to Iran. He was in hiding from 1979-84, then escaped and lived out his life in Canada, where he died 21 February 1990. He was appointed individually on 7 December 1953.

Dr Ugo Giachery visited twice. From 8-9 May 1971, he visited Dublin and on 4-5 November 1972 he attended the first National Teaching Conference in the Republic, speaking in several sessions on the qualities of the Guardian and his experiences in helping to build up the World Centre.¹⁶ Dr Giachery was born 13 May 1896. In 1969, he and Angeline settled in Monaco and visited many European countries over the next few years. He was appointed in the first contingent in December 1951 and died 5 July 1982 in Western Samoa.

Hand of the Cause Paul Haney was probably here during the Nine Year Plan, in August 1971. In a letter dated 2 March 1975, he mentioned that he met friends in Dublin at that time, on his way to the North Atlantic Oceanic Conference in Reykjavik, Iceland. I have no other reference to this visit. Mr Haney was born six months after his parents' pilgrimage in 1909. His mother was pregnant at the time and 'Abdu'l-Bahá named him Paul 'for the

outside world' and He also named him 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which He said was his 'real name.'¹⁷ He was appointed individually 19 March 1954 and was killed in a car accident in Haifa on 3 December 1982.

Mr Haney came to the Summer School 2-16 August 1975.¹⁸ He spoke about the functioning of Local and National Assemblies, as well as the individual within the administration. He also explained the work of the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre.

Dr Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir was born 4 April 1923 in Iran, pioneered with his wife to the Mentawai Islands in Indonesia during the Ten Year Plan, for which they were made Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause in the third contingent 2 October 1957, and spent much of the next twenty years, until he died 29 December 1979, travelling around the world visiting Bahá'ís and teaching, especially in very remote locations, but including Europe and North America.

He visited Ireland three times. The first time was 6-7 July 1973.¹⁹ On 6 July, he met in the National Centre with believers from Dublin, Dun Laoghaire, Bray, Kilkenny and Waterford. On 7 July he consulted with the National Assembly, then travelled to Limerick, where he recommended a goal of increasing the number of believers; a goal of 300 was decided.

His second visit was to Summer School in August 1974 (Annual Report 131). His third visit was 15-17 June 1979.²⁰ On 16 June, he spoke in the Prince of Wales Hotel in Athlone to believers from eight communities, but I have as yet found no record of where else he went. Lists in the book, *Dr. Muhájir*, confirm that he visited Ireland in 1973, 1974 and 1979.

In 1978, during the Five Year Plan, both 'Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm and 'Alí-Akbar Furútan visited, the only time either of them visited Ireland.

Mr Furútan was born 29 April 1905 and was appointed with the first contingent in 1951. He visited the Summer School from 21-28 August 1978. It was announced in the Feastletter of June 1978, but was never reported in *New Day*, the next issue of which appeared in September 1979.

Rúhíyyih Khánúm was born 8 August 1910 and was appointed individually on 26 March 1952. She visited for the week 10-17 September 1978, which is described in detail in *New Day* of

September 1979. On Sunday 10 September, she spoke to Bahá'ís in Carrickfergus Town Hall in Northern Ireland, also giving some news interviews and attended a reception. Then she headed south and spoke to Bahá'ís, who travelled from all over, at the Derryvale Hotel in Dundalk, Co. Louth on 12 September.

Then in the evening of 15 September, she spoke at the largest public meeting for some time, on the general subject of the Bahá'í Faith, in the Royal Hibernian Hotel in Dublin. (Her visit was the first time the National Assembly decided to seek media coverage, which was a historic policy change.) She had a number of such interviews, including one in *The Irish Independent* and another in RTÉ Radio's 'The Church in Action.'

On 16-17 September, there was a Conference at the Player Wills Theatre in Dublin, the largest venue up to that point for a Bahá'í Conference in Ireland, where she gave three long sessions including a frank question and answer session.

There are a number of other possible visits by other Hands of the Cause. There are records in the archives files of preparations for a visit by Dorothy Baker in 1947. This would have been before her appointment as a Hand of the Cause with the first contingent in 1951. However, the only evidence that she did in fact visit was her own CV prepared for the National Assembly of the United States in which 'Eire' appears on her list of countries visited.

Also, there is record of preparations for a visit by Enoch Olinga. The *Bahá'í Journal* of May 1972 says: 'Mr. Enoch Olinga will be spending nearly 3 weeks with us and will be able to visit a number of centres in England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.' However, there is scant reference to the trip afterwards, with no details of itinerary and no mention anywhere else that he was ever here.

Conclusion

This is a very basic outline of all the visits of Hands of the Cause to the island of Ireland that I have been able to document in a short space. There may be others, and there is a slight possibility that some of these did not actually happen. In all, out of 32 appointed during their lifetimes, 17 visited (or lived) in Ireland and they paid a total of 39 separate visits (not including George Townshend) between the years 1952 and 1986. This paper, it is

hoped, is a beginning toward more fully describing and evaluating their activities and influence in Ireland.

Timeline

February 1952: Mr Leroy Ioas

August 1952 (or 1953): Mr Dhikru'lláh Khadem

Ten-Year Plan (1953-1963)

February 1955: Mr Leroy Ioas

February 1955: Mr Hermann Grossmann

1956: Mr Hermann Grossman

Summer 1958: Mr Hermann Grossmann

10-12 April 1961: Gen. Shu'á'u'lláh 'Alá'í

September 1961: Mr Leroy Ioas

1963-1964

May 1963: Mr Abu'l-Qásim Faizí

January 1964: Mr John Ferraby

Nine-Year Plan (1964-1973)

December 1964: Mr John Ferraby

1965: Mr Tarázu'lláh Samandarí

January 1966: Mr Abu'l-Qásim Faizí

April 1967: Mr John Ferraby

June 1967: Gen. Shu'á'u'lláh Alá'í

July 1968: Mr Jalál Khazeh

October 1968: Mr William Sears

January 1969: Mr John Ferraby

July 1969: Mr Jalál Khazeh

October 1970: Mr John Robarts

May 1971: Dr Ugo Giachery

May 1972: Mr Enoch Olinga?

1973-1974

June 1973: Mr Collis Featherstone

July 1973: Dr Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir

Five-Year Plan (1974-1979)

August 1974: Dr Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir

September 1974: Mr Abu'l-Qásim Faizí

After Convention 1975: Gen. Shu'á'u'lláh 'Alá'í

August 1975: Mr Paul Haney

August 1976: Mr John Robarts

August 1978: Mr 'Alí-Akbar Furútan

September 1978: 'Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm

Seven-Year Plan (1979-1986)

June 1979: Dr Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir

May 1981: Mr John Robarts

June 1982: Mr Collis Featherstone

June 1982: Mr John Robarts

August 1984: Mr Dhikru'lláh Khadem

Six-Year Plan (1986-1992)

August/September 1986: Mr John Robarts

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8. *Ibid.*, #57, December 1986, pp. 7-9.
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10. Javidukht Khadem *Dhikru'lláh Khadem*, p. 60.
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12. *New Day* #45, pp. 4-5.
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15. *Ibid.*, #16, November 1974, pp. 5-6.
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Century of Light: New Trends in Understanding by Earl Redman

Abstract

Century of Light is a remarkable book in that it illustrates what the Universal House of Justice believes are the significant points in the century just passed; but it often turns conventional wisdom on its head. It strips away the clutter of history and lifts, if just a little, the veil on Bahá'u'lláh's simple statement about the world's equilibrium being upset by His new World Order. The book examines the twentieth century in a holistic sense and describes the simultaneous moral downfall of humanity in general with the respiritualization of a small but ever-growing portion of that same humanity. In many instances, Century of Light gives interpretations of processes and events that are quite different from the common perception. The twentieth century was the most horrific in history but, unknown to the mass of humanity, it led to the 'fundamental change of direction the Divine purpose required.' All Bahá'í scholars should benefit from a careful study of this unique historical analysis. This paper attempts to illustrate some of the examples where the Universal House of Justice has given us a new perspective on historical events.

Introduction

When Bahá'u'lláh revealed the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* in 1873, it contained a short paragraph that said simply:

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System – the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.¹

During the following century and a quarter, few probably realized the prophetic significance of these two sentences.

In the year 2000, we 'crossed a bridge to which we shall never return.'² The Universal House of Justice marked this point in the history of the world with a Twelve Month Plan that

had an importance beyond the objectives specifically assigned. The Plan was a dynamic link between a highly eventful epoch in Bahá'í history, and the immensely

promising prospects of a new one ... It has been etched in our annals, too, for the enduring effects of the Faith's activities at the end of the twentieth century – a century that deserves to be reflected upon by any Bahá'í who wishes to understand the tumultuous forces that influenced the life of the planet and the processes of the Cause itself at a crucial time in humanity's social and spiritual evolution.³

As an aid for Bahá'ís struggling to understand the significance of the twentieth century, the Universal House of Justice had the book, *Century of Light* (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Dehli, India, 2001), prepared under its supervision.

Century of Light strips away the clutter of history and lifts the veil on Bahá'u'lláh's simple statement in the *Aqdas*, if just a little. It examines the twentieth century in a holistic sense and describes the simultaneous moral downfall of humanity in general with the respiritualization of a small but ever-growing portion of that same humanity. It recounts a human history guided by a Spiritual Force recognized by few. It demonstrates how the Hand of God has guided humanity throughout the last century on to a new path. 'What the struggles of the twentieth century achieved,' it says, 'was the fundamental change of direction [uniting humanity into a global society] the Divine purpose required. The change is irreversible.'⁴ So fundamental was this change that it is as if 'A corner had been turned that left behind six or more millennia of history ... a new authority was at work in human affairs to which all might reasonably hope somehow to appeal.'⁵

In their Ridván message in 1996, the Universal House of Justice began preparing the Bahá'í world for a change in mindset:

As for the institutions, entry by troops will act upon them as much as they will act upon it. The evolution of local and national Bahá'í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá'í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage.⁶

Part of this change in mindset was defined by the Universal House of Justice in its 9 January 2001 document, which states that the

core of the Five Year Plan 'is a spiritual process in which communities and institutions strive to align their pursuits with the Will of God.'⁷ In the Ridván message of 2001, the House assures the believers that this change of mindset is happening: 'With great joy in our hearts and high expectations, we come to this Ridván season at a change of time, when a new state of mind is evident among us all.'⁸

Following its own insistence on a new mindset, the Universal House of Justice examines in *Century of Light* the historical sweep of the twentieth century by using a unique perspective that visualizes a human history guided by a Spiritual Force. Though this concept is not unknown in the worlds of intellectual and theological thought today, the House of Justice is alone in having the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh for this time. Its occasionally radical conclusions, therefore, commonly turn conventional wisdom on its head. All Bahá'í scholars should benefit from a careful study of this unique historical analysis. This paper attempts to illustrate some of the examples where the House of Justice has given us a new perspective on historical events.

'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Persian Bahá'í Community

The tragic persecution that afflicted the early believers in Persia is well known, as is the steadfastness and sacrifice of those Bahá'ís in the face of such tribulations. It is well known that the sacrifices and martyrdoms in Persia led directly to the blossoming of the Faith elsewhere. Most Bahá'ís are also familiar with the herculean efforts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to maintain and stimulate that harassed community.

But *Century of Light* illuminates something unexpected:

'Abdu'l-Bahá was able not only to stimulate the expansion of the Persian Bahá'í community, but to shape its consciousness and collective life. The result was the emergence of a culture, however localized, that was unlike anything humanity had ever known.⁹

This dramatic statement refers to the development of 'rudimentary consultative bodies', not what most people think about when pondering those times. *Century of Light*, however, states

categorically that the importance of these bodies is ‘impossible to exaggerate. In a land and among a people’ it says,

accustomed for centuries to a patriarchal system that concentrated all decision-making authority in the hands of an absolute monarch or Shi’ih mujtahids, a community representing a cross-section of that society had broken with the past, taking into its own hands the responsibility for deciding its collective affairs through consultative action.¹⁰

In relation to the development of the Bahá’í New World Order in the early twentieth century, therefore, the creation of consultative bodies in an autocratic land illustrated the power of the Hand of God.

The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution has been defined as the ‘complex of social and economic changes resulting from the mechanization of industry.’¹¹ This mechanization led to the increased manufacture of goods, more efficient technology, increased productivity, and enhanced efficiency created by the formation of large enterprises. It also began the process of urbanization with the movement of farming people to the cities for factory jobs.

Century of Light acknowledges the above but exposes a distinctly darker side during the beginning of the twentieth century:

Large-scale industrial production, fuelled by the arms race, had accelerated the movement of populations into urban centres. By the end of the preceding century, this process was already undermining inherited standards and loyalties, exposing growing numbers of people to novel ideas for the bringing about of social change, and exciting mass appetites for material benefits previously available only to elite segments of society.¹²

Century of Light pointedly illuminates the undermining of loyalties as a darker result of the Industrial Revolution. This may have been the result of factory owners who were more concerned with profits than the welfare of their employees. This lack of concern led to the

masses being drawn to the 'novel ideas for the bringing about of social change.'

The last phrase in the above quote, 'exciting mass appetites for material benefits previously available only to elite segments of society,' implies both positive and negative results with the same wording. On the positive side, the masses of society began to acquire those things previously available only to the rich, while on the negative, it highlights the dawning of materialism.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's journey to the West

'Abdu'l-Bahá's journeys through Europe and North America were, according to Shoghi Effendi, 'a turning point of the utmost significance in the history of the century'¹² and 'marked the culmination of His ministry.'¹³ Thousands of people were brought into contact with the message of Bahá'u'lláh due to direct contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His attendant publicity. *Century of Light*, though, declares that the journeys resulted in an immense moral failure, not on the part of 'Abdu'l-Bahá or the Western Bahá'ís, but on the part of the masses and their leaders:

However much one may rejoice in the praise poured on the Master from every quarter, the immediate results of His efforts represented yet another immense moral failure on the part of a considerable portion of humankind and of its leadership. The message that had been suppressed in the East was essentially ignored by a Western world which had proceeded down the path of ruin long prepared for it by overweening self-satisfaction, leading finally to the betrayal of the ideal embodied in the League of Nations.¹⁴

The world had failed for a second time: first the kings and rulers rejected Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation, then the people of Europe and North America ignored 'Abdu'l-Bahá's message.

Man-made Ideologies

During the twentieth century, the world developed many ideologies for governing, including theocracy, monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, republican, and democracy, as well as capitalism, Communism, Nazism, and nationalism. Each of these creations were looked on, temporarily at least, as the path to

world peace and tranquillity. *Century of Light*, however, unambiguously declares that they did little more than accelerate humanity's decline:

The consequence of humanity's infatuation with the ideologies its own mind had conceived was to produce a terrifying acceleration of the process of disintegration that was dissolving the fabric of social life and cultivating the basest impulses of human nature. The brutalization that the first world war had engendered now became an omnipresent feature of social life throughout much of the planet.¹⁵

Bahá'ís, *Century of Light* explains, are not creating a new system of governance. Instead, they are simply fulfilling the plan sent by God through Bahá'u'lláh:

Theirs is the duty to hold, aloft and undimmed, the torch of Divine guidance, as the shades of night descend upon, and ultimately envelop the entire human race. Theirs is the function, amidst its tumults, perils and agonies, to witness to the vision, and proclaim the approach, of that re-created society, that Christ-promised Kingdom, that World Order whose generative impulse is the spirit of none other than Bahá'u'lláh Himself, whose dominion is the entire planet, whose watchword is unity, whose animating power is the force of Justice, whose directive purpose is the reign of righteousness and truth, and whose supreme glory is the complete, the undisturbed and everlasting felicity of the whole of human kind.¹⁶

The book dramatically contrasts the man-made versus the God-made by paraphrasing Rúhiyyih Khánúm, Hand of the Cause of God and widow of Shoghi Effendi:

powerful nations were launching armies of invasion whose goal was to seize the natural resources of neighbour states – or simply to satisfy an appetite for conquest. During this same period, Shoghi Effendi was mobilizing the painfully small band of pioneers available to him, and dispatching them to the teaching goals of the Plan he had created. Within

a few short years, the vast battalions of aggression would be shattered beyond recovery, their names and conquests erased from history. The little company of believers who had gone out with their lives in their hands to fulfil the mission entrusted to them by the Guardian would have achieved or exceeded all of their objectives, objectives that soon became the foundations of flourishing communities.¹⁷

While the plans of humankind, when not following the Word of God, can be brought to naught, the plan of God is unstoppable.

The League of Nations

In the aftermath of the First World War, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson proposed a 'general association of nations ... formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.'¹⁸ He said that this League of Nations would ensure that the world would be a fit and safe place in which to live, and that all the peoples of the world were partners in this program for world peace. Wilson called for open covenants of peace, freedom of the seas, the removal of trade barriers, and the reduction of national armaments to a point consistent with national safety. Unfortunately, Wilson's own country, the United States, refused to take part in this, the world's first attempt at global governance, and its European adapters proved not to have the moral integrity to follow the path marked out by Wilson.

Century of Light affirms that the failure of the world to follow Wilson's vision made the next world war inevitable:

In sum, at precisely the moment in human history when an unprecedented outbreak of violence had undermined the inherited bulwarks of civilized behaviour, the political leadership of the Western world had emasculated the one alternative system of international order to which experience of this catastrophe had given birth and which alone could have alleviated the far greater suffering that lay ahead.¹⁹

World War II

After the First World War, the United States retired from the world scene to live behind its protective oceans. It rejected the League of

Nations which Wilson had forcefully promoted to a devastated world, preferring to let the Europeans extricate themselves from the horror which they themselves had created. Both Bahá'u'lláh²⁰ and 'Abdu'l-Bahá²¹ prophesied the Second World War and Shoghi Effendi stated that: 'The war should be regarded "as the direct continuation" of the conflagration ignited in 1914.'²²

Century of Light strongly asserts that the War, beyond being unfinished world business, occurred to force the United States to assume its true position in the world:

It would come to be seen as the 'essential pre-requisite to world unification'. The entry into the war by the United States, whose President had initiated the project of a system of international order, but which had itself rejected this initiative, would lead that nation ... to assume through adversity its preponderating share of responsibility to lay down, once for all, broad, worldwide, unassailable foundations of that discredited yet immortal System.²³

This understanding of the relationship between the Second World War and the United States makes the events of 11 September 2001 very thought-provoking. The United States has again become isolationist and has acquired a go-it-alone attitude. Then when we read Bahá'u'lláh's words to the 'Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein' quoted in *Century of Light*, we can only gaze in amazement at the confrontation between the United States and Iraq. 'Bahá'u'lláh Himself', states the *Century of Light*,

delivered a mandate that has no parallel in any of His other addresses to world leaders: 'Bind ye the broken with the hands of justice and crush the oppressor who flourisheth with the rod of the commandments of your Lord, the Ordainer, the All-Wise.'²⁴

Is the United States unwittingly following the mandate of Bahá'u'lláh and, as a consequence, forcing the world to both confront oppression and learn to act in unity? [Note: this article was written during 2002]

The United Nations; uplift and unification of the peoples of the world

Creation of the United Nations was a signal event in the history of the twentieth century. Unlike the League of Nations, the new international body had peace-keeping powers in addition to greater authority. It was the first serious step toward international governance, though it, too, failed to receive a mandate sufficient for world governance.

What the United Nations did do, according to *Century of Light*, was to help humanity break away from 6,000 years of history:

A corner had been turned that left behind six or more millennia of history. Beyond all the continuing educational disadvantages, the economic inequities, and the obstructions created by political and diplomatic manoeuvring – beyond all these practical but historically transient limitations – a new authority was at work in human affairs to which all might reasonably hope somehow to appeal. Representatives of once subject peoples, whose exotically clad warriors had brought up the rear of the Diamond Jubilee procession in London only five decades earlier, now began to appear as delegates to the Security Council and occupants of senior posts in the United Nations and non-governmental organizations of every kind.²⁵

The masses of humanity finally had at least partial control over their destinies.

The Ten Year Crusade

The Ten Year Crusade or Plan (1953-63) was the first international teaching plan, whose objectives were the development of the Bahá'í World Centre, the consolidation of national Bahá'í communities, the consolidation of all territories then open to the Faith, and the opening of the main unopened territories.²⁶ Shoghi Effendi called it a 'decade-long, world-embracing Spiritual Crusade.'²⁷ The Universal House of Justice has said that during the Crusade, 'the foundations of its Administrative Order were laid throughout the world, thus preparing the way for that awakening

of the masses which must characterize the future progress of the Faith.’²⁸ It also stated that

the Community of the Most Great Name spread with the speed of lightning over the major territories and islands of the globe, increased manifoldly its manpower and resources, saw the beginning of the entry of the peoples by troops into the Cause of God, and completed the structure of the Administrative Order of Bahá’u’lláh.²⁹

Century of Light, however, reveals that the true significance of the Ten Year Crusade was that it

called for the Cause to make a giant leap forward over what might otherwise have been several stages in its evolution. What Shoghi Effendi saw clearly – and what only the powers of foresight inherent in the Guardianship made it possible to see – was that an historical conjunction of circumstances presented the Bahá’í community with an opportunity that would not come again and on which the success of future stages in the prosecution of the Divine Plan would entirely depend.³⁰

What was significant was the moment; the Ten Year Crusade could not have happened at any other time. The result of this ‘giant leap’ was the election of the Universal House of Justice, ‘very likely ... history’s first global democratic election.’³¹

The Power of the Community of Nations

The renewed persecutions of the Bahá’í community in Iran during the early 1980s created a world-wide outcry. Most Bahá’ís were eminently aware that the sacrifices of that beleaguered community were spreading the Faith across the globe to an unprecedented degree. *Century of Light*, though, underscores the power of the community of nations in alleviating the worst of the persecution:

Not only the Bahá’í community but the United Nations’ human rights system itself benefited from this long struggle. Initially, after the Islamic revolution, the community of believers in Iran had faced a threat to its very survival. In

time, the United Nations Human Rights Commission, however slow and relatively cumbersome its operations may appear to some outside observers, succeeded in compelling the Iranian regime to bring the worst of the persecution to a halt. In this way, the 'case of Iran's Bahá'ís' marked a significant victory for the Commission and the Bahá'í Faith alike ... It served as a startling demonstration of the power of the community of nations, acting through the machinery created for the purpose, to bring under control patterns of oppression that had darkened the pages of recorded history throughout the ages.³²

Century of Light also marks this as demonstrating the relevance of the activities of the Faith to the larger world: 'This circumstance highlights the relevance of the Faith's activities to the life of the larger society in which these efforts are taking place.'³³

Unification of the planet

'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that: 'The fifth candle is the unity of nations – a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland.'³⁴ Bahá'ís have long known that the unity of the nations of the world was coming. Few, however, realized that while we gazed expectantly toward the future, this unity had arisen quietly behind us. *Century of Light* states unambiguously that this candle has been lit:

Yet, the unification of humankind under a system of governance that can release the full potentialities latent in human nature, and allow their expression in programmes for the benefit of all, is clearly the next stage in the evolution of civilization. The physical unification of the planet in our time and the awakening aspirations of the mass of its inhabitants have at last produced the conditions that permit achievement of the ideal, although in a manner far different from that imagined by imperial dreamers of the past.³⁵

Century of Light further emphasizes this by saying:

The Master's promise of "unity of nations" ... looked forward to today's widespread acceptance among the peoples of the world of the fact that, however great the differences among them may be, they are the inhabitants of a single global homeland.³⁶

Future world government

Most Bahá'ís knew that the task of world governance was beyond the United Nations in its current form. Selfish nationalistic tendencies effectively block that body from fulfilling the ever-growing need for a world governing body:

Somewhere ahead lie the further great changes that will eventually impel acceptance of the principle of world government itself. The United Nations does not possess such a mandate, nor is there anything in the current discourse of political leaders that seriously envisions so radical a restructuring of the administration of the affairs of the planet. That it will come about in due course Bahá'u'lláh has made unmistakably clear. That yet greater suffering and disillusionment will be required to impel humanity to this great leap forward appears, alas, equally clear.³⁷

Century of Light points out the obvious: that national governments will have to surrender a portion of their power before true world governance can be established. But the book also highlights 'other centres of power' as also having to relinquish authority: 'Its establishment will require national governments and other centres of power to surrender to international determination, unconditionally and irreversibly, the full measure of overriding authority implicit in the word "government".'³⁸ Of these other centres of power, *Century of Light* specifically mentions multinational corporations (unbridled exploitation of the masses of humanity by greed),³⁹ media conglomerates (the almost universal celebration in the arts and media of degeneracy and violence),⁴⁰ and religious leaders (who have imposed on credulous masses a welter of dogmas and prejudices that have constituted the greatest single obstacle against which the advancement of civilization has been forced to struggle).⁴¹ The danger of religious prejudice, the Universal House of Justice has emphasized in its

letter of April 2002 to the religious leaders of the world, 'will ignite a worldwide conflagration the consequences of which are unthinkable.'⁴²

Conclusion

Century of Light is a remarkable book in that it illustrates the points which the Universal House of Justice believes are significant in the century just passed. In many instances, those points are quite different from the common, secular perceptions. The twentieth century was indisputably the most horrific in history but, unknown to the mass of humanity, it led to the 'fundamental change of direction the Divine purpose required.'⁴³

September 2002

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Creating Environments that Enhance Spirituality *by Dawn Staudt*

Abstract

This paper sets out to explain that all of the teachings, laws and ordinances of the Bahá'í Faith are there to advance both the individual and society spiritually. Its purpose is to highlight three areas that particularly lend themselves to creating the environment for individual spiritual development: the use of personal prayer, the use of the arts (with a description of Tranquillity Zones) and the use of encouragement (focusing on the Virtues Project).

Introduction

Since it is obvious that spiritual development of the individual is what the Bahá'í Faith is fundamentally about, it seems fair to say that it could likely be that the conditions that encourage one person to develop along the path of spirituality could well apply to others. In fact, the Writings confirm this view. It is this outlook that has inspired this author to attempt to share and support the view that certain factors can indeed lend to this all-important goal of individual spiritual development.

The most fundamental principle of this spiritualization process is to obey the basic tenants of the Faith. Obviously, the more one is able to be firm in the Covenant – that is, obey all the laws and ordinances of Bahá'u'lláh – the more one will progress. It is not within the scope of this brief work to go into details of this vast ocean of requirements and possibilities. The assumption is made that the reader is well aware of the many basic concepts involved, namely: twice daily reading of the Word of God, daily reciting of one of the three Obligatory Prayers, observing the ordinances of the Bahá'í calendar, i.e. the Fast, Feasts and Holy Days. Obedience to all Bahá'í laws and to the Bahá'í institutions, as well as observation of the teachings on consultation, are but a few of the many other specific ways that one can internalise the teachings of the Faith and become a more spiritual person – that is, draw closer to God.

There are three specific areas this paper will address regarding ways to create or to enhance an environment for spiritual development. These will include: the use of personal prayer, the use of the arts, and the use of encouragement.

The Use of Personal Prayer

The Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá tell us many things about prayer:

There is nothing sweeter in the world of existence than prayer. Man must live in a state of prayer. The most blessed condition is the condition of prayer and supplication. Prayer is conversation with God ... It creates spirituality, creates mindfulness and celestial feelings, begets new attractions of the Kingdom and engenders the susceptibilities of the higher intelligence.¹

This one quote alone says so many profoundly spiritual things: 'nothing sweeter in the world of existence.' It was this quote that recently made this author wish to try harder to *feel* that connection with God when praying when, in fact, 'conversing with' Him. Surely, if this is considered 'the most blessed condition' and if we are specifically told 'it creates spirituality,' this must be something that we can strive to do for ourselves more and more seriously, more and more steadfastly. Bahá'u'lláh tells us this exactly and very clearly when He says:

At the dawn of every day he should commune with God, and, *with all his soul, persevere in the quest of his Beloved* (author's emphasis).²

This shows that daily prayers – whether the Obligatory Prayer or other personal prayers – should not consist of 'casual' conversation with God. 'Communing' with God and 'the quest' of our Beloved do not imply a simple 'chat' with God, merely reciting the words of prayers, merely running through our list of requests and our few words of thanks. 'Communing' implies, rather, a deep connection of our heart and soul to our Lord. It implies a real *desire* to make that connection. Bahá'u'lláh refers to this longing with a promise of reward: 'whenever thou shalt long for Me, thou shalt find Me close to thee.'³ Is this not the object of our lives – to be close to God? It seems so simple, but too often we don't seem to find it so.

As this quotation shows, communing is a condition of our heart, a yearning, a true longing. It is simply, yet so profoundly,

the love in our hearts for our Creator and for Bahá'u'lláh, His Manifestation for this age. Of course, God knows what's in our hearts, so it doesn't necessarily have to be put into words. We do, however, have to create the feeling or awareness of that longing. It would seem that the phrases above, 'communing with God' and 'with all his soul,' do not imply a mere intellectual knowing that we love God and trusting that He knows that we know. Love is, again, a matter of the heart and soul.

The Báb tells us that it is indeed the condition of our hearts that matters most when we pray. He writes: 'The most acceptable prayer is the one offered with the utmost spirituality and radiance ... The more detached and the purer the prayer, the more acceptable is it in the presence of God.' The word 'radiance' seems to imply joy and brilliancy. If this radiance is truly with us when we pray, surely we will feel the result of this communing, this conversation with God. It is as we are told in the Hidden Word: 'Love Me that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant!'⁴ We know God created us because He loves us, but this aphorism tells us that if we don't love Him, His love cannot reach us. Prayer, then, is one of the ways we show our love for God.

It seems that when we are aware of this radiance and this love when we pray, it is then that 'It creates spirituality, creates mindfulness and celestial feelings, begets new attractions of the Kingdom,' as stated above. It seems that these qualities of spirituality, mindfulness and new attractions is what will go out with us from our prayers for the rest of the day. Is this not what makes us 'spiritually attractive' to others, what will make us the 'magnets' of the hearts of men? Is this not what it means in that same first quote above when it is stated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 'Man must live in a state of prayer?'

Perhaps these are not new insights to the reader on prayer. One can say that one is already well aware of these quotations and the fine implications they make. So why is it so difficult to cultivate this attitude of prayer on a regular basis? Shoghi Effendi tells us:

It is often difficult for us to do things because they are so very different from what we are used to, not because the thing itself is particularly difficult ... Bahá'u'lláh would not

give us these things if they would not greatly benefit us ... we must accept to obey these ordinances even though at first we may not see any need for them. As we obey them we will gradually come to see in ourselves the benefits they confer.⁵

This is precisely what this author is proposing: that we do not, in fact, follow the advice given closely enough. The Guardian refers to it as 'obedience' and that really goes back to the introductory comments relating to firmness in the Covenant, which is a far greater topic than this paper will endeavour to cover. Instead, I will examine this in another light with details of practical assistance that can aid us toward this with this gradual obedience.

There are several examples of details which we might try to improve. One is the timing of our personal prayers. In addition to the specific time required for the Obligatory Prayers, we are specifically enjoined to pray 'at the dawn of every day', as indicated in the quotation above, while in another quote we are told 'at times, such as midnight, when freed from daily cares.'⁶

'When freed from daily cares ...' This denotes that by following this advice of either of these two certain times of the day, our minds will be less occupied with other thoughts and concerns. It makes sense that this will thus make it easier for us to concentrate and give our full attention to this communing with our Lord. This last quotation, as well as the one following, refers to another important point in creating this environment for spiritual development through prayer, namely, offering our prayers in private:

The reason why privacy hath been enjoined in moments of devotion is this, that thou mayest give thy best attention to the remembrance of God, that thy heart may at all times be animated with His spirit, and not be shut out as by a veil from thy Best Beloved.⁷

This, of course, does not mean praying with one's children playing in the same room or with one's spouse reading a book there. How can we possibly get into this special frame of mind described above as 'communing' with God and this longing in our heart with someone else present who is not in the least in that same

condition? (Of course, praying in a larger gathering of Bahá'ís is a different matter.)

Cleanliness is another condition we are told in the Writings that affects our spirituality and should be considered when approaching prayer:

Wings that are besmirched with mire can never soar.⁸

When man in all conditions is pure and immaculate, he will become the centre of the reflection of the manifest light ... The channel must be cleansed before it is filled with sweet water ... External cleanliness, although it is but a physical thing, has a great influence upon spirituality.⁹

The point is this: the Divine Physician not only tells us what the remedy is, He also tells us how to apply that remedy. The details of the 'how to' pray are actually what create the proper 'environment' for prayer. The more closely we can try to apply the various details given to us regarding prayer, the more likely we will feel these sacred effects in our hearts and the more they will effect our behaviour in spiritual ways.

What is it that gets in the way of putting into practice these small details that can make such a difference? Obviously, each person needs to consider this for themselves. Is it lack of detachment from the material world, namely, our precious sleep? We may see ourselves as being either a 'morning lark' or a 'night owl', so one specific time of the day or night must be appropriate to seek this 'quest of our Beloved' when 'freed from daily cares.' Are we not organized enough to properly wash and dress ourselves before we set out to recite our prayers? Perhaps our homes are small, but, again, with thought and consultation with those with whom we live, privacy is likely to be attainable.

Two other details of how to administer the remedy and how to create this special environment relates to what is learned in Study Circles, namely, that to 'intone' means 'to say out loud.' We have also learned that 'recite' means 'to say from memory.' Perhaps learning the prayers we use most often by heart can also contribute to creating this atmosphere of yearning to be close to God, simply because we can close our eyes, block out distractions in the room around us and not have to fumble with a prayer book. The Báb tells us: 'every breast which committeth His Words to

memory, God shall cause, if it were that of a believer, to be filled with His love ...'¹⁰ Is this not what we are seeking in our prayers – ‘to be filled with God’s love?’

We are told that when we make a sacrifice, we receive a gift. The sacrifice involved in any of these issues will be well rewarded with this increased connection of our hearts to our Beloved in those precious moments of prayer. We must remind ourselves that the prolongation of prayer is not what God requires from us; however, the more one experiences the true condition of prayer, as described in the Writings, the longer, in fact, one wishes to remain in it! The bounties it bestows are priceless. The effects in our daily lives are tangible.

The power of Divine Assistance gained through prayer can never be underestimated. The Writings contain many references to the benefits of prayer – strengthening in divine virtue, healing, awakening, mindfulness, protection, preservation from tests, to name but a few. It seems that most often we miss numerous opportunities because we have not relied on this power of prayer. We may and must consciously strive more faithfully to attain this ‘best of conditions’, which in fact is within our own power to achieve. This author proposes that it is the daily acquiring of the details of how to pray that will help us create the special environment that will enhance our own spirituality. Perhaps we can begin by asking God’s assistance in this matter of enhancing the quality of our prayers.

In the Five Year Plan (2001-2006), where we are to be systematic in all that we do, perhaps we can choose but one of these little details of how we should pray to start us on our way to creating this condition of spiritual development. One can work toward that one little detail first, whether it be:

- the special time of day,
- the spotless cleanliness,
- the intonation of our prayers,
- memorizing prayers or
- seeking privacy while praying.

If we can master first just one of these details, we are likely to feel some effect, some improvement. Once one is mastered, we can add in another one; and so, as the Master tells us, ‘little by little, day by

day,' we will see this very special area of our lives improve and move forward in precious spiritual ways and thus affecting our lives in ways we never thought possible before.

The Use of the Arts

There have been one kind of events over the last couple of years that have highlighted to this author that the use of the arts can contribute to creating tremendous spirituality. (We know, of course, as well, that this point has been made in recent plans from the Universal House of Justice, notably in the Ridván letter of 1996.) This event includes what have come to be called 'Tranquillity Zones,' which will now be described and discussed.

Most Irish Bahá'ís are probably familiar now with the Tranquillity Zones. These were developed over several years by the Bahá'ís in Swindon, England. The original premise was to offer an opportunity to raise spiritual awareness among the people of Swindon. This was done by setting up a truly beautiful environment to which the public was invited. Special music, flowers, candles, and fragrance were combined with verses from the Writings to create this atmosphere of heightened awareness of the spiritual within us all.

Among the Bahá'ís thus involved in Swindon there was a question for quite some time as to whether the Tranquillity Zones were a teaching project or a service project. In the end the Bahá'ís seemed to feel that it is one and the same. The following quotation from their 40-page report entitled 'From Events to Environments' shares the insights they gained on this special approach to teaching:

Therefore in teaching, two processes can be seen at work. The first is the process of spiritual growth, which every human being is capable of developing in their heart; much like the seed of a tree that has the capacity and potential to grow. This is between the individual and Bahá'u'lláh. The second process is creating the environments in which this spiritual capacity has the opportunity to grow and this is something that we as Bahá'ís can help to create. The term 'teaching' then refers to a process that creates environments of spiritual growth.

Notice that this last phrase is the same as the title of this paper. This is what it is all about: creating the environment for spiritual growth. When each of the senses are awakened – when the eyes behold the beauty of the flowers, when the nose inhales the sweetness of the scent, when the ear is touched by the sound brought forth by the musician – then is the heart and soul enabled to feel the spirit of the Word of God.

This verse from the Writings tells us that first there must be purity. Perhaps the beautiful environment of the Tranquillity Zone contributes to creating the pure heart at that particular moment:

in all his actions and conduct there must first be purity, then beauty...The pure eye comprehendeth the sight and the meaning of God; the pure nostril inhaleteth the perfumes of the rose-garden of bounty; the pure heart becometh the mirror of the beauty of truth ...¹¹

Of course, Bahá'ís know that the Word of God has the power to touch the hearts and souls of the whole human race:

The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable ... The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked ... It is an ocean inexhaustible in riches, comprehending all things.¹²

In a Tranquillity Zone, the beautiful surroundings simply enhance the opportunity for the hearts to be touched by the Word of God – *both* our own hearts and those of our friends. When our own hearts are moved at a Tranquillity Zone, as well as the heart of our friend attending, a special bond of unity is created that is endowed with spirit.

When inviting a friend to a Tranquillity Zone, one can describe it as a 'kind of meditation.' Often a particular theme or topic is chosen for each occasion (e.g. happiness), so it would be a meditation on that theme. However, it is important to make it clear that there is no one kind of meditation in the Bahá'í Faith, no set format to be rigidly followed. To Bahá'ís, drawn from diverse backgrounds, meditation is simply an opportunity to contemplate

the Writings. One might want to explain the simplicity of the occasion as follows: a lovely environment will be created with candles, flowers, scents and music and one person will slowly read some verses for your contemplation. This is all a Tranquillity Zone is and people coming may like to have a clear understanding of this at the outset. This can be especially important as other traditions invoke various images of what meditation will involve and may not necessarily be the sort of event to which they are attracted!

Tranquillity Zones are a very effective way to open the hearts of our seeking friends. (In fact, as the Swindon project developed over those months and years, their community doubled in size.) Thus, it can be seen that we can become more 'natural' teachers, more naturally able to share this precious Faith of ours with others in such a specially created environment that enhances spirituality. It is the beauty of the environment created from the beauty of the gifts God has given to us – including the Word of God – offered in an attitude of service that has this effect on the hearts of those attending. (Of course, the beauty and serenity of the souls offering the Tranquillity Zone is another important condition that they will have presumably prepared with their prayers prior to the event.)

The arts and the beautiful environment combined with the sincere love and fellowship of the friends serve to create this atmosphere of spirituality. It is, or can be, a glimpse of heaven on earth. The stranger has become a friend. The friend has become like a lover. This closeness of hearts has been brought about by this spiritually created atmosphere. The hearts of all those in attendance were truly uplifted, as the Writings well attest to this possibility: 'We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your soul, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high ...'¹³ Another verses tells us:

Whatever is in the heart of man, melody moves and awakens. If a heart full of good feelings and a pure voice are joined together, a great effect is produced. For instance: if there be love in the heart, through melody, it will increase until its intensity can scarcely be borne ... The meaning is that melody causes whatever feeling is in the heart to increase ...¹⁴

Regarding all art, including music and poetry, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

All art is a gift of the Holy Spirit. When this light shines through the mind of a musician, it manifests itself in beautiful harmonies. Again, shining through the mind of a poet, it is seen in fine poetry and poetic prose ... These gifts are fulfilling their highest purpose, when showing forth the praise of God.¹⁵

The Writings support this idea and clearly encourage the use of these arts for the gatherings of the friends and tell us of the great benefits to be received, both in this quotation, as well as from several others from the same source, though not all cited here:

Continue as long as thou canst this melody in the gatherings of the beloved; thus may the minds find rest and joy and become in tune with the love of God. When eloquence of expression, beauty of sense and sweetness of composition unite with new melodies the effect is ever great, especially if it be the anthem of the verses of oneness and the songs of praise to the Lord of Glory.¹⁶

As long ago as 1933, Shoghi Effendi stated:

The day will come when the Cause will spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings will be presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalising, especially among the mass of the people.¹⁷

Those who have seen or been part of the Diversity Dance Theatre groups that have toured around Ireland over the last couple of years can recall how these dancers have touched many hearts. Over several years, there has also seen an increased emphasis on the use of the arts from the institutions of the Faith. This has been seen from the Training Institute programmes prior to the use of the Ruhi materials, as well as now in the Ruhi

materials with the ‘gift of oneself’ used during Study Circles, from the National Spiritual Assembly at its recent Institutional Meetings, and from speakers at Summer Schools. We are slowly but surely getting the idea that the use of the arts is a very powerful way to create environments for spiritual growth.

The Use of Encouragement

The third area that is conducive to creating spiritual growth is that of the use of encouragement. One might think this a rather simplistic approach, but attempts will be made to show how truly powerful this can be. The author recently did an hour-and-a-half session at the annual conference for a national organisation (not Bahá’í) on this topic, and was rather overwhelmed with the positive response received afterwards. This prompted the inclusion of this topic in this paper.

If one first looks at the definition of the word ‘encourage,’ one will find in The Oxford Dictionary: ‘to give support, confidence, or hope to; to help or stimulate the development of.’ There it is – ‘stimulate the development of’ something. In this case, I will look at spiritual development. From the definition, we can see that by offering encouragement we are simply offering support and hope to others. Is this not what all of us need in our everyday lives? Certainly we need it in all that we undertake that is good, but if we could receive encouragement in all that pertains to spiritual development, then all the rest would much more easily fall into place.

At the conference just mentioned, this author coined the phrase of an ‘encourager’ as being someone who is ‘a bringer of light’ to others. We all know how wonderful we feel when someone – stranger or loved one – tells how well we did at something. It is as if a magic wand touched us and our heart feels warm and happy. It is sweet to know that someone thought it went well, that someone noticed the effort made (even though we are to offer our deeds as service to God), that someone else benefited in some way from what we have tried to do. In all humility, we may well know that it was accomplished only by the aid of the Almighty. But still it can even be the comment made that makes us more fully *aware* of this. It is then that *this* realization fills us with a special glow that warms heart and soul. So, such

simple words as 'well done' can help us to develop radiance of spirit, a deeper dedication to try to be of service and also humility.

We should not underestimate the worth of such simple words of encouragement. The Writings offer definite support for this:

Thus it is incumbent upon us, when we direct our gaze toward other people, to see where they excel, not where they fail.¹⁸

Never speak disparagingly of others, but praise without distinction.¹⁹

See nothing but good in one another, hear nothing but praise of one another, and speak no word of one another save only to praise.²⁰

The Writings go on to tell us that it is not enough only to speak encouragingly of others, but, as both the quotes above and below show, we should also see only what is good in others:

Thus it is incumbent upon us, when we direct our gaze toward other people, to see where they excel, not where they fail.²¹

One must see in every human being only that which is worthy of praise.²²

This is indeed a tall order, but we remember that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has told us that even our thoughts have power. For example, we are told that we must replace a thought of war with a stronger thought of peace, a thought of hatred with a more powerful thought of love.²³ So, even our *thinking* should be of a positive, encouraging nature.

These few quotations give us insights into how we can go about encouraging others, as well as ourselves, to bring about this development of spirituality. This way of speaking and thinking that keeps us looking to the positive/spiritual side of life and not letting the negative/unspiritual side dominate are again habits that we can consciously strive to acquire. Let us now turn our attention to the point of encouraging children.

The dictionary definition said that to encourage also was about giving confidence. We all would be aware of the extreme importance of giving confidence to children. This is what develops their self-esteem, i.e. how they feel about themselves. Sociology and psychology studies have long ago shown that a child's self-esteem affects them in many ways: how they learn, how they make friends, how they progress in fulfilling their potential both academically and socially. It boils down to how happy and content they will be in life.

These studies also clearly indicate that it is the home environment that has the biggest influence on the development of this self-esteem. (Perhaps this is no longer true in modern Western societies where many or most mothers work full-time out of the home and children under the age of five spend the vast majority of their waking hours with people who are not their parents.) We know as Bahá'ís, however, that the mother is considered the 'first educator' of the child. A great deal of responsibility is clearly placed on her in this capacity:

The mother is the first teacher of the child. For children, at the beginning of life, are fresh and tender as a young twig, and can be trained in any fashion you desire. If you rear the child to be straight, he will grow straight, in perfect symmetry. It is clear that the mother is the first teacher and that it is she who establisheth the character and conduct of the child.²⁴

Of course, fathers have a very responsible role to play as well:

Ye should consider the question of goodly character as of the first importance. It is incumbent upon every father and mother to counsel their children over a long period, and guide them unto those things which lead to everlasting honour.²⁵

We know clearly, as well, that 'those things which lead to everlasting honour' refer to all that pertains to the spiritual development of the child. Again, 'Abdu'l-Bahá delineates this as follows:

It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith ... For every praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion.²⁶

From the very beginning, the children must receive divine education and must continually be reminded to remember their God. Let the love of God pervade their inmost being.²⁷

Encouraging the child in the development of praiseworthy character and habits is, therefore, of the utmost importance in family life. This is not an easy task, when we, sadly, live in a world that tends to dwell on 'the unpleasant things of life'. News broadcasts, newspaper headlines, soap operas, gossip columns and magazines, backbiting: so many negatives surround us that it is not always easy to take the positive, encouraging approach. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

Know that this matter of instruction, of character rectification and refinement, of *heartening and encouraging the child*, is of the utmost importance, for such are basic principles of God (author's emphasis).²⁸

Certainly, all the above quotations regarding seeing the good in others and not speaking disparagingly of them are applicable to our child-rearing practices. At the same time these must be tempered with the important realization that the child does, in fact, need to be corrected when misbehaving. It is not enough to see only the good and ignore the bad. Perhaps we can distract a child to create a more positive situation at times, but certainly at other times the child must be lovingly, patiently, but definitely corrected and made to understand clearly that his or her negative deeds are not to be repeated. The parent must obviously see where the child 'fails' in order to correct him or her and guide them on the path of proper spiritual development. The Writings tell us:

Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him.²⁹

Perhaps the following quotation will help parents keep this discipline, this training issue in better perspective: ‘Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God.’³⁰

Again, this is a tall order when one is spending an entire day with a two-year old. Much more could be said of these matters, but space does not permit. The author refers readers to the book *Bahá’í Education: A Compilation* as an excellent and detailed source from the Writings on many various aspects of the parenting and training of children.

To conclude this section, I would like to offer an example of how to encourage children and fellow adults in very positive ways that highlight the spiritual development of each and every individual. This concept comes from the Virtues Project. The concept, as well as many others from this Project, can create an atmosphere of spiritual development both within our homes and broader community environments, both within and outside the Bahá’í community.

The Virtues Project, developed by three Bahá’ís in the United States in the early 1980s, uses this quotation from Bahá’u’lláh as a premise: ‘Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value.’³¹ The virtues latent within us all are considered those ‘gems.’ The virtues are universally valued by all cultures as the content of our character. They run ‘like a silver thread’ through the Scriptures of the world’s great religions. Bahá’ís know that part of our purpose in this life is to develop ‘divine attributes’, which, of course, are these virtues. Bahá’u’lláh says:

The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the Will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds.³²

The Virtues Project proposes that we can learn the ‘language of the virtues.’ The idea of a ‘virtues acknowledgement’ is used to

thank or honour a person – child or adult – for the virtue that they have just demonstrated in their behaviour. For example:

- 'I would like to thank you, Johnny, for your kindness and co-operation in helping Sally pick up.'
- 'I would like to honour you for the courage it took to tell me the truth.'
- 'I thank you for your perseverance in making sure that all community members were aware of the Local Assembly's plans for the Holy Day.'
- 'I would like to honour your trustworthiness and thank you for having kept this matter confidential.'

In all of these statements, the positive is being acknowledged. Praise, support, confidence, in a word, *encouragement* is being given for a specific spiritual behaviour. By specifically naming that behaviour with the virtue, the development of that virtue is reinforced, particularly in a child. Sometimes we simply classify all such behaviours as 'good', rather than being specific. So, we then fall into the trap of saying to a child, 'What a good boy!' The child may not be sure exactly what he did that was so good. Meanwhile, if this is used frequently, he has now become 'labelled' as being a 'good' boy. This exerts pressure on the child and can create a lot of guilt when he does fall off the wagon of being a 'good' boy. Use of specific labels for the behaviour – as distinct for the person – can help healthy growth occur.

These same techniques offer encouraging interactions with adults. More importantly, for adults as well as for children, the specific positive spiritual qualities are encouraged and reinforced. As mentioned above, this is part of our purpose in life – part of what we should always be striving to work toward. It can be seen how such a simple concept of learning to 'speak the language of the virtues' helps to create an environment that enhances spiritual development.

Specifically in relation to child-rearing, this 'language of the virtues' can be used to encourage positive behaviour when it is lacking and thereby avoid the more commonly used negative expressions of anger and impatience. Consider these examples:

- 'Johnny, you need to be more considerate and kind to your sister. Stop doing that, please, now.'
- 'I think you need to develop more courage and trustworthiness so you can learn to tell the truth the first time you are asked a question. You know how important truthfulness is.'
- 'You need to be more generous and learn to share your sweets with your friends.'
- 'You need to be more courteous and not interrupt me when I'm on the phone, please.'

These sound perhaps rather strange because they are so different than what would normally be said in our current culture of negativism. Try to imagine the positive outcomes that could develop with this kind of straightforward approach if applied across the board at home and in schools. A greater awareness of the virtues would result, which couldn't help but increase a greater recognition of the need to develop spiritually.

It is important to point out that using this 'correction' or 'instruction' approach of the Virtues Project is not appropriate for adult-to-adult interactions, as the Writings make it very clear that we should not see the faults of others, as indicated above. Thus it is not appropriate for any adult to tell another that he or she needs to develop trustworthiness. We should use a sin-covering eye at all times in other adults' behaviour and, instead, concentrate fully on developing our own spiritual qualities. Using the language of the virtues with children in either a home or school setting would have a positive effect on the spiritual attitude of adults present, however, as mention of the virtues would remind the adults themselves that they, too, should possess those attributes.

It is also perhaps worth considering that possibly in marriage relationships, use of this instruction/correction technique might be possible, since couples are to be as spiritual 'helpmates' to each other 'who should be concerned about the welfare of each other'³³ and 'loving companions ... that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other.'³⁴ This would not be on an ongoing daily basis, presumably, but at times of consultation. Of course, consultation is the specific tool for Bahá'ís with which to communicate fully and directly about problems and difficulties and should be used in marriage. Always the guidelines of using

‘moderation’ and ‘purity of motive’ in consultation should be employed. Perhaps use of the virtues correction could be part of consultation in a marriage.

To assist the reader to realize the credibility of this innovative and spiritual approach, it should be mentioned that the Virtues Project was honoured as a model programme for families at the World Conference of Cities, Local Governments and Private Sector Partners on Families in association with the United Nations Secretariat during the International Year of the Child. It has been used on many Native Reservations in the States, in many prisons, by many different denominations of the Christian Church, as well as by the personnel departments of many large US businesses to promote healthier, more wholesome – in fact, more spiritual – environments for all concerned.

Conclusion

Spiritual development is fundamentally all about bringing out the best in each and every one of us. Whether it is through the most personal spiritual exercise of all, namely prayer, where we truly feel connected with our Creator; or whether it is the spiritual enlightenment that a beautiful environment coupled with the Word of God can bring us; or that breath of the Holy Spirit that has inspired the artist’s work that in turn touches our own soul; or the gentle, kind words that cheer and encourage another person’s heart on their way in life – whatever it is that assists in drawing each of us closer to pursuing our own spiritual destiny, that is something that we need to actively seek to create and sustain in our own environments.

‘All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition.’³⁵ This is exactly what distinguishes us from all of the other mammals that make up the animal world: we have been endowed with the *will* to determine our own actions, i.e. the ability to choose either to live as the other beasts with our animal nature ruling our lives or to chose to live as the spiritual beings God created us to be. It does require a decision, a choice, a will to act as we are more naturally inclined toward our lower nature. By not consciously deciding to act, we abnegate our free will and miss the precious opportunities to change, go forward and improve our lives in spiritual ways. Such choices and use of our volition are, in fact, a daily process, as

some of the various ideas presented in this paper have sought to illustrate.

Spirituality is a deeply personal affair that is enacted between each individual's heart and his or her Creator on a daily basis. Yet the spirituality of the individual has great influence on all aspects of that person's own life – in both this world and in the world to come. The spirituality of each individual influences, in turn, all the other people with whom he or she will come into contact every day. Indeed, 'human happiness is founded on spiritual behaviour.'³⁶ It is hoped that some small part of this paper may assist in that process in each reader's life as we all strive to create environments that will enhance spirituality.

7 November 2002

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A Philosophical Basis for the Centre for Renewable Energy at Dundalk Institute of Technology by L. D. Staudt

Abstract

This paper, originally delivered to a non-Bahá'í audience, discusses the nature of the physical world, the principle of sustainability generally and, in an energy sense, the present energy situation, options for Ireland and the role of the Centre for Renewable Energy at Dundalk Institute of Technology (CREDIT). It concludes by outlining a positive vision for the use of renewable energy in Ireland.

Introduction

The Centre for Renewable Energy at Dundalk Institute of Technology (CREDIT) came into existence in 2002. It is focused on becoming a centre of excellence in renewable energy research, academic programmes and community-related activities. It is the purpose of this paper to establish the basis of CREDIT, to put its activities into a broader context.

This paper will discuss the nature of the physical world, the principle of sustainability generally and, in an energy sense, the present energy situation, options for Ireland and the role of CREDIT.

Life on Earth

The existence of any creation proves the existence of its creator, or to phrase it differently, a creation presupposes a creator. For example, the painting proves the existence of the painter. This principle is graphically illustrated in nature, where what was once a world of molten rock has seemingly organised itself into complex organisms and ecosystems. What was once only the mineral world has progressively added the vegetable kingdom (mineral properties plus the property of growth or life), the animal kingdom (vegetable properties plus consciousness and sense perception) and the human kingdom (animal properties plus the capability of abstract thought and self-contemplation). We also note as a general principle that the creator is superior to the creation. Hence we conclude that there is a Creator that is superior to all of creation, including the human race. The fact that we cannot fully comprehend this 'illimitable superior Spirit'¹ is

natural and right, in the same way that a cat, for instance, has a limited comprehension of human beings.

The great spiritual traditions explain that on this earth, the human race is intended to grow closer to our Creator. We are given a number of ways to do this, including communication (prayer and meditation), learning of the lives and teachings of the Holy Ones (Abraham, Buddha, Krishna, Christ, Muhammad, Bahá'u'lláh and others), and observation of the natural world – God's creation. We can 'know' the artist through the work of art.

We are born from this life into the next, and in this womb-world we are enabled to develop the various qualities that indeed are all we take with us to the next life – such traits as love, honesty and trustworthiness. This earth is indeed a mother earth.

The Principle of Sustainability

Sustainability is defined as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.'² In the context of the discussion above, it is clearly important for society to (a) create the best possible conditions for spiritual development and (b) leave behind an equally beautiful world for generations unborn to make their pilgrimage through this life.

Sustainability is increasingly becoming the touchstone or criterion by which all of our activities are being measured. Although society is at present clearly unsustainable in many respects, its members are taking their first steps down this road, and the very first step is the realisation by all members of the human race of the need for sustainability. Therefore we should feel encouraged to hear this word being used as often as it is.

In an energy sense, sustainability has quite a concrete meaning, and points society in the clear direction of renewable energy. Some years ago renewable energy was not taken as a serious option, and the notion of life after fossil fuels was either not seriously considered or was dominated by an over-optimistic assessment of the possibilities for nuclear fission or fusion. Herman Daly described the energy policy of the past as follows:

Recent growth rates of population and per capita energy use ... are projected up to some arbitrary, round-numbered date. Whatever technologies are required to produce the projected

amount are automatically accepted, along with their social implications, and no thought is given to how long the system can last once the projected levels are attained ...

This approach is unworthy of any organism with a central nervous system, much less a cerebral cortex. To those of us who also have souls it is almost incomprehensible in its inversion of ends and means.³

The implication of the last sentence is that we are failing to realise that our (energy-related) activities must work within a context of knowledge of our earthly purpose, and not simply serve 'market forces'. Indeed, we could say that at present we don't even know the 'ends' our energy activities on earth serve, and we are fairly mindlessly making use of the energy 'means' at our disposal. Knowledge of purpose combined with an increasing appreciation of the wonder and complexity of the natural world will result in the human race 'living lightly' upon the earth. We can take a kindly look at the events of the last century or two to help explain how we find ourselves in this situation.

It is imperative to realise that humanity has rapidly moved from a society that was primarily lived at the local level and in a sustainable manner to one of contemporary excess. In the past, sustainability was not such an important issue, since in general human society did not have the tools or the scale to live unsustainably. With the discoveries of recent times, this is no longer the case. We have moved into a situation where our powers have multiplied, and without much thought we have simply raced forward to use these powers. We are clearly in an 'adolescent' phase, and are only beginning to think about the responsibilities of adulthood as a society. The good news is that we can be confident that adulthood will follow our turbulent adolescence.

There is an intriguing vision of a 'mature' society in the authorised interpretations of the Bahá'í Faith, which embodies the principle of sustainability:

National rivalries, hatreds, and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding and co-operation. The causes of religious strife will be permanently removed, economic barriers and restrictions will be completely abolished, and

the inordinate distinction between classes will be obliterated. Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear. The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.⁴

The quotation goes on to say that such a society will make use of 'all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet'.

Renewable Energy

Renewable energy is essentially 'all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet'. The sun's rays impact the earth, resulting in direct heating and photosynthesis. The resulting temperature differences result in the wind, which in turn results in the waves. The tides originate from the moon's gravitational pull on the oceans of the world. All can be used to create useful energy, and all of our energy needs can and will be met from renewables; it is only a question of timing.

A word must be said about our 'needs'. Energy consumption has increased by an order of magnitude over the last half century. Quality of life has not increased by an order of magnitude. With advances in energy efficiency and energy conservation techniques, the entire planet can live very comfortably in an energy sense at a reduced and sustainable level of energy consumption.

The major advantages of renewable energy in Ireland include:

- No pollution or greenhouse gases.
- Available now and forever (secure supply).
- Affordable now and forever (price stability).

- No fuel imports (presently we import 5 billion in fuel annually) can be manufactured locally.
- More jobs.
- No generation equipment currently made in Ireland.

Ireland at present imports 86% of its fuel. We are totally exposed to volatile oil and gas markets. Only 2% of our total energy needs come from renewable sources. This is made up almost entirely of our hydro and wind electricity generation, which supply 5% of our electricity.

Ireland is blessed with a very large renewable energy supply. An estimate of the potential for wind energy alone is given in an ESB International study where it is pointed out: 'wind power could generate around 345TWh/y or around 19 times the current electricity production of the ESB system'.⁵ This report did not consider offshore wind potential, which is also huge. The report also indicates very impressive potential for biomass and wave power.

The cost of wind power has declined rapidly since the beginning of its commercial development in the early 1980s. The cost of electricity from the wind is now the same as fossil-fuel fuel 'brown' electricity. The concrete proof of this statement is that, without grant support of any kind, the company, Airtricity, is now selling 100% green electricity to its 16,000 commercial customers at 10% less than ESB. When carbon taxes or green certificates (or both) are in place, thereby giving value to pollution, wind turbines at lower wind-speed sites in Ireland will also become viable. It is now possible to supply Irish electricity needs, now and forever, in a sustainable way, with almost no increase in electricity prices.

Wave power, biomass (energy crops) and solar power will also make significant contributions to our energy future, and will prove economic when the true cost of fossil fuels (including pollution, etc.) is included in fossil fuel pricing.

There is historical precedent for a relatively rapid change in the energy supply industry. The report, 'State of the World', points out:

The closing decades of the nineteenth century were a fertile period in the history of technology, as inventors applied novel scientific advances to a range of new devices. The

incandescent light bulb, electric dynamo, and internal combustion engine were invented in the late 1800s but had relatively little effect on industry or daily life as the century ended. As they came into widespread use in later decades, however, it became clear in retrospect that the technological foundation for the transition was largely in place by 1900.⁶

Very few in the late 1800s could have predicted the massive change in the energy economy, primarily one moving from coal to oil. However, the technology for the change was essentially available at that time and was only subsequently used on a large scale.

It is clear that another interesting transition is about to occur in this century, using technology developed at the end of the last century.

This transition is beginning already, although few understand that it is both possible and inevitable. For example, Germany had 8,754MW (megawatts) of wind power installed at the end of 2001, having installed about 2,700MW during the year. By way of comparison, 5,000MW of conventional 'brown' generation plant currently supplies the nation's electricity demand. Given that the transition to renewables is well underway elsewhere, a great leap of imagination is not required to see this happening in Ireland. When this possibility was put forward by the present author in the 1980s, there were far fewer people willing to accept the idea!

The Role of CREDIT

The Centre for Renewable Energy at Dundalk Institute of Technology has a clear vision that this transition to renewable energy is imminent, and it is the role of CREDIT to help speed this transition in Ireland. Given our abundance of renewable energy sources, it is envisaged that we will be net exporters of clean, green energy, and that we will be experts in this area. It would be an absurdity for us not to be, and it is a huge opportunity for the Irish nation.

CREDIT will have three primary areas of renewable energy activity to be gradually developed over the coming years: research, academic programmes, and community involvement. The research programmes will make use of the considerable talent and

experience of DkIT staff and graduate students. Academic programmes will respond to the need to educate students to be prepared for the increase in employment in the renewable energy area, and DkIT is well positioned to develop such programmes. CREDIT will also encourage renewable energy activities in the Dundalk area through tours of demonstration facilities, consultancy with local industry, renewable energy publications, etc.

Conclusion

A philosophical basis for the Centre for Renewable Energy at Dundalk Institute of Technology has been presented. Our primary function as human beings on this beautiful planet is spiritual development. We need to optimise the conditions of society such that we can develop in the womb of mother earth, and advance civilisation sustainably such that future generations can also develop.

A small but important part of this society will be a sustainable energy system, which will be based on renewable energy. It is quite evident that we are at the beginning of a major transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy – a transition that will take place at an increasing pace and will be near completion by the end of this century. This transition is necessary, possible and inevitable.

CREDIT will facilitate the transition through research, academic programmes and community activities.

October 20, 2002

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Poems by Sheila Banani

The Muse

So smooth she comes
like ice cream on the tongue
or music flute-sweet
curling in the ear
with a warming breath
Like bird-song in the
midnight trees
sighs
while the world's asleep
so smooth she comes
Rising up out of soft
untouched places
so smooth
she comes carving out my soul.

Don Quixote

Oh, Don...
windmills
are stilled
while giants sleep
and twitch with dreams
of larger fears,
whose wakening will cloud the sky,
then shake the hills and
start us slowly spinning.

Poems by *Hugh McKinley*

Threnody

for Dick Backwell [d. October 1972]

Life vanished – gone like comestible smoke;
Bright memories, magnesium flares that, hour-glassed,
Shroud the quarter of a century.

But yesterday, our morning then, brief time
That we were young, victory ahead:
Great meetings, conferences, my earliest Summer School.

Step following step, event event;
You separate each, as 'Now'.
Your letters kingdom-spanning link with life.

No matter what dark periods were endured
My more-than-brother, you were part of me:
Wise, calmly humorous, and – always – 'there'.

And now you're gone; dead, fourteen days ago.
Although – exceeding certainly I'm sure,
You'll wake to 'There', wise in humility;

Smile, and extend more powerful than before
That compensating word and ready hand.
Chill and alone, I'm grassed; momentarily sundered.

Descending, shopping – anything to do; to get away –
Suddenly there were birds, house-martins and swallows
Dipping and wheeling in immeasurable flight;

Paused on their Autumn pilgrimage
Into warm South, their golden land.
Soul-symbols, life-transcending: my heart was stayed.

For you – and with right precedence –
The first of ours to reach that Golden shore;
And shortly shall inform us with your glory,

Helping unlimited by mortal state.
Right that the month of Knowledge was departure:
Wisdom your most shining quality,

Brought closer – for you are, sleeping or awake,
Nearer than all which Life and Death have power over.

Mystery of Life

Motionless –
Frozen dead in gully
One hand-size blackbird sprawling,
Angular.

Lifted, there lay fat worm beneath:
Prey that, mysteriously,
Yet lived, preserved unswallowed,
Sheltered by body-warmth and feathers
From last night's biting frost.

Eater turned benefactor
Through unexpected death;
Condemned preserved
Through raptor's sharp demise.

Biographical Notes

Sheila Banani, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for opening the country of Greece to the Bahá'í Faith in 1953, has had poems published in the United States as well as internationally. She has a Master's Degree in Urban Planning from the University of California at Los Angeles.

Kevin Brogan last year he completed an M.A. thesis on Information and Communications in Technology as it applies to the Secondary Teacher.

Hugh McKinley was born in Oxford of a Bahá'í family in 1924 and became a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for Cyprus. The Universal House of Justice in its message after his passing stated that 'his indefatigable labours pioneering field, his teaching activities coupled with profound knowledge of the Holy Writings and firmness in the Covenant brought great victories to the Cause.' Hugh studied for opera singing but later had poems published in many countries. He visited Ireland many times on teaching trips and also lived there for a year before pioneering to Syros, Greece in 1966 where he remained for 13 years before finally settling in Suffolk, UK.

Eamonn Moane is a lecturer in Accountancy and Financial Management at the Dublin Institute of Technology, and is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland. He worked for 10 years as an accountant in the Finance Department of the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

Wendi Momen is a fourth generation Bahá'í, born in California. She came to the United Kingdom in 1969, where she has lived ever since. She has a Degree in Economics and a PhD in International Relations, both from the London School of Economics. She has been a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom since 1982 and has served as its Chairman (1990-2000), its Assistant Secretary (2000-2001) and as its Treasurer (1984-1990; 2001-03). She has worked as an editor for George Ronald, Publisher since 1984.

Betsy Omidvaran joined the Bahá'í community in 1974 in the United States. She moved to Ireland in 1987, and has served as a member and officer of a number of Bahá'í institutions, local and national. This year she received a Master's Degree in Arabic.

Earl Redman is an out-of-work geologist from Alaska who became a Bahá'í in 1980. He lived for six years in Chile and now lives in Co Cavan with his wife, Sharon O' Toole.

Dawn Staudt has been a Bahá'í since 1978, first in her home community of White River Jet, Vermont in the USA and since 1985 as a pioneer in Ireland. She received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology from State University of New York in Albany in 1974, as well as another 3-year training from Cuidiú – the Irish Childbirth Trust – as an accredited Antenatal Class Educator in 1990. Though teaching Childbirth Classes on a part-time basis for the last 13 years, her marriage and motherhood have been her most important vocations.

Lawrence Staudt became a member of the Bahá'í community in 1978, received his B.Sc. in Electrical Engineering in 1974 and his M.Eng. degree in 1975. He has been deeply involved in wind and solar energy in the United States and Ireland since 1978, and currently manages the Centre for Renewable Energy at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT).

Guidelines for Contributors

Bahá'í scholarship is an endeavour open to everyone. The editor and reviewer of *Solas* will be looking for the substance, method and spirit of true scholarship, a scholarship guided by the Faith's primary principle of the independent investigation of truth complemented by scholarly integrity and humility and due respect for the views and insights put forward by others. This involves concern for important issues and problems, careful and comprehensive consideration of the facts, logical development of ideas and moderate yet persuasive presentation of conclusions or interpretations.

We welcome contributions, preferably unpublished, on a broad range of subjects. Papers that relate contemporary issues to the principles, history, teachings and philosophy of the Bahá'í Faith are especially welcome. Short pieces of reflective writing may be submitted as a 'Sounding.' Poetry and reviews (e.g. of books, films, drama, music, television documentaries) are also welcome, as are responses to papers and reviews.

We ask that contributors simplify evaluation and publication by closely following the system used in this issue of *Solas* where, for example, endnotes are used instead of footnotes. A bibliography may also be included, though this is left to the contributor. Papers should not normally exceed 6,000 words and there should be double spacing between lines. Typescripts only should be sent to the editor at the following address:

'Solas,' 14, High Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, Republic of Ireland.

or as a file attachment (preferably Word) to emcccloughan@eircom.net.

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