

MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 25 June 2013

From: Research Department

“Al-amr bi’l-ma‘rúf wa’n-nahy ‘an al-munkar”

Mr. ..., in an email letter of 7 October 2012, has asked whether the Islamic teaching of “al-amr bi’l-ma‘rúf wa’n-nahy ‘an al-munkar”, translated by Mr. ... as “promotion of virtue and prevention of vice”, has been annulled by Bahá’u’lláh. The context of the question is whether it is appropriate “for a Bahá’í to tell another Bahá’í what is right and what is wrong.” We respond as follows.

The principle of “al-amr bi’l-ma‘rúf” has its origins in the Qur’án and has been interpreted within Islam as a moral obligation between individuals.¹ In Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings, the phrase, or variants of it, also occurs several times. For example, in one of His Tablets, He states that throughout the forty years of His ministry, He has enjoined justice and forbidden evil to the people of God. And in the First *Ishráq* of the Tablet of *Ishráqát*, He states that “religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world, for the fear of God impelleth man to hold fast to that which is good, and shun all evil.”²

We have found no instances in the Bahá’í Writings enjoining “al-amr bi’l-ma‘rúf wa’n-nahy ‘an al-munkar” as a responsibility upon individuals in the sense of the popular Islamic interpretation mentioned above. Rather, the Bahá’í Teachings make clear that the most effective way, as individuals, to uplift the behaviour of those around us is to overlook the faults of others and to live a life of virtue and righteousness, teaching by the example of our actions. A letter dated 12 May 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states:

Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being “perfect as our heavenly father is perfect” and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy. If we allow our attention and energy to be taken up in efforts to keep others right and remedy their faults, we are wasting precious time.

Of course, any consideration of this subject must take into account the voluminous body of guidance in the Bahá’í teachings that govern the relationships between individuals, and among individuals, institutions and the community.

¹ For example, article 22(b) of the *Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam* states: “Everyone shall have the right to advocate what is right, and propagate what is good, and warn against what is wrong and evil according to the norms of Islamic Shariah.” (Quoted in John Witte Jr. and Johan D. van der Vyver, eds., *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspectives* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1996), p. 396.

² *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988, 2005 printing), p. 125.