

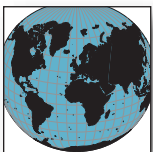


ONE COUNTRY

“The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens” – Bahá’u’lláh

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Newsletter of the Bahá’í
International Community
October-December 2007
Volume 19, Issue 1



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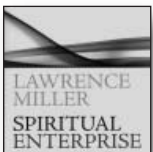
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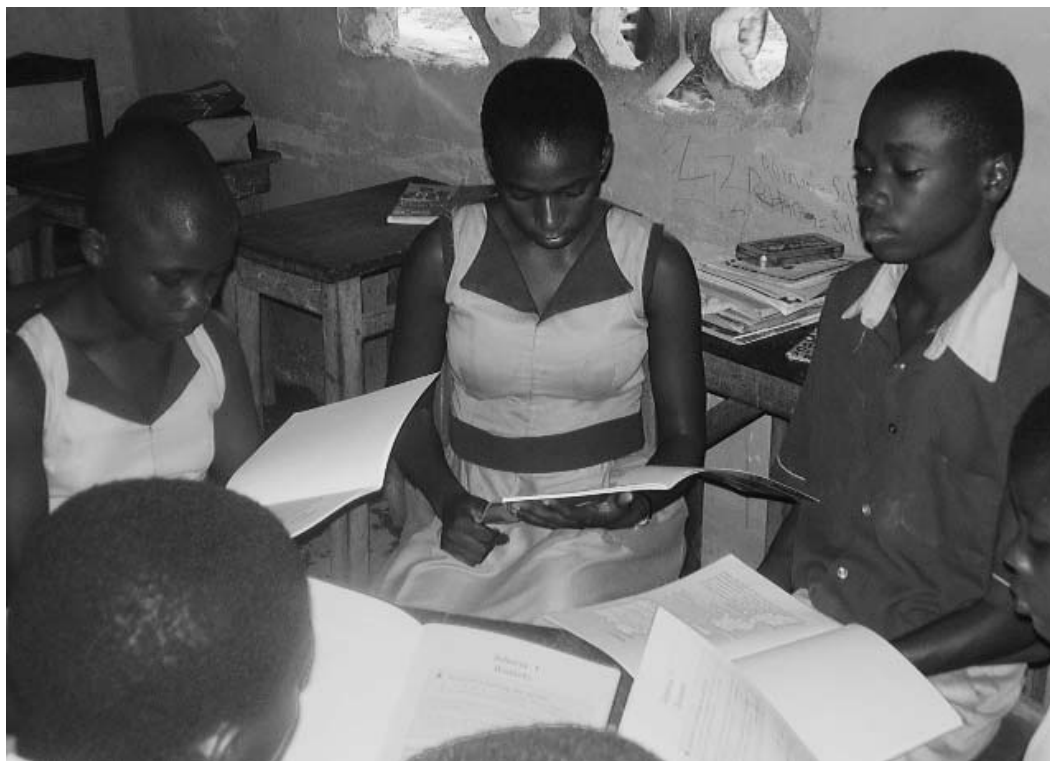


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In Ghana, innovative literacy program produces dramatic results

“Enlightening the Hearts” program of the Olinga Foundation encourages local dialects and moral virtues, reaching more than 22,000 students in remote rural schools



Students study “Enlightening the Hearts” materials at the Samreboi Catholic Junior Secondary School.

GONUUKROM VILLAGE, Western Region, Ghana — For years, Owusu Ansah Malik thought his native language was second-rate. English, the national language, was emphasized in his classrooms — his local dialect was not.

But a program that offers instruction, books, and mentoring in the 16-year-old’s native Twi language has helped him see the value of his mother tongue — and improved his English literacy.

“I thought our Ghanaian language was too poor to be learned, since its teaching was not encouraged,” said Owusu, who is in Class Eight at the Gonukrom Junior Secondary School. “But with this program, I realized that our language is rich and can be learned. It has also helped me to read English easily.”

Owusu is one of more than 22,000 students to have participated in the “Enlightening the Hearts” literacy program, which is aimed at helping young people age 9 to 15 in Ghana become literate by teaching them to read and write in their own language.

Operated by the Olinga Foundation for Human Development, a Bahá’í-inspired nongovernmental organization, the program has offered training in more than 260 remote area primary and junior secondary schools in Ghana’s Western Region since 2000.

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Religion, the modern age, and the coming global society

There can no longer be much doubt that the next phase in human society is the emergence of a world civilization.

The processes by which such a new planetary life is being constructed are collectively known as "globalization." And while the debate continues over whether globalization is a good thing or a bad thing, few doubt its inexorable advance.

Globalization is driven by forces like increased cross-border migration, the ever-expanding reach of the information media, and the accelerating integration of national economies. Such trends are unlikely to be reversed.

The real need for humanity today, then, is to agree on a set of common values by which to guide these new processes. Without a set of common values, the prospects for building a cohesive — and peaceful — global community are remote.

Throughout history, the most important source of common values in the process of community building has been religion.

"The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men," said Bahá'u'lláh.

Indeed, religion, with its emphasis on moral conduct, obedience to law, selflessness, and other virtues, has been the cohesive power behind the creation of the world's great civilizations.

Judaism, with its emphasis on monothe-

ism and divine law, has held together its community of believers despite some 6,000 years of tribulations, exile, and prejudice.

On the Indian subcontinent, Hinduism's emphasis on tolerance and pluralism has helped to knit together diverse ethnic and social groups, creating the rich spiritual life and cultural fabric its followers enjoy today.

Buddhist teachings on right living and conduct are intimately associated with the concept of the "sangha" or "community" and have lent the underlying impulse to Buddhist civilization.

Christianity finds its foundation for community building in Christ's commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself." That ideal, among others, has led some two billion people to call themselves Christians today.

Islam, from its earliest days, has sought to establish an integrated spiritual, social and political community, the "ummah," in which religion and religious law and values would be the guiding force in society. During the Middle Ages, the resulting Islamic civilization was responsible for dramatic advances in mathematics, astronomy, and medicine.

Yet, while the world's great religions of the past have proved capable of building cohesive communities within their respective regions or epochs, it seems unlikely that they are capable of supplying the kind of common values needed for the unique challenges of the global age.

For one thing, none of the world's major pre-modern religious systems has been able to sustain unity within its own community. Christian ecumenism remains a distant goal, for example, while the Sunni-Shiite split within Islam is only growing wider. Indeed, such sectarianism can be traced back to each great religion's earliest days.

Another issue today is the rift that has opened within each of the world's traditional religious communities over how to confront the modern world. While some have embraced the ideas that constitute the modern ideal — such as the equality of women and

EDITOR'S NOTE: With this issue, we are changing the dating system for ONE COUNTRY. Instead of reflecting the period of time during which most stories in it occurred, the cover date will indicate the time period for which the issue is generally available (and therefore current for readers), as is the general practice for most periodicals. The volume and issue numbers remain in sequence.

men and the need to pursue the scientific method — other individuals and groups have clung so tightly to archaic or literalist interpretations as to have become fanatical or extreme in their viewpoints.

The result has been a backlash against modern values within some religious communities that has at times expressed itself in violence. This phenomenon has led a number of people to reject religion altogether.

At the same time, recent history suggests that no secular ideology alone will be able to promote the kind of unity and commitment that will be necessary to meet the challenges posed by globalization and the inevitable coming together of humanity.

Despite the advances of secularism in this century, the majority of humanity remains deeply religious, and there is little to suggest the religious impulse will fade away. Religious belief and the transcendental experience that comes with it are simply too much a part of human nature to be ignored.

Moreover, the relativistic values that are inherently derived from a strictly materialistic view of the world will, in any event, never be capable of providing the necessary framework on which to build a cohesive and sustainable global society. If anything, the failed ideological experiments of the last century prove this point, leaving in their wake destroyed societies and millions of dead.

There is, however, another model — one that arises from the experience of the worldwide Bahá'í community. That model is for a system of religious belief and values that is fully consonant with the modern ideal and that embodies within it an outlook that is truly global in nature — and that is also able to tap into the power of religion in the process of community building.

Representing a cross section of humanity, Bahá'ís come from virtually every nation, ethnic group, culture, profession, and social or economic class. More than 2,100 different ethnic groups are represented, a demonstration of global “unity in diversity.” Yet, despite this diversity, the Bahá'í community is virtually free of schism or factions. Indeed, among the greatest accomplishments of the Bahá'í Faith has been its ability to resist the impulse to divide into sects and subgroups that has plagued every other religion.

Moreover, the social principles of the Bahá'í Faith stand uniquely in harmony with the emerging global value system that has already been identified in places like the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights, and in the series of global United Nations conferences in the 1990s that culminated in the 2000 Millennium Summit.

These principles include the elimination of all forms of prejudice, equality between the sexes, the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth, universal education, and a sustainable balance between nature and technology. The Faith also recognizes the essential oneness of the world's great religions, promotes the harmony of science and religion, and advocates the establishment of a world federal system, based on collective security and the oneness of humanity.

At the same time, the spiritual teachings of the Bahá'í Faith have a proven capacity to touch the deepest yearnings for spiritual meaning and purpose — as evidenced by the fact that the Bahá'í community is composed of people from virtually every religious background, including Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Zoroastrian, and even animist. Many formerly nonreligious individuals have become Bahá'ís as well.

The Bahá'í Faith is able to unite people from such diverse backgrounds because it teaches that there is only one God, Who has throughout history revealed Himself through a series of divine Messengers — including Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad. This succession of divine Teachers reflects a single historic “plan of God” for educating humanity about the Creator and for cultivating the spiritual, intellectual, and moral capacities of the human race.

The goal has been to prepare the way for a single, continually progressing global society. “Religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquillity amongst its peoples,” said Bahá'u'lláh. “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”

The Bahá'í Faith also elevates the ideal of creating global community to the highest level. “Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth,” said Bahá'u'lláh. “It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.”

As humanity moves forward towards the inevitable and historic embrace of its oneness, searching for a path that can give purpose, meaning, and motivational impulse to this process, the experience of the worldwide Bahá'í community offers a unique example for consideration.*

While the world's great religions of the past have proved capable of building cohesive and unified communities within their respective regions or epochs, it seems unlikely that they are capable of supplying the kind of common values needed for the unique challenges of the global age. There is, however, another model — one that arises from the experience of the worldwide Bahá'í community.

Moral issues of climate change stressed at Commission on Sustainable Development

“If sea levels rise at the rates they are predicting, we may see hundreds of millions of refugees. Where will they go?”

— Arthur Lyon Dahl, International Environment Forum

Tahirih Naylor of the Bahá’í International Community, left, moderated the panel discussion on “The Ethical Dimension of Climate Change.” At right is Don Brown of the Collaborative Program on the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change.



UNITED NATIONS — As the scientific consensus on global warming grows, it’s time to look more closely at how to share the economic, social, and humanitarian burdens that climate change will likely bring.

That was the main message of a panel discussion on “The Ethical Dimension of Climate Change,” organized by the Bahá’í International Community and held on 30 April 2007 during this year’s meeting of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.

“If sea levels rise at the rates they are predicting, we may see hundreds of millions of refugees,” said Arthur Lyon Dahl, president of the International Environment Forum, a Bahá’í-inspired organization.

“Where will they go? Who will take them in? What does it mean about immigration regulations?” asked Dr. Dahl, noting that these were only some of the moral and ethical questions that are being posed by the looming effects of climate change.

Sponsored by the nations of Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands, with assistance from the UN Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS), the panel discussion became one of the most talked-about

side events at the 2007 Commission, said Tahirih Naylor, a representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the UN.

“The timing of the event on the opening day of the Commission really helped to bring attention to the ethical issues surrounding climate change, helping to frame discussions at the Commission, at least among nongovernmental organizations and major groups,” said Ms. Naylor.

This year the Commission focused on policies and options to expedite the implementation of national commitments in the areas of energy for sustainable development, industrial development, air pollution/atmosphere, and climate change.

“It is on the ethical dimensions of climate change that the Bahá’í International Community decided to focus at this year’s Commission,” said Ms. Naylor. “While the issue is often discussed in scientific, economic and technical terms, its compelling human and ethical dimensions are often overlooked. Religion clearly has a role in highlighting such dimensions.”

Bahá’í delegates participated in other activities during the Commission, collaborating with civil society partners, including those representing other major groups, such as children and youth, indigenous peoples, women, and science and technology interests. Bahá’í delegates met with group representatives, assisted in writing statements to be presented to the sessions of the Commission, and proposed lobbying points, with a focus on the ethical dimension of the issues at stake.

Panelists for the “The Ethical Dimension of Climate Change” included Enele Sopoaga, former Permanent Representative of Tuvalu to the UN; Om Pradhan of the UN-OHRLS; Don Brown, project coordinator of the Collaborative Program on the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change; Tony Barnston of the International Research Institute for Climate and Society at Columbia University; Rabbi Lawrence Troster, Fellowship Program Director of GreenFaith; and Dr. Dahl, who is a Bahá’í and

also the coordinator of the UN Environment Programme's environmental diplomacy program at the University of Geneva.

Mr. Brown, who is at the Rock Ethics Institute at Pennsylvania State University, said the moral and ethical issues that accompany rising sea levels or widespread crop failures will be matters of life and death for many people.

"How much warming should we tolerate?" he asked. "What is the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases that the world should identify as a target? There is no more obvious moral and ethical issue than this issue. It will literally determine who lives and who dies, whether Tuvalu survives, whether the Marshall Islands survive."

Such issues, Mr. Brown said, will force multilateral institutions like the United Nations to rethink international law and norms.

Ambassador Sopoaga said the issues for nations like Tuvalu are particularly stark. "The future will be catastrophic for all communities, for all countries, but particularly for those who have already been identified as particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change," he said, noting that some forecasts suggest that small island states will disappear entirely under the rising ocean.

"It is a moral obligation, beyond political obligation or economic obligation, to help countries like Tuvalu and small island developing states, and, of course, the least developed countries," he said. "We have to do something urgently."

Mr. Pradhan of the UN-OHRLLS said that the latest predictions indicate that small island nations would be "simply wiped out."

"This is the time to remind the international community that ethics and morality do play a very important role in any human activity, especially when we have a situation where climate change is affecting such a large number, especially the poor and vulnerable," he said.

All of the panelists agreed the release of recent studies by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the UK's Stern Review Report on the Economics of Climate Change have established a high level of confidence that climate change is real and that the consequences will be great.

"Some of the people against acceptance of global climate change demand something like at least 98 percent certainty," said Mr. Barnston. "We have somewhere around 90 percent or the low 90s. To me that's pretty high. It's not 75 percent like it was a decade ago."

The panelists also agreed that preventing the most drastic consequences of climate



change would require that many people change their behavior — such as by driving fuel-efficient cars, shifting to renewable energy, and the like.

The question now, Mr. Barnston said, is how to motivate humans to change their behavior. "When we discover something inconvenient to our lifestyle, it takes years to adjust to it, years to accept it, to believe it, and then to do something about it," he said, giving as examples the discovery that smoking is harmful or sunburns are not healthy. "We have to shorten the time lag before all levels of society accept that climate change is a danger just like cigarette smoking is a danger."

Dr. Dahl and Rabbi Troster both said that religious belief could be an important factor in providing the motivation for ethical behavior.

"How do we create a willingness to make the sacrifices that are going to be necessary?" asked Dr. Dahl. "How do we build a sense of global solidarity when we are all facing the same common challenges?"

"Religion is that dimension of society that has traditionally been responsible for morality and ethics," he answered. "We have to look at moderation. And all religions have taught about being content with very little."

Rabbi Troster said religious communities believe that the attitude in which humanity views itself in relation to creation is fundamental in changing behavior.

"This is central to the concept of moral action," he said. "If we change our attitudes, we will change our behavior."*

Panelists discuss moral questions resulting from climate change. From left, Don Brown of the Collaborative Program on the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change, Arthur Lyon Dahl of the International Environment Forum, and Rabbi Lawrence Troster of GreenFaith.

"How much warming should we tolerate? There is no more obvious moral and ethical issue than this issue. It will literally determine who lives and who dies, whether Tuvalu survives, whether the Marshall Islands survive."

— Don Brown, Collaborative Program on the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change

Iranian government campaign to incite hatred against Bahá'ís shows new facets

“Put in an historical context, these kinds of attacks too often have been a prelude to campaigns of oppression and violence that are far worse.”

— Diane Ala'i, Bahá'í International Community

Gravestones in the Bahá'í cemetery near Najafabad, Iran, were left in a heap by a bulldozer that destroyed the burial ground some time between 9 September and 10 September 2007.



The bulldozing of a Bahá'í cemetery in Iran in September is the latest in a series of incidents in a government-led campaign of hatred against Bahá'ís.

The cemetery was destroyed sometime between 9-10 September near Najafabad. It followed a similar incident in July, when a Bahá'í cemetery in Yazd was also extensively damaged by earth-moving equipment.

Both events add to a growing list of anti-Bahá'í incidents — and to the list of human rights violations in general — in Iran.

In Najafabad, a few days before the destruction of more than 100 Bahá'í graves, threatening letters were delivered to some 30 Bahá'í families. In May, in Mazandaran province, the unoccupied homes of six Iranian Bahá'ís were set on fire. In June, in Abadeh, vandals wrote hateful graffiti on Bahá'í houses and shops.

Since May, Bahá'ís in at least 17 towns have been detained for interrogation. Six new arrests have been reported. In Kermanshah, a 70-year-old man was sentenced to 70 lashes and a year in prison for “propagating and spreading Baháism and the defamation of the pure Imams.” In Mazandaran, a court has once again ruled against three women and a man who are charged with “propagation on behalf of an organization which is anti-Islamic.”

All these events are results of the Iranian government's long campaign to incite hatred against Bahá'ís, reflecting the general deterioration of human rights in Iran, said a spokeswoman for the Bahá'í International Community.

“This should be a cause for concern among human rights activists everywhere,” said Diane Ala'i, the representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations in Geneva.

She appealed to the world to hold the Iranian government accountable for its actions and to help prevent the situation from deteriorating into further violence. Bahá'ís in Iran number about 300,000 and represent the largest religious minority in the country.

“Put in an historical context, these kinds of attacks too often have been a prelude to campaigns of oppression and violence that are far worse.

“While some of these incidents may seem to be minor, the fact that such events are increasingly commonplace and reported as occurring in virtually every region of Iran shows that the persecution of Bahá'ís remains official government policy, and therefore is something for which Iran must be held accountable,” she said.

“The graffiti in Abadeh included slogans such as ‘Death to Bahá'ís, the mercenaries of America and England,’ ‘Hezbollah despises the Bahá'ís,’ ‘Bahá'ís — mercenaries of Israel’ and ‘Bahá'ís are unclean’ — phrases that relate directly to government propaganda that has been disseminated in Iranian news media in recent years,” Ms. Ala'i said.

She noted that other groups in Iran are also suffering human-rights violations.

“In recent months, the Iranian authorities have been carrying out a widespread crackdown on civil society, targeting academics, women's rights activists, students, and journalists,” said Ms. Ala'i.

Details on anti-Bahá'í incidents reported in recent months include:

- On 19 June 2007, it was learned that a 70-year-old man of limited means had been arrested in April 2007 in Kermanshah. Authorities charged him with the possession of

three Bahá'í CDs. He was tried on 23 April 2007 and charged with "propagating and spreading Baháism and the defamation of the pure Imams." His lawyer was given only 10 minutes to prepare a defense. Although the verdict has not been published, the judge orally sentenced him to one year in prison, which he is currently serving, and 70 lashes. The latter part of the sentence has not yet been carried out.

- On 18 June 2007, a 34-year-old man was arrested at a hardware store in Tabriz where he worked and taken to an unknown location. Two days later, he succeeded in phoning his family to let them know he was alive. A police security agent contacted Bahá'ís in Tabriz and said some of the man's neighbors, who are members of the Basiji morality squads, had alleged that he had insulted Islam. He remains in custody.

- On 28 May 2007, a husband and wife in Abadeh, near Shiraz, were arrested in their home by agents of the Information Ministry. The agents seized books, family videos, photographs, CDs, telephone directories, documents, a cellular phone, a computer, and minutes of the meetings of the small group of Bahá'ís that coordinates the affairs of the local community on an ad hoc basis. The couple were interrogated about the activities of the Bahá'ís. The wife was released after eight hours; the husband was transferred to Shiraz, where he was held in prison until 29 June 2007 and released on bail. He is charged with teaching the Bahá'í Faith.

- On 8 May 2007, the provincial court of appeal of Mazandaran denied the appeal of three women and one man who were arrested in 2005 in Ghaem Shahr and charged with "propagation on behalf of an organization which is anti-Islamic." The case has been referred to the Supreme Court. All have been released on bail.

- On 25 April 2007, the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Sari sentenced a Bahá'í to a year in prison and four years of exile to the town of Bijar. The individual was charged with "teaching activities against the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the benefit of groups and various organizations opposing the system."

- During April and May 2007, a number of Bahá'ís were summoned for interrogation or were questioned by telephone by officials of the Ministry of Information or the police in various localities, including in Babol Sar, Bandar Abbas, Bandar Torkman, Bojourn, Gilavand, Damavand, Hamedan, Karaj, Lahijan, Shahinshar, Tehran, and Yaftabad. The questioning focused on seeking information



The Bahá'í cemetery in Yazd, Iran, was destroyed in July. The tracks left behind and the severity of the damage show that heavy equipment was used.

about Bahá'í activities and about the Bahá'ís themselves. A report has been received that a bank in central Jiruft in the province of Fars had been ordered to produce a printout of all accounts held by Bahá'ís.

- The Bahá'í International Community obtained a copy of a letter in which the government agency responsible for providing veterans' benefits stated that an individual Bahá'í, who suffered extensive disability following his incarceration as a prisoner of war in the Iran-Iraq conflict, was not eligible to pension benefits because he belongs "to the Bahaist sect."

- Attacks on the Bahá'í Faith continue in the mass media, including on the Internet. Newspapers in Khorasan and Mazandaran have recently published items maligning Bahá'ís, while anti-Bahá'í pamphlets and tracts have been distributed in Shiraz and in the schools in Shahinshar, Ahvazk, and Babol Sar.

- Reports have been received of banks refusing to grant loans and officials refusing to issue or renew business licenses solely on the grounds that the applicants were Bahá'ís. In Sanandaj, a bank official stated that the bank had received 14 loan applications from Bahá'ís, all of which will be rejected. Bank staff in Sari informed Bahá'ís who had applied for a loan, "It has been asked of us not to provide loans and other services to Bahá'ís."

- In Hamadan, the owner of a grocery store that had been operated by his family for 48 years tried to have the business license transferred to his name after the death of his father. He was told by a government official that business licenses for grocery stores would not be issued to Bahá'ís. He was told: "Wherever you go, even to the United Nations, you will end up here, where you will get the same clear answer."*

"The graffiti in Abadeh included slogans such as 'Death to Bahá'ís, the mercenaries of America and England,' 'Bahá'ís — mercenaries of Israel' and 'Bahá'ís are unclean' — phrases that relate directly to government propaganda that has been disseminated in Iranian news media in recent years."

**— Diane Ala'í,
Bahá'í International
Community**

Confidential Iran memo exposes policy to deny Bahá'í students university



This letter from a government ministry to 81 Iranian universities instructs them to expel Bahá'í students. An English translation can be read at: <http://news.bahai.org/story/575>

“[I]f the identity of Bahá'í individuals becomes known at the time of enrollment or during the course of their studies, they must be expelled from university.”

— Asghar Zarei,
Director General,
Iranian Ministry of
Science, Research
and Technology

NEW YORK — The Bahá'í International Community has obtained a copy of a confidential 2006 letter written by Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology instructing Iranian universities to expel any student who is discovered to be a Bahá'í.

The letter refutes recent statements by Iranian officials, who say Bahá'í students in Iran face no discrimination — despite the fact that at least 128 of the 200 Bahá'í university students enrolled last autumn were expelled over the course of the 2006-2007 academic year.

“This latest document proves unequivocally that Iranian authorities remain intent on utterly blocking the development of Iranian Bahá'ís, despite what they say to the outside world,” said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations.

“The letter exposes a duplicitous campaign by Iran to pretend that it does not violate the internationally recognized right to education while, in fact, the government is actually continuing to implement its secret, long-term plan to prevent Bahá'í students from obtaining a university education.

“Not only Bahá'ís, but also others — students expelled under directives that target them on absolutely baseless grounds; women whose human rights are grossly violated through the enactment or perpetuation of discriminatory laws; and other victims of injustice in that land — need international defense,” she added.

The 2006 letter is from the Central Security Office of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) and was issued by its director general, Asghar Zarei, to 81 universities around the country. Stamped “confidential,” the exact date of the letter is undecipherable, although its contents are legible.

“[I]f the identity of Bahá'í individuals becomes known at the time of enrollment or during the course of their studies, they must be expelled from university,” states the letter, which was signed by Mr. Zarei. The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology oversees all state-run universities.

The directive flatly contradicts public and private statements of Iranian government officials. In early March, for example, the Reuters news agency carried a story about Iran's treatment of Bahá'í students and it quoted an anonymous spokesperson for the Iranian Mission to the United Nations saying: “No one in Iran because of their religion has been expelled from studying.”

Last year, as well, deceitful statements by Iranian officials came to light when Clare Short, a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom, received a communication from Hamid Reza Arefi, the charge d'affaires of the Iranian Embassy in London. “In Iran, no individual is excluded from higher education solely because of his/her ideology.”

“Although Baháism [sic] is not recognized as an official religion but by law Bahá'ís are entitled to equal rights,” wrote Mr. Arefi in an 8 June 2006 letter to Ms. Short.

The 2006 letter from the MSRT's Central Security Office also makes a clear reference to the secret 1991 Golpaygani memorandum about Bahá'ís, which was released to the public in 1993 by a United Nations official.

Despite Mr. Arefi's assurances that Iranian Bahá'ís are legally entitled to equal rights, other voices state that the Golpaygani memorandum takes precedence.

That 1991 memorandum outlined a comprehensive plan to “block” the development and progress of the Iranian Bahá'í community. The 1991 memorandum states for example that Bahá'ís shall be denied “any position of influence” and that “employment shall be refused to persons identifying themselves as Bahá'ís.”

The 1991 memorandum states clearly that Bahá'ís “must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís.”

Signed by Hujjatul Islam Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani, secretary of the Iran Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, the 1991 memorandum was approved by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As such, it reflects the highest policy of the government. ❁

Bahá'í world loses most distinguished member

HAIFA, Israel — The worldwide Bahá'í community has lost its most distinguished member with the passing of Dr. Ali-Muhammad Varqa on 22 September 2007 at his home here.

In 1955, Dr. Varqa was appointed to the high rank of “Hand of the Cause” by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. Dr. Varqa served in that capacity, on the international level, for 52 years until his passing. He was the last survivor of the 27 Hands of the Cause who were alive when Shoghi Effendi passed away in 1957.

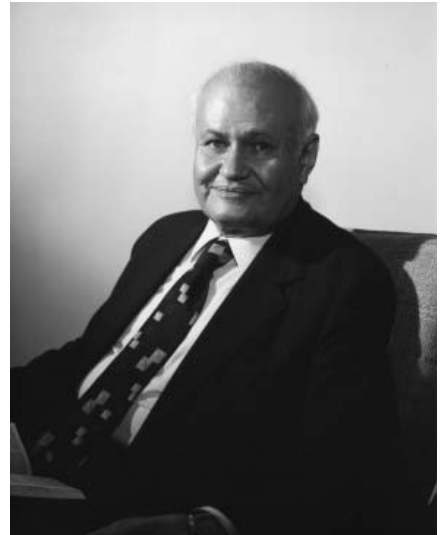
Dr. Varqa came from a well-known Iranian family that has served the Bahá'í Faith with distinction for generations. After obtaining a doctorate from the Sorbonne in Paris in 1950, he taught in Iran at the universities of Tabriz and Tehran and served the Bahá'í community there in various administrative capacities. In 1979 he moved to Canada, and later established his residence in Haifa to

serve at the Bahá'í World Center.

He was born in 1911 in Tehran, Iran, and received his name from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in memory of his grandfather, who had been killed for being a follower of Bahá'u'lláh.

Dr. Varqa traveled to many countries as a representative first of Shoghi Effendi, then of the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith. In that capacity, Dr. Varqa attended the first national conventions held in Belgium, Luxembourg, the Congo, Mauritania, Central African Republic, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Czechoslovakia and Greenland.

Dr. Varqa is survived by three daughters and six siblings. His funeral took place the morning of 24 September, with burial in the Bahá'í cemetery in Haifa. ❀



Dr. Ali-Muhammad Varqa

Samoa head of state, a Bahá'í, passes away

APIA, Samoa — The Samoan head of state, His Highness Susuga Malietoa Tanumafili II, who was a Bahá'í, passed away on the evening of 11 May 2007. He was 94 years old.

One of the longest reigning monarchs in the world, he had been head of state since Samoa gained independence from New Zealand in 1962.

“His service to the people of Samoa as Head of State was distinguished by the high principles, genuine compassion and personal humility that characterized the constancy of his concern for the welfare of all,” the Universal House of Justice, the international Bahá'í governing body, said in a statement to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Samoa.

“As the first reigning sovereign to accept the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, he set a record that will forever illumine the annals of our Faith, one that future generations will increasingly extol,” the House of Justice said. “His great interest for well-nigh four decades in the Faith’s progress was reflected in the en-

thusiastic affirmation of his belief whenever the opportunity presented itself and in the abiding joy with which he regarded the construction in 1984 of the Mother Temple of the Pacific Islands in Samoa...”

New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark also offered condolences. “Throughout his long reign as head of state, Malietoa represented Samoa with wisdom, humor, and insight,” she said in comments published in the *New Zealand Herald*.

His Highness Susuga Malietoa Tanumafili II was born on 4 January 1913. His wife, Lili Tunu, died in 1986. They have two sons and two daughters.

Memorial services were held in the Bahá'í House of Worship in Samoa and elsewhere throughout the Bahá'í world.

Samoa comprises several islands in the South Pacific about halfway between New Zealand and Hawaii, with a population of 200,000 people. ❀



Painting of His Highness Susuga Malietoa Tanumafili II done by Duffy Sheridan for 25th anniversary of Samoan independence. (Copyright Duffy Sheridan. Used by permission.)

Religion can help fight AIDS, says study

In the March 2007 issue of the *International Journal of STD and AIDS*, researchers say prevention strategies for the spread of HIV/AIDS could harness religious belief.

GEORGETOWN, Guyana — Strategies to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among young people could be more effective if they tapped into the power of religious belief and practice, according to researchers who studied the knowledge and attitudes of young people in relation to sexual behavior and HIV/AIDS.

The study, sponsored by UNICEF and conducted by the Varqa Foundation here, found that young people who knew and followed the teachings of their religion were much less likely to have engaged in sexual intercourse than those who did not, by a rate of 18 percent to 45 percent respectively.

“Prevention strategies for the spread of HIV/AIDS should harness religious belief and practice, especially in societies such as Guyana where religious affiliation remains strong,” wrote the study’s authors in the March 2007 issue of the *International Journal of STD and AIDS*.

Guyana has the third highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, which is the second-most afflicted region in the world.

“Many specialists working in international development are somewhat uncomfortable with faith-based efforts at personal and community transformation — such as to prevent HIV/AIDS,” said Brian O’Toole, the lead author in the study and director of the Varqa

Foundation, a Bahá’í-inspired social and economic development agency based in Guyana. “But this study suggests that in a country like Guyana, where many people have strong faith-based beliefs, it might be possible to draw on spiritual inspiration to address some of the problems facing society.”

Other authors included Roy McConkey, a professor in the health promotion group at the Institute of Nursing Research at the University of Ulster; Karen Casson, also of the University of Ulster; Debbie Goetz-Goldberg, a researcher with Health for Humanity, another Bahá’í-inspired agency; and Arash Yazdani, a youth volunteer.

More than 2,000 people age 12 to 20 were surveyed by a network of young people organized by the Varqa Foundation. Respondents completed anonymous, self-reporting questionnaires about sexual behavior, their understanding of HIV/AIDS, and attitudes towards issues like virginity and condom use.

Ninety-five percent of respondents were aware that HIV could be contracted from sexual contact with someone who was HIV positive. However, less than a third (29.5 percent) were able to state up to three other ways that HIV could spread and only 37 percent were able to name three ways of self-protection.

The survey also found that in Guyana, nearly 25 percent of young people age 12 to 14 were sexually active, a percentage that rose to more than 33 percent for those 15 and older. Nearly half of the males over the age of 15 were sexually active, according to the survey.

Respondents were asked if they were aware of their religion’s teaching on sexual matters and whether they followed it. Just over 35 percent of the young people said they did, with another 22 percent knowing the teaching but not following it.

The authors also concluded that peer education should be another element in any strategy of HIV/AIDS prevention.

“The content and delivery of educational inputs must be capable of being adapted to local contexts preferably by persons who are very familiar with those situations,” wrote the authors. “In this respect, peer education would appear to offer some promise.”*

Brian O’Toole, standing, trains people to help collect data for a study about the spread of HIV/AIDS in Guyana. He credits the network of young helpers for a higher-than-usual rate of response to the questionnaire.



New Bahá'í representative to open office in Brussels to strengthen ties with European Union

GENEVA — Sarah Vader has joined the Bahá'í International Community as a representative to the United Nations.

In addition to working at UN offices in Geneva, Ms. Vader will establish an office in Brussels aimed at strengthening the Community's ties with the European Union. In that role, Ms. Vader will work closely with national-level Bahá'í affiliates in the 27 countries that are members of the EU.

"With the integration of Europe moving forward at a fast pace, the Bahá'í International Community decided it was time to open an office closer to the institutions of the European Union," said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations.

"In this endeavor, we are pleased to have on board Ms. Vader, who brings a high degree of expertise in dealing at the international level with businesses, civil society, and governments, as well as a comprehensive understanding of European culture and institutions."

In her work in Geneva, Ms. Vader's portfolio of issues will include human rights and the advancement of women. In Brussels, her

portfolio will include all areas of concern to the Bahá'í International Community and its affiliates in Europe.

Before assuming this position, Ms. Vader was associate director for the Open Forum and Special Projects at the World Economic Forum, where she had worked since 2000. In that role, she managed the Open Forum, a series of sessions held outside the congress center during the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum. It brought together global business leaders and representatives of civil society to discuss globalization, poverty, and other international issues.

Before that, her work included developing the global governance portfolio for the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in 2004 and 2005 and managing civil society input to the Forum.

A native of Switzerland, Ms. Vader, 31, has a degree in international law from the University of Paris 1, Pantheon-Sorbonne. As part of her education, she did internships at the International Committee of the Red Cross and at the Paris branch of the Community's Office of Public Information.

She has served on the national governing body of the Bahá'ís of Switzerland since April 2002. She is fluent in English and French and conversant in German, Italian, and Persian.

"I am pleased with this change in my professional path, and look forward to taking on the challenges of working for the Bahá'í International Community, a nongovernmental organization that is active across such a wide range of issues at the United Nations and in other international organizations," said Ms. Vader.

"Through my work at the World Economic Forum, I saw the importance of bringing together governments, businesses, and civil society in a multi-stakeholder approach, so it will be of great interest to apply this experience here.

"I look forward, also, to working closely with the 27 national affiliates of the Bahá'í International Community in Europe as we seek to bring our concerns to the attention of the European Union," she said.*

In addition to working at Bahá'í UN offices in Geneva, Sarah Vader will establish an office in Brussels aimed at strengthening ties with the European Union, working closely with national-level Bahá'í affiliates in the 27 EU member countries.



Sarah Vader

In Ghana, innovative literacy program produces dramatic results

Teacher Victoria Kwofie leads Class Six students in the “Enlightening the Hearts” program at the Anyinabrim Methodist Primary School in the village of Anyinabrim in Achechere Circuit, Western Ghana



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By all accounts Enlightening the Hearts is highly successful, helping to triple the literacy rates among participants and winning praise from students, parents, teachers, and government education officials.

“The methodology makes it so simple to acquire language skills,” said Samson Boakye, a teacher at the Anyinabrim primary school. “The syllabic approach is excellent. Then there is transfer of knowledge from the Ghanaian language to the English language. Children are therefore reading the English language fluently.”

Along with its distinctive method for teaching literacy, the program also incorporates elements of moral education by emphasizing virtues drawn from religious scriptures — another feature that has drawn praise.

“Why I like this program mostly is the moral aspect of the book which will no doubt help children to become good citizens in the future,” said Ayyub Yaku Aidoo, a teacher at the Samreboi primary school.

The origins of the project go back to 1996, when the Bahá’í community of Ghana initiated a literacy campaign. It was handed off to the Olinga Foundation in 2001. The foundation itself was started by a group of Bahá’í educators in 2000.

The foundation was named after Enoch Olinga, one of the first Africans to accept the Bahá’í Faith. Its mission is to promote universal basic education, to empower young people, and, according to its Web site, “to build the capacities needed to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization on the African continent.”

In addition to the Enlightening the Hearts literacy campaign, the Olinga Foundation has three other programs: 1) a capacity-building program for community leaders; 2) community-development facilitator training; and, 3) a junior youth empowerment project.

In all of its programs, the foundation draws on Bahá’í social and spiritual principles, emphasizing specifically the equality of women and men, the right to universal basic educa-

By all accounts Enlightening the Hearts is highly successful, helping to triple the literacy rates among participants and winning praise from students, parents, teachers, and government education officials.

tion, and the need to eliminate prejudice.

At present, the literacy program reaches the largest population, and has drawn the most attention. "This is our main program," said Leslie Casely-Hayford, director of the foundation. "We believe literacy and moral education are essential to the progress and development of society."

Focus on deprived areas

The project currently operates in two districts in the Western Region, Wasa Amenfi West and Wasa Amenfi East, and plans are well advanced to offer the project in a third district in Ghana's Eastern Region. The focus is on remote and underserved school populations.

"The program places great emphasis on reaching children in deprived area schools, which are often off the main road," said Dr. Casely-Hayford.

Once schools are selected, the foundation provides specialized training and onsite supervision for teachers, and books and learning materials for students. About 40 to 50 schools are chosen as project sites each year.

The program has had impressive results. In its own surveys of select schools, the project found that the average baseline literacy rate from 2002-2006 was about 17 percent. Among those students who were tested after completing the ten-month program, the literacy rate averaged 52 percent.

"That represents a tripling of the literacy rate," said Dr. Casely-Hayford, noting that a 2004 World Bank report indicated that literacy among primary-school children in Ghana is extremely low. By one measure, the report said, fewer than five percent of students showed mastery of English in 2000.

As well, an evaluation by the district education office found that students in schools participating in the program also performed exceptionally well in the Ghanaian language subject section of the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE).

The project's success, said Dr. Casely-Hayford and others, stems largely from its practice of using the local language as the language for literacy instruction.

"Experience over the last five years in three language groups — Twi, Ewe, and Dagbani — has proven that this approach speeds the learner's ability to acquire basic literacy skills, and increases their confidence by using a phonetic and syllabic approach," said Dr. Casely-Hayford.

Leonard Nubuasah, national program coordinator for the Olinga Foundation, said

that many children quickly become literate during the nine-month program.

"The children can transfer their knowledge of literacy in their own language easily into the English language," said Mr. Nubuasah, a former teacher who has been with Olinga for five years.

Another key to the program's effectiveness is the motivational impulse generated by the emphasis on moral education and the use of the Holy Writings of the three major religions practiced in the region.

"Access to Holy Writings can also stimulate individual and collective transformation," said Dr. Casely-Hayford. "It also ensures human capacity development such that a child's full potential is realized."

The moral values discussed in the workbooks are patience, honesty, trustworthiness, love, humility, obedience, purity, kindness, and modesty.

"We used these nine virtues because they are highly embedded in our Ghanaian society at the local level," said Mr. Nubuasah. "The Christian preachers talk about them, the Muslims discuss them, and they are also found in the Bahá'í Faith. These are the three main religions here, and these virtues are the building blocks for our children."

Mr. Nubuasah said that another sign of the project's success is that about 75 percent of the schools that have participated in the nine-month program have continued to use the project's methodology.

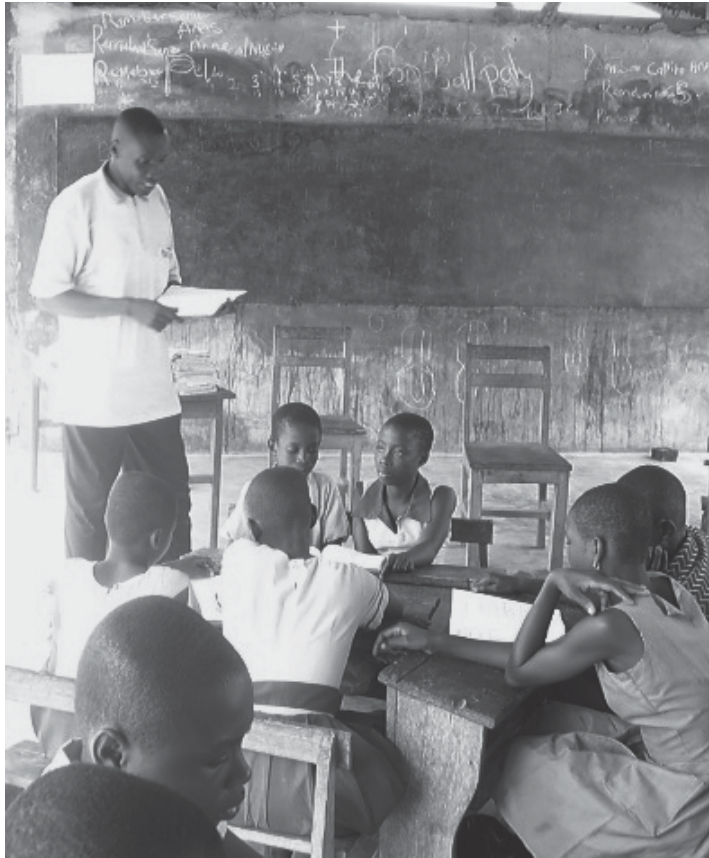
"We know this because every year we continue to supply these schools with books, and we continue to monitor the program by visiting each school — if they are not too remote — two or three times a year," said Mr. Nubuasah.

"They have been highly effective in the regions they have worked in. They have increased reading and literacy levels and brought values into the learning environment. All my regional offices were happy with their work."

**— Michael Nsowah,
acting director
general of the
Ghana Education
Service**

The program focuses on remote, rural schools such as the Anyinabrim District Assembly Primary School in Achechere Circuit, Western Region, Ghana.





Teacher Abraham Coffie leads a level six class at the Anyinabrim District Assembly Primary School in Achechere Circuit, Western Region.

“When Olinga started we saw improvements in the places that they were working. We also saw that people started talking about values and we were impressed.”

— Nana Bobbie, director, Wassa Amenfi West district education office.

Last November, Michael Nsowah, acting director general of the Ghana Education Service, wrote a letter recommending that other educational districts in Ghana consider adopting the Olinga Foundation’s literacy program.

“They have been highly effective in the regions they have worked in,” said Mr. Nsowah. “They have increased reading and literacy levels and brought values into the learning environment. All my regional offices were happy with their work.”

“They do a lot of work in remote places that are difficult to access. They provide both learning materials and skills development. This is an important thing for a country like Ghana that does not have too much money,” said Mr. Nsowah.

Cost effective

Because of its emphasis on cost effectiveness, the program has been able to reach large numbers of children through teacher training and the provision of literacy materials. According to Dr. Casely-Hayford, it costs about US\$300 to open a program in a new school and support that school for a one year period.

The project receives most of its support from the Bahá’í International Community’s Office of Social and Economic Development.

It has also received support from the Canadian International Development Agency, the National Spiritual Assembly of Ghana, and the North American Women’s Association of Ghana, along with several other groups and individuals across the world.

The emphasis on providing specialized training to teachers is another factor in the program’s success.

To date the program has trained over 350 primary and junior secondary school teachers. The training has two main goals: encouraging and enabling teachers to improve the quality of education in schools through better literacy instruction and to introduce the concepts of moral education and personal transformation.

Mr. Nubuasah said many teachers were at first unmotivated and unsure about how to teach children how to read and write, especially using the local language.

“But the Holy Writings of the Bahá’í Faith, especially, speak about the importance of education and the station of teachers,” said Mr. Nubuasah. “This becomes a source of motivation.”

Entwi Bosiako, the head teacher at the Gounkrom primary school said the methodology taught by the Olinga Foundation was simple and easy to use, as were the textbooks.

“This has motivated me to teach the Ghanaian language,” said Mr. Bosiako, 39. “The Holy Writings used for reflections during the training workshop is also a source of inspiration and motivation.”

District education officials say the program’s success extends beyond the simple promotion of literacy.

“Our students have had problems with reading,” said Nana Bobbie, assistant director of the Wassa Amenfi West district education office. “When Olinga started, we saw improvements in the places that they were working. We also saw that people started talking about values and we were impressed. So the work that they are doing has had a good impact on education as a whole.

“Also the teachers ... have now become excited by the training. I think this is another key to the foundation’s success.”

“We really appreciate their help,” said Mr. Bobbie. “Morality has broken down so badly in Ghana. We had been looking for a way to salvage the situation for a while. Then the Olinga Foundation came with their books and values. We really like the moral education attached to the literacy campaign.”*

— Reported by Kerii Hange Tjitendero

Spiritual Enterprise

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Honesty and trust are essential in the process of innovation, as well, since most new ideas and inventions today emerge from collaboration “instead of one creative genius sitting in her office with lights going on over her head.”

“If I fear that you are going to take an idea that I share with you and claim credit for yourself, I am less likely to share that idea,” he writes, saying that any kind of distrust shuts down the “dance of creativity” as surely “as a train wreck shuts down the railroad line.”

His chapter on the process of “consultation,” as the non-adversarial decision-making process used by Bahá’ís is known, is especially instructive. The principles of Bahá’í consultation include detaching individual ego from an idea, gathering information from diverse sources and viewpoints, and a commitment to frank and open dialogue — and Mr. Miller shows how these same ideas are being discovered and incorporated into the decision-making processes of modern corporations.

“Businesses succeed by making better decisions than their competitors,” Mr. Miller writes. “In business and in academia a great deal of work is being done to discover processes to achieve deep understanding, thorough analysis of problems and solutions, and methods for reaching a collective decision.”

“Members of the Bahá’í community must be at the forefront of integrating this knowledge and experience from both academic and applied sources with their principle of consultation and the writings of their Faith.”

In the second half of *Spiritual Enterprise*, Mr. Miller discusses how Bahá’í spiritual principles can be directly applied to specific business concerns, such as issues of capital and finance, organizational structure, leadership, and even information systems.

On the issue of capital and finance, for example, he notes that “[t]here has always been a strained relationship between religion and money. In previous religious dispensations the lending of money was viewed with either condemnation or at least suspicion.”

In the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith, however, “there is no question that there is recognition of the legitimate need for the creation, investment, lending and profit on private capital.”

While carefully noting that no one has yet defined or derived an official Bahá’í un-

derstanding of economics, he offers that “a careful reading of the Bahá’í teachings” on the question of capitalism emphasizes “a complete balance and recognition of legitimate interests of all parties and the interdependence, the common benefit for all of humanity that is derived from a just and equitable system.

“Members of western society must overcome their adversarial assumptions that have so long dominated any discussion of capital, capitalism and profit,” he writes. “The focus must shift from who is a winner and loser in the game of business to how the benefits are best shared in service to humanity.”

The idea of profit sharing, which is highly encouraged in the Bahá’í writings, is one such antidote to the excesses of capitalism, he writes. “Profit sharing is not only a moral good,” he writes, continuing his emphasis on the practical application of Bahá’í principles in business. “Several studies have demonstrated that profit sharing and employee ownership result in improved business performance over companies that do not share or provide for employee ownership.”

One of the most interesting sections of the book is in the first chapter where Mr. Miller asks whether an organization can possess “spiritual” qualities. He suggests that it can, by promoting a harmony between the demands of the material world and the moral ideals engendered by “our higher spiritual selves.” He offers, also, that “[t]rue spirituality is selfless, rather than self-centered.”

In an organization guided by spirituality, he writes, “we would experience an energizing harmony like that between two perfectly tuned instruments. The absence of dissonance conserves energy. Harmony creates energy. A spiritual enterprise would, therefore, be energizing and contribute to the development of the capacities of its members.”

All in all, Bahá’í readers will certainly find the book quite interesting for the degree to which it demonstrates how Bahá’í spiritual, social and economic principles are being rediscovered in the corporate world — and indeed, how thinking in the corporate world is already moving in directions outlined by the Bahá’í Faith.

Business leaders with no background in the Bahá’í Faith, likewise, will find it interesting and perhaps surprising the degree to which a religion, albeit one founded less than 170 years ago, has so much to say about topics related to economics, business, and the kinds of cooperative endeavors that define the successful modern corporation.*

“Profit sharing is not only a moral good. Several studies have demonstrated that profit sharing and employee ownership result in improved business performance over companies that do not share or provide for employee ownership.”

— Lawrence Miller,
Spiritual Enterprise

***Spiritual Enterprise* can be purchased from George Ronald via their Web site: <http://grbooks.com>**

Can corporations possess spiritual qualities?

Spiritual Enterprise: Building Your Business in the Spirit of Service

By Lawrence Miller

George Ronald

Oxford

Lawrence Miller's client list reads like a page from the Fortune 500 directory. In 30 years of management consulting, Mr. Miller has worked with companies like Exxon USA, MetLife, Coca-Cola, American Express, Honeywell, Eastman Kodak, and McDonald's.

As an author of business books, too, Mr. Miller is well recognized, with six previous titles to his name. *American Spirit: Visions of A New Corporate Culture*, for example, was the text for Honda of America's course on their values and culture. And *Barbarians to Bureaucrats: Corporate Life Cycle Strategies* explored the rise and fall of civilizations to illustrate the patterns of leadership and evolution in corporate cultures.

What makes Mr. Miller's latest work so significant is the degree to which he has directly connected his personal religious beliefs to his insights about the corporate world.

Spiritual Enterprise: Building Your Business in the Spirit of Service draws explicitly on Mr. Miller's Bahá'í belief and practice, outlining how the spiritual principles of the Bahá'í Faith offer "new principles of management for a new age."

Mr. Miller starts off by stressing the importance of making a direct correlation between religious principles and business practices.

"Religion is on the march in both the East and the West," writes Mr. Miller in the introduction. "The pendulum has swung from a time when religion guided all of our affairs, to a time when religion and faith were presumed to be an illegitimate topic for consideration in public institutions. It is now swinging back to a time when we are seeking an integration of personal faith and public life."

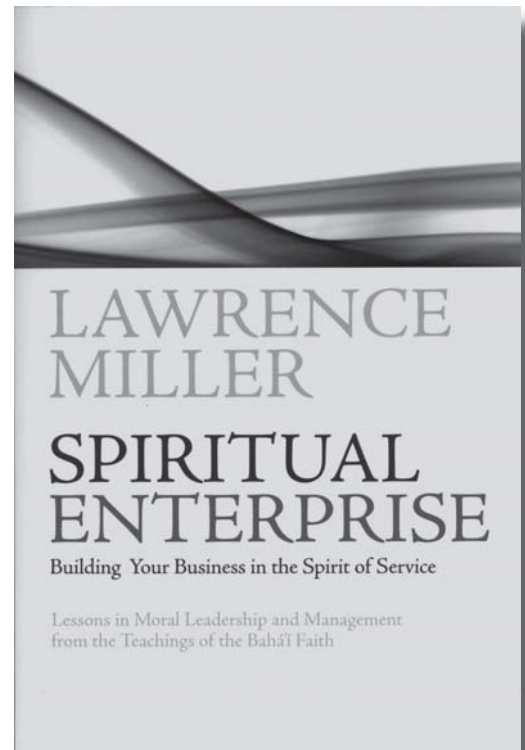
In the first half of the book, Mr. Miller shows how the basic moral and spiritual principles of the Bahá'í Faith can be applied to the corporate sphere. Specifically, he identifies honesty and trustworthiness, the spirit of service, justice, consultation, unity, moderation, world citizenship, and universal education, as core values that can inform and improve almost any business.

He spends a chapter on each principle, weaving together a discussion of ethics,

economic theory, and the latest research into management science, explaining how such principles stand at the foundation of successful corporate practices.

"Honesty and trustworthiness are not only the foundation of virtue but of economic activity as well," he writes in the first chapter, outlining how honesty and trust are essential for wealth creation, innovation, and leadership.

He gives a number of examples. The modern system of "lean manufacturing" is built on long-term and intricately close relation-



ships between suppliers and manufacturers. Suppliers, he explains, must invest huge sums to build manufacturing plants next to their customers' plants to provide "just-in-time" parts and materials.

"No legal agreement, no matter how well constructed, is adequate to assure the close communications and relationships that are required to make this process work," he writes. The "realities of today's business environment require long-term relationships built on trust."

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