

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

26 November 1986

[To a National Spiritual Assembly]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The International Teaching Centre has referred to the Universal House of Justice your letter of 29 September 1986 in which you seek comment on the draft of the letter you plan to send to the Local Spiritual Assembly of ... for the guidance of ... , a believer who has written an article entitled, "The Infallibility of the Prophets."

The House of Justice has studied your draft response and ...'s paper in which he concludes, by means of logical analysis, based in part on his understanding of an article by Mr. Juan Ricardo Cole on the Tablet of Wisdom, that Bahá'u'lláh, and indeed all the Prophets of God, are not infallible.... expresses the opinion that attempts to resolve apparent contradictions in the Writings by seeking a broader context only serve to create insoluble logical difficulties, and he indicates that he is aware that the Institutions of the Faith may not agree with his views causing his status as a Bahá'í to be called into question. We are instructed by the Universal House of Justice to make the following reply.

...s article raises fundamental issues about the station of the Manifestations and Their authority, as well as about the nature of individual interpretation.

It is clear from a study of the Text that infallibility is an essential attribute of the Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

... the Most Great Infallibility is confined to the One Whose station is immeasurably exalted beyond ordinances or prohibitions and is sanctified from errors and omissions....

... Were He to pronounce right to be wrong or denial to be belief, He speaketh the truth as bidden by God. This is a station wherein sins or trespasses neither exist nor are mentioned.
(*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 108, 109)

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Some Answered Questions*, stresses the inseparability of "essential infallibility" from the Manifestation of God, and states:

... as the supreme Manifestations certainly possess essential infallibility, therefore whatever emanates from Them is identical with the truth, and conformable to reality. They are not under the shadow of the former laws. Whatever They say is the word of God, and whatever They perform is an upright action.

The following extract from a letter dated 11 January 1942 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer underlines the vital link between Revelation and the infallibility of the Manifestation:

Regarding your Bahá'í friend who does not fully understand the infallibility of the Manifestation of God: You should influence that person to study the matter more deeply, and to realize that the whole theory of Divine Revelation rests on the infallibility of the Prophet, be He Christ, Muḥammad, Bahá'u'lláh, or one of the others. If They are not infallible, then They are not divine, and thus lose that essential link with God which, we believe, is the bond that educates men and causes all human progress.

As to the infallibility of the content of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, ... cites issues concerning the chronology of philosophical figures mentioned in Mr. Cole's article in the *World Order* magazine in 1979, as a basis for questioning the infallibility of Bahá'u'lláh.... appears to have misconstrued the tenor of Mr. Cole's article. Mr. Cole's article does not challenge the infallibility of Bahá'u'lláh, on the contrary, he shows that Bahá'u'lláh, Himself, states in the Tablet of Wisdom that He is quoting the writings of past sages. Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

Thou knowest full well that We perused not the books which men possess and We acquired not the learning current amongst them, and yet whenever We desire to quote the sayings of the learned and of the wise, presently there will appear before the face of thy Lord in the form of a tablet all that which hath appeared in the world and is revealed in the Holy Books and Scriptures. Thus do We set down in writing that which the eye perceiveth. Verily His knowledge encompasseth the earth and the heavens.

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 149)

Mr. Cole confirms this statement by comparison of the texts concerned. There is nothing in the text of this Tablet to show conclusively whether, by quoting these passages, Bahá'u'lláh was intending to confirm their assertions, or whether He was merely referring to historical authorities that were accepted by the audience He was addressing. It must be borne in mind that accounts of past events as recorded by historians of the East do not always agree with the accounts set down by chroniclers in other parts of the world. Perhaps in the future studies will be undertaken to ascertain the facts scientifically, if this is at all possible.

In reference to His Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh provides the following assurance that when viewed from the perspective of the Manifestation, the divine purpose of the verses will become apparent and questions will be resolved:

The verses are sent down at one time in a form that is untroubled by the rules of grammarians, transcending what the minds of men have yet conceived; and at another time they are sent down in a style that conformeth to the standards of men. Thy Lord, verily, is potent over whatsoever He willeth by virtue of His words "Be, and it is." Wert thou to view them with Mine eyes thou wouldst see that they are in conformity with the most consummate rules, and wouldst give thanks to the Lord, the Almighty, the Best-Beloved.

(Newly translated)

As to the question of individual interpretation, while individual interpretation is the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, the application of logical analysis has inherent limitations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated:

Therefore, if the criterion of reason or intellect constituted a correct and infallible standard of judgment, those who tested and applied it should have arrived at the same conclusions. As they differ and are contradictory in conclusions, it is an evidence that the method and standard of test must have been faulty and insufficient.

(The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912, p. 254)

Understanding of the Writings requires belief in the Manifestation of God, for, as the Master states:

... the knowledge of God is the cause of spiritual progress and attraction, and through it the perception of truth, the exaltation of humanity, divine civilization, rightness of morals and illumination are obtained.

(Some Answered Questions, p. 300)

Other important components in this process include an attitude of prayerful humility, acceptance of the statements of the Manifestation, confidence in the knowledge that

understanding of their meaning will emerge with meditation, study of the texts and the passage of time, willingness to acknowledge that one's views may be erroneous, and, courage to follow in the direction defined by the authentic sacred texts.

The House of Justice urges your National Spiritual Assembly to use the guidance contained in this letter as a basis for guiding and educating the believer in question about some of the fundamental verities of Bahá'í belief as a means of assisting him to determine his relationship to the Faith....

We are asked to assure you of the prayers of the House of Justice for the implementation of this weighty responsibility.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat