

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

1 May 1991

[To two individuals]

Dear Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letters ... and has instructed us to send you the following reply....

First of all, we are asked to explain that although Bahá'ís believe that the Teachings and Order of Bahá'u'lláh are the solution to the current problems of mankind, they abstain completely from ever attempting to put them into effect through political action. Only if people voluntarily accept them and submit themselves freely to this Order will it be implemented in the world. Bahá'ís should never attempt to impose their belief on anyone. Bahá'u'lláh has given certain teachings which Bahá'ís believe to be true; they offer these teachings to the rest of mankind. Whosoever accepts them is a Bahá'í, but everyone is free to reject them. No one is ever compelled to become a Bahá'í, nor is anyone compelled to remain a Bahá'í. If one has accepted the Bahá'í Faith and later concludes that one has made a mistake, one is free to withdraw, and no stigma is attached to such an action. In all such things Bahá'ís uphold Bahá'u'lláh's principle of independent investigation of truth.

But one must ask what is the truth? Naturally human beings are continually discovering more and more about the truth. God is infinite, so His truth also is infinite. Nevertheless, as human knowledge progresses there are certain truths that are clearly established. Acceptance of such truths is not a surrender of freedom but is a free acceptance of things as they are. For example it is now clearly established by science that the earth moves round the sun, and not vice versa. Any human being is free to believe the contrary but to do so is not an assertion of freedom, it is an evidence of ignorance or foolishness. In the same way, to accept that Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be a Manifestation of God is true is not a surrender of freedom but the acceptance of a conclusion that one has confirmed to one's own satisfaction.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches, and Bahá'ís believe, that the fundamental truths of religion are not discovered by human beings but are revealed to mankind by God through His Manifestations. Whether or not this belief is true is, clearly, a matter of profound importance. If one does not accept it, one is free to adopt all manner of viewpoints including the one propounded by you in your letter, namely, that the followers of all the different religions should live together in harmony without becoming one religion, and that one can choose certain of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and reject others. This is a valid position, but the point that you should realize is that it is not the Bahá'í position. Bahá'ís respect your right to hold it, but you cannot hold it and be a Bahá'í because a Bahá'í, by definition, accepts Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age and upholds His Covenant as, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity."

Bahá'ís believe that in this age God has revealed through Bahá'u'lláh the Teachings which will lead the followers of all religions to recognize their common foundation so that they will flow into this latest Dispensation of God's Revelation like rivers into one ocean and, in the words of Jesus, "there shall be one fold and one shepherd." They also believe that the Law of God revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for this stage of human history, and the institutions that He has founded, are the bedrock on which the unity and harmony of mankind will be built. This is what they teach, because this is what they believe to be the truth. Nevertheless, this does not prevent their living together in harmony with those who believe otherwise, or stop their collaborating in humanitarian activities with their fellow human beings of all other religions and of none.

It is apparent from your letters that you have not properly studied or understood the Bahá'í teachings and may well have been antagonized by shortcomings among members of the Bahá'í community. Of course, Bahá'ís try not to have shortcomings. They are striving with varying success to put the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh into effect in their lives and to raise up the institutions which He has ordained. Individuals and even Spiritual Assemblies are imperfect—this is an inevitable aspect of growth—but they have the satisfaction of witnessing improvement and maturation as the years go by.

The House of Justice hopes that you will make a deeper study of the Bahá'í teachings in collaboration with your Bahá'í friends and, even if you finally decide that you cannot accept them, that you will be able to collaborate with Bahá'ís and all others in the building of a better world.

With all good wishes,

Department of the Secretariat