

One Common Faith

— SEQUENTIAL OUTLINE —

1. History's Turning Point

- 1.1 A sea change in consciousness is under way, creating new receptivity to Bahá'u'lláh's message.
- 1.2 Early in the twentieth century a materialistic vision of reality had become the dominant world faith.
- 1.3 History arrived at its supposed destination: a universal civilization based on secular reality.
- 1.4 Beyond the West, announcements that "God is Dead" went largely unnoticed. Yet the people in these lands were marginalized and alienated.
- 1.5 At century's end: the sudden resurgence of religion as an all-consuming global phenomena.
- 1.6 The intensification of humanity's spiritual search continues, unabated, entering all spheres of human activity.

2. Disillusionment with the Promises of Materialism

- 2.1 Reawakened interest in religion is the product of historical forces that are gaining momentum.
- 2.2 For over a hundred years, progress was identified solely with material development. Extreme forms culminated in totalitarian regimes.
- 2.3 Other systems, while repudiating inhumane methods, derived their thrust from the same limited conception of reality. The resulting social ills can no longer be ignored.
- 2.4 Even programs of "social and economic development" have proved a disheartening failure.
- 2.5 The "gospel of human betterment" ultimately created a culture that fails to meet humanity's deepest needs. The resulting perversions of truth reveal a civilization in decline.
- 2.6 Materialism's error lies not in its laudable efforts to improve life, but in the disengagement of material progress from spiritual and moral development.

3. The Progressive Globalizing of Human Experience

- 3.1 Global integration also undermines the inherited certainties of the twentieth century. Interaction between diverse populations gives rise to a questioning of all established truths.
- 3.2 Travel and migration expose people to new cultures and norms. People are brought face to face with their common humanity.
- 3.3 Increasing recognition of the "oneness of humanity", a principle Bahá'u'lláh announced to the leaders of the world a century and a half ago—ignored, yet resistlessly accomplishing itself.
- 3.4 Loss of faith in materialism, and the progressive globalization of human experience, reinforce one another. The resulting upheaval is part of a spiritual process.

4. Humanity's Current Needs Overwhelm Established Religions

- 4.1 Throughout history the great religions have been the primary agents of the civilizing process.
- 4.2 Why does this heritage not serve as the stage for today's reawakening of spiritual quest?
- 4.3 The social teachings of these religions, designed for earlier times, cannot address modernity.
- 4.4 The close association of people with differing faiths causes confusion and doubt.
- 4.5 None of the established religions can be refashioned to serve as an ultimate guide for modern life. Yet this is simply an inherent feature of an evolutionary process.

5. Bahá'u'lláh Recasts the Entire Conception of Religion

- 5.1 In sharing Bahá'u'lláh's message, Bahá'ís need to recognize the widespread misconceptions about the nature of religion.
- 5.2 The diverse and conflicting conceptions of religion have one thing in common: all impose human limitations on something transcendent.

- 5.3 Humans cannot “capture” God. The Creator interacts with an ever-evolving creation via the appearance of prophetic Figures.
- 5.4 These “Manifestations” appear at different times, yet all proclaim the same Faith.
- 5.5 The Manifestations imbue individuals with Divine attributes, helping them carry forward an “ever advancing civilization”.
- 5.6 Belief is a necessary and irrepressible urge of the human race.
- 5.7 The work of the Manifestations is not merely repetitive but progressive. Successive revelations awaken humankind to its capacities and responsibilities as the trustees of creation.
- 5.8 Bahá’u’lláh has not brought a new religion, but rather recast the entire conception of religion. Humanity today is heir to history’s entire spiritual legacy.
- 5.9 God’s “proof” is that He has repeatedly manifested Himself. The Manifestations exert an influence beyond that of any other historical phenomenon.

6. Progressive Revelation and the Failure to Understand It

- 6.1 The common objection to the idea of the unity of religion.
- 6.2 Analogy of cultural life: the evolution and incredible diversity of human expression in no way invalidates the fact that humanity constitutes one “human race”.
- 6.3 A similar process characterizes religious life. Differing teachings, designed to meet the needs of each age, proceed from one source, forming one religion.
- 6.4 Eternal versus transitory teachings: Religion’s core message is immutable; auxiliary guidance is designed to enhance the process of civilization building.
- 6.5 Importance of the recognition of God’s revelation at its appearance. Failure to do so condemns people to practices that have long fulfilled their purpose.
- 6.6 Typically, theology has assumed it had the right to interpret God’s purpose.
- 6.7 Theology constructed its own authority in the heart of each great faith.
- 6.8 Result: the construction of barriers between faiths. Each stage in a progressively unfolding revelation became frozen in time.

7. Religion’s Unity of Purpose

- 7.1 Exploring past scriptures through Bahá’u’lláh’s eyes reveals a unity of purpose and principle.
- 7.2 The goal of humanity is to know God and to serve others.
- 7.3 The soul’s ability to understand God’s purpose is dependent on interventions of the Divine.
- 7.4 The succession of revelations has been an implicit, and usually explicit, feature of all revealed texts.
- 7.5 A deep sense of the oneness of religion emerges. “Religion is religion, as science is science.”
- 7.6 It is inadequate recognition of the station of God’s Manifestations to see them as the founders of separate religions. They are the spiritual Educators of history.

8. Religion’s Shaping of Civilization

- 8.1 Each religious dispensation focused on spiritual and material concerns of priority importance at that stage of history, leaving other desirable advances to be dealt with in future Revelations.
- 8.2 Example of Islam: Laws that would be draconian today unified warring tribes and launched the faith on five centuries of development whose speed and scope is unmatched before or since.
- 8.3 Issues of crime and punishment are especially contentious in understanding society’s evolution towards spiritual maturity. Historical perspective is essential.
- 8.4 Each dispensation focuses on reformations that are considered immediately essential.
- 8.5 Bahá’u’lláh exhorts us: “be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in...”

9. Enacting the Principles of the New Age

- 9.1 The needs of this age, enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh, are now accepted—at least as ideals—by progressive minds everywhere.

- 9.2 What is lacking is the power of moral conviction that can implement these ideals.
- 9.3 Through Bahá'u'lláh's revelation the principles required for the "coming of age of the human race" have been invested with the spiritual power capable of tapping the roots of human motivation.
- 9.4 Integral to these teachings are principles addressing the administration of humanity's collective affairs.

10. The Power of Unity: The Model of the Bahá'í Community

- 10.1 Society's progress is crippled by its inability to see "lack of unity" as the fundamental cause of the world's ills.
- 10.2 The world clings to prescriptions shaped by materialistic misconceptions of reality. But unity is a spiritual condition—its one certain source lies in the laws and principles revealed by God.
- 10.3 Central to Bahá'u'lláh's mission is the creation of global community reflecting the diversity and unity of humankind—a phenomenon unlike anything the world has seen.
- 10.4 The relevance of the achievement of the Bahá'í community calls out for appreciation.
- 10.5 The Bahá'í Faith has maintained its unity, unbroken and without schism throughout its existence.

11. Disunity and the Persistence of Evil

- 11.1 The modern world is unable to effectively address the problem of evil.
- 11.2 Since unity is the key to establishing peace and justice in the modern age, assaults on it represent evil in its most destructive form .
- 11.3 Evil is identified as the deliberate violation of covenants of peace and reconciliation by which people of goodwill seek to escape the past and build a common future.
- 11.4 Bahá'u'lláh created a Covenant to preserve the unity of His teachings, and the community of those who recognize Him.
- 11.5 Covenant-breaking is not merely disagreement or moral failing, but a deliberate attempt to impose personal agendas that violate one's professed commitment.

12. The Unfolding of the Bahá'í Global Community

- 12.1 To anyone concerned with the crisis of civilization, the Bahá'ís should be cause for attention—evidence that humanity can find fulfillment as a single race in a global homeland.
- 12.2 Urgency of the Faith's global Plans—need to multiply resources and diversify talents.
- 12.3 The Faith's "culture of systematic growth"—core activities pursued in all corners of the globe.
- 12.4 Sharing Bahá'u'lláh's message and promoting the betterment of society are reciprocal features of one global plan. The obligation to assist humanity's universal movement towards God.
- 12.5 Sharing Bahá'u'lláh's message is not an interfaith project. The experience of conversion is not an extraneous feature of spiritual search. Bahá'u'lláh: "The call of God has been raised."

13. The Day of Fulfilment

- 13.1 The "coming of the Kingdom" is an historical process unfolding in a physical world.
- 13.2 Religion's goal is not only the salvation of the individual, but humanity's collective attainment of "the Promised Day".
- 13.3 The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is neither preparatory nor prophetic: *It is that Event.*
- 13.4 The fundamental difference between Bahá'u'lláh's mission and projects of human design. The appeal is to a potential in the human soul, nurtured and trained by God since the dawn of time.
- 13.5 The coming of age of the human race. Bahá'u'lláh's summons to "one common Faith".