One Common Faith\*

Summary\*\* by Colin Dibdin Nov 2005

* Foreword - Elevating Religious Discourse
* Sea-change in human consciousness – re-intepreting reality.
  + Religion vs materialism in the 20th Century
  + Re-awakened interest in religion
* Re-evaluations:
  + Failure of Materialism
    - Scientific materialism
    - Capitalism
    - Development
    - Consumer culture
    - Why materialism failed – disengaged from spiritual development / disillusionment with failed promises.
  + Global integration
    - Communications and knowledge – questioning of authority
    - Travel & Migration – perception of a ‘single global homeland’
    - The conception of reality announced by Bahá’u’lláh, the oneness of mankind, is becoming the standard for judging collective efforts.
* These changes reflect a spiritual process – the Day of Resurrection.
* The major religions are, historically, the “primary driving forces of the civilizing process”.
* Why then are people not turning with confidence to religion?
  + 2 Problems
    - Society has changed. There are new practical and moral decisions to make.
    - Association with other religions leads to questioning of doctrines that inhibit association and understanding.
  + Established religions cannot change their belief systems in order to answer current questions. To do so would lead to further disenchantment and conflict.
* Misconceptions about human nature and social evolution inhibit endeavours at human betterment. Bahá’ís need an in-depth understanding.
* Variety of understandings of the term ‘religion’. Yet all are ‘imprisoned’ in conceptual limits.
* Bahá’í teachings:
  + God is inaccessible. We know Him through “those luminous Gems of Holiness”.
  + The Manifestations of God – proclaim the same Faith.
  + The Manifestations – awaken souls and cause progress in the world.
  + Faith is an aspect of human nature that “will not be denied” despite 20th century materialistic ‘solutions’.
  + Through ongoing revelation, God upholds the integrity, autonomy, authority and progressiveness of religion.
  + The Bahá’í Faith is not a new religion, but part of the world’s spiritual evolution.
  + God’s Manifestations: prove His existence, fulfil the Covenant (promise of guidance) and advance civilization.
* The most common objection to this: that differences among the religions are too fundamental.
* Two categories of religious difference are presented as the ‘intent’ of scripture: Practice and Doctrine.
  + Understanding differences in practice:
    - Religious customs are
      * Analogous to cultural diversity, i.e. evolutionary
      * Derived from God, and differ because of the requirements of each age.
    - Differences in practice are
      * Not a significant objection to the idea of the oneness of religion.
      * Misses the distinction between the eternal and transitory features of religion.
      * The ‘eternal’ spiritual and moral aspect is not irreconcilable with the ‘auxiliary’ guidance for civilization-building.
      * The concept of progressive revelation emphasises recognition of the revelation of God at its appearance. Humanity’s failure has condemned entire populations to ritualistic repetitions of out-dated practices. The consequences are:
        + Trivialization of religion.
        + Mockery of spiritual resources, first by leaders then by the general population, undermining the foundations of belief.
  + Understanding differences of doctrine:
    - The role of clergy: theological presumption has been detrimental to religious understanding and the scope of what could be achieved.
    - The parable of the tares and the wheat warns against the usurpation of Divine authority by theologians.
    - Dogmatic theology has frozen each revelation in time, today raising walls of separation and conflict and barriers in the path of those seeking to understand God’s will.
* A new perspective on religion:
  + Free of theology, and in the light of “this Day”, consistent themes emerge from the world’s scriptures, especially the Oneness of God.
  + Humanity’s purpose is to know and to serve God.
  + Knowledge of God is possible only through awaking to His Revelation. (John 14.6)
  + Progressive Revelation is expressed in all the major Faiths (quotes Hindu, Old Testament, New Testament, the Qur’án)
  + Scripture reveals the oneness of religion at the deepest level. Dual knowledge system - science and religion.
  + It is inadequate to say the work of Moses, Buddha etc was founding distinct religions. Rather, they are the Spiritual Educators of history. In loving them humanity learns to love God. They are not honoured by dogma, but by the soul’s surrender to their transformative influence.
  + Confusion about the role of religion:
    - Texts regarding women’s social status.
    - Texts regarding defensive wars.
    - Texts regarding harsh punishments.
    - Overview: Condemning any particular religion for failure to address the whole range of social wrongs ignores the nature of human development.
* The needs of this age:
  + Rules of behaviour are not eternal but depend on the needs of the age.
  + Bahá’u’lláh’s principles for this age have been largely adopted, at least as ideals.
  + But in practice many principles are flouted because adherence lacks the conviction and authority of religion.
  + Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation invests the social principles for world unity with “the one power” capable of changing behaviour. [Principles listed].
  + Principles of Governance are integral to the Bahá’í Teachings on world unity. [Goals listed].
* Unity:
  + The power to realize these goals is that of unity. People see unity as a distant goal. In fact it is the pre-requisite to solving social ills caused by disunity. Existing institutions tacitly admit that creating unity of mind and heart is beyond their capacity.
  + Unity is a condition of the human spirit. Its source is religion. The laws and principles of Bahá’u’lláh are the most potent instruments for unity.
  + The Bahá’í community reflects the oneness of mankind. Its unity, in diversity, is the ultimate testimony in vindication of Bahá’u’lláh’s mission. It may be the most diverse community on the planet.
  + How can this achievement be explained. Not wealth, patronage or aggressive proselytising, but the operation of spiritual influences.
* The ego and betrayals of trust.
  + Unlike previous religions, attacks on the unity of the Bahá’í community have failed. The net effect has been to increase the community’s deepening and commitment.
  + Without faith in God, the ability to address or understand evil is lost. Although Bahá’ís do not attribute to evil an objective existence, its effects are nevertheless crippling. The horrors of the 20th Century are an example. Essentially the character of some monstrous figures represents a spiritual disease.
  + Unity requires trust and trustworthiness. Yet betrayal of trust is a persistent thread in human history. The lesson of the 20th Century is that disunity – poising relations – could open the door in this age to even worse behaviour.
  + Evil is the deliberate violation of covenants of peace and reconciliation. The ego resists restraints on its perceived freedom. To forgo licence requires belief that fulfilment lies elsewhere – ultimately in submission to God.
  + Failure to submit has caused betrayal of God’s Messengers and their ideals. Bahá’u’lláh strongly condemns those who violate the specific Covenant which preserves the unity of the Bahá’í Faith. Such people are as an axe striking at the root. Not to be confused with leaving the Faith, which anyone is free to do.
  + The phenomena of Covenant-breaking: in the past the consequences of Covenant-breaking did not vitiate the central message. Today commitment to unity is the touchstone of all professions of dedication to God and service.
* The Bahá’í Cause
  + Bahá’í achievements are worthy of attention because they are evidence that the world’s people can – in diversity – work, live and find fulfilment together.
  + This underlines the urgency of growth and consolidation, in order to contribute to human betterment. In one sense, this is a response to the expectation that the Bahá’í community will become a useful partner with like-minded organisations.
  + Overview of the current plan:
    - Culture of systematic growth (children’s classes, study circles and devotional meetings).
    - Develops spirituality
    - Develops capacities.
    - Creates a community of interest
    - Potentially amplifies the Bahá’í contribution to public discourse on the issue of ...?...
  + Service and teaching are parallel, not competing, efforts within the Faith. Each individual is free to find his or her own approach. To make this choice intelligently he/she must gain a perspective on the processes of change and its implications for his or her own life.
  + Becoming a Bahá’í involves inner conviction.
* The Bahá’í Faith in historical context
  + A feature of modernity is that people have the ability to see the drama of salvation in the context of history.
  + The religious texts all refer to the goal of religion as humanity’s attainment of unity and the glory of the Lord.
  + The revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is that event. The foundations of the Kingdom of God are being laid.
  + This goal is fundamentally different from political and ideological projects of human design. The Kingdom of Heaven is ‘within’. Cultivating “the vineyard” is a privilege of those who recognise Bahá’u’lláh and embrace His Cause.
  + Everywhere we can see this new creation emerging. God has brought humanity to its ‘coming of age’ as a single people. The greatest remedy for the earth’s ills is union in “one common faith” and Bahá’u’lláh is summoning humanity to enter.

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\* The document *One Common Faith* may be found at <https://www.bahai.org/library/other-literature/official-statements-commentaries/one-common-faith/>. In the Foreword the Universal House of Justice wrote that “Bahá’ís must draw on a deep understanding of the process by which humanity’s spiritual life evolves”, and added “”We commend it to the thoughtful study of the friends.

\*\* I made this personal outline to help me study and navigate the document. Each dot point summarises a paragraph, and so it acts as a table of contents. Some paragraphs were difficult to summarise in a sentence. I recommend that readers of *One Common Faith* attempt their own outlines, which will undoubtedly capture different insights and look a lot different from this one. Colin