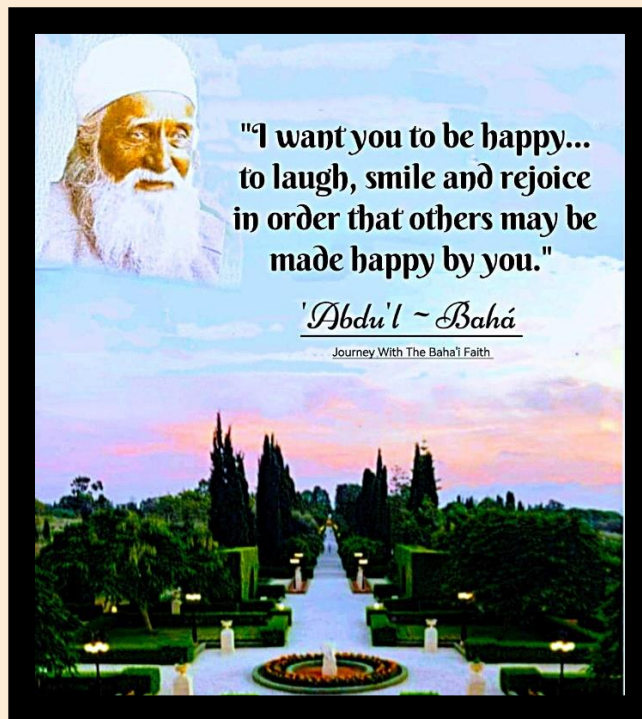




The Nuggets

Volume 4, Issue No.12



Baha'i Stories

Consultation

The most memorable instance of spiritual consultation was the meeting of the disciples of Jesus Christ upon the mount after His ascension. They said, "Jesus Christ has been crucified, and we have no longer association and intercourse with Him in His physical body; therefore, we must be loyal and faithful to Him, we must be grateful and appreciate Him, for He has raised us from the dead, He made us wise, He has given us eternal life. What shall we do to be faithful to Him?" And so they held council. One of them said, "We must detach ourselves from the chains and fetters of the world; otherwise, we cannot be faithful." The others replied, "That is so." Another said, "Either we must be married and faithful to our wives and children or serve our Lord free from these ties. We cannot be occupied with the care and provision for families and at the same time herald the Kingdom in the wilderness. Therefore, let those who are unmarried remain so, and those who have married provide means of sustenance and comfort

for their families and then go forth to spread the message of glad tidings.” There were no dissenting voices; all agreed, saying, “That is right.” A third disciple said, “To perform worthy deeds in the Kingdom we must be further self-sacrificing. From now on we should forego ease and bodily comfort, accept every difficulty, forget self and teach the Cause of God.” This found acceptance and approval by all the others. Finally a fourth disciple said, “There is still another aspect to our faith and unity. For Jesus’ sake we shall be beaten, imprisoned and exiled. They may kill us. Let us receive this lesson now. Let us realize and resolve that though we are beaten, banished, cursed, spat upon and led forth to be killed, we shall accept all this joyfully, loving those who hate and wound us.” All the disciples replied, “Surely we will -- it is agreed; this is right.” Then they descended from the summit of the mountain, and each went forth in a different direction upon his divine mission. This was true consultation. This was spiritual consultation and not the mere voicing of personal views in parliamentary opposition and debate. -Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*

Events and News

Bahá’í World News Service

“A haven of peace”: Native forest at Colombia temple promotes environmental action



AGUA AZUL, Colombia — Against the backdrop of the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16) in Cali, Colombia, participants from around the world witnessed how spiritual principles can

guide environmental conservation through a visit to a unique initiative: a native forest adjacent to the local Bahá'í House of Worship in the Norte del Cauca region.

“This initiative reflects the Bahá'í principle that humanity has a sacred responsibility to be a steward of the natural world,” said Ximena Osorio, a member of the Bahá'í Office of External Affairs of Colombia, in a conversation with the News Service.

“When we care for nature with love and wisdom,” she continued, “we not only protect biodiversity but also nurture our collective spiritual growth and development.”

The expression of the principle of humanity's harmonious relationship with nature was evident during the day-long visit to the site, which included an interfaith devotional gathering with readings from Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Zoroastrian traditions, as well as the Bahá'í writings.

The initiative emerged in response to pressing environmental challenges in the Norte del Cauca region, where the proliferation of sugarcane plantations across the land over many decades has impacted traditional farms, forced residents to lease land to sugar mills, and diminished the biodiversity of the native ecosystem.

When plans for the House of Worship were first announced in 2012, it catalyzed conversations among the local population about the revival of the natural habitat. Through a series of consultations, residents were inspired to envision how the temple grounds could reflect the region's biodiversity, and the idea emerged to grow a native forest on the surrounding land.

“Rather than viewing the temple grounds in isolation,” said Mrs. Osorio, “participants in those consultations envisioned how the grounds could contribute to ecological restoration while providing opportunities for service and education.”

This vision took concrete form through what would become the native forest project. As its coordinator, Taraneh Rezvani, explained, “The project aims to provide a space for environmental education and promote reflection on the importance of preserving the environment and our connection to nature.”

Spanning 11.5 hectares, the initiative focuses on recovering tropical dry forest—one of the most threatened ecosystems globally, which in Colombia has shrunk to just 8% of its original size.

What distinguishes this initiative is how it expresses the essential relationship between worship and service that Bahá'í Houses of Worship embody. Open to all people, Houses of Worship offer a space where prayer and contemplation inspire service to society.

The surrounding native forest exemplifies this harmony of worship and service through opportunities for practical service to the environment and community.

Mrs. Osorio explains that the project is guided by the Bahá'í principle that science and religion are complementary systems of knowledge and practice. “The project draws on both traditional ecological wisdom and modern conservation science in its approach to restoration,” she explained.

From its inception, the project drew on both traditional practices and community participation. Through “mingas”—a traditional practice where people gather for collective service—residents planted over

1,500 trees. Local families and regional institutions donated 1,000 of these trees, representing more than 180 species of fruit and timber trees.

“The native forest provides a unique space where one can experience the deep spiritual significance of our relationship with nature,” noted one attendee. This perspective resonated with many conference participants from diverse faith traditions that had gathered at the site.

In the years since its inception, the project’s impact on local biodiversity has become increasingly evident.

“Fifty bird species have been identified within the native forest area,” shared Mrs. Rezvani. *“Many of these species had long disappeared from the region.”*

The project has also successfully recovered 15 native plant species, with 19 more in the process of recovery. These developments were highlighted during the recent visit by COP16 conference attendees.

“After so many days of intense participation in COP16 activities, coming here has been a source of joy and spiritual and mental revitalization, this is a haven of peace” said one participant.

Another noted that “religious communities can make a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation, starting with the very lands they own, transforming them into a refuge for native and diverse species.”

Looking ahead, the initiative aims to broaden its educational function to increase public appreciation for regional biodiversity, streamline its supply of seeds and seedlings to the local population, and contribute to mitigating climate change effects.

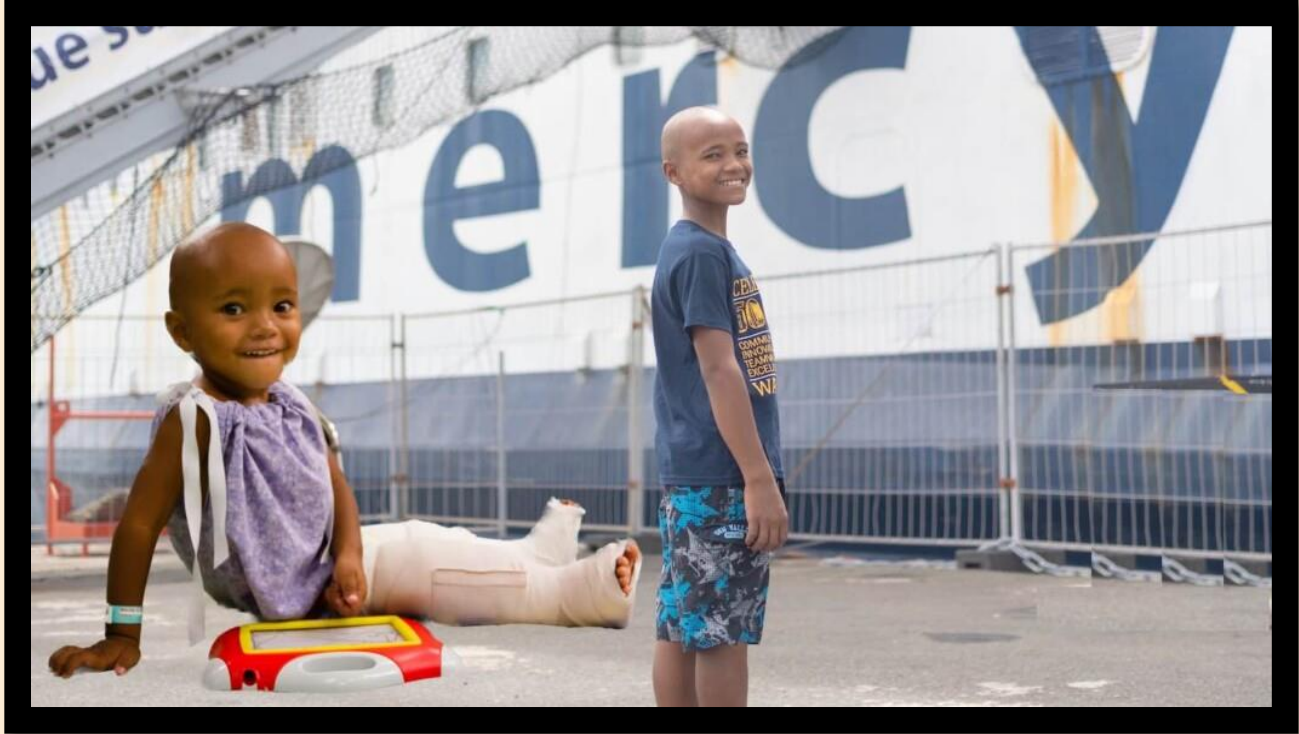
News from the Twin Community of Jaipur

Here is a sample of activities in pictures of many junior youth groups, Ruhi study groups, children’s classes, home visits and devotional and prayer meetings in different parts of Jaipur and Rajasthan. A seven-day winter campaign was completed.



Food for the Mind, Heart and Soul

Former orthopedics patient Romino, nine years after his surgery, revisiting the Africa Mercy – SWNS



A boy who was given life-changing leg surgery as a toddler has returned to the same hospital ship a decade later, declaring he wants to become a doctor himself.

Romino developed bowed legs in early childhood which prevented him from walking properly. Doctors in his Madagascar hometown suggested leg massages to correct the issue, but nothing seemed to work. Then, in 2015, his worried mother Claudia brought her three-year-old to a charity hospital ship called Africa Mercy, while it was docked nearby.

Doctors on board performed surgery on the little lad, so he could grow up running, walking, and playing football just like his friends.

This year, Africa Mercy returned to Madagascar—and Romino stepped aboard again, in an emotional return.

He told the staff that he wants to become a doctor himself, inspired by the Mercy Ships surgeons that saved his legs nine years ago.

“I remember when Mercy Ships taught me how to walk again and when they picked us up at our house,” said the 12-year-old. “Now I want to give people the same healing that I received.”

Claudia started to notice her son’s bowed legs developing when he was two-and-a-half years old—and it became more and more clear as he began to walk.

She couldn’t believe her luck when she learned Mercy Ships was coming to her country to provide free surgical care for children.

After the toddler’s surgery, he recovered well and grew up with healthy straight legs. In fact, Romino, who is nicknamed Tilos, says he wins most races he runs against his friends today.

“People are surprised when they see him, because no one believed that he would look like this,” said Claudia.

“However, he’s like this now, and they always ask ‘Is it you? Is this Tilos?’”

Romino had faint memories of the giant hospital ship, the Africa Mercy, and the people who helped him, but his experiences inspired him to want to help others.

But he never imagined he would step back aboard the vessel of compassion.

This marks Mercy Ships’ fourth field service in Madagascar, following previous visits in 1996, 2015 and 2016.

“I’m so happy,” said Romino. “I’m happy because I never thought I was coming back here to see the ship again.”

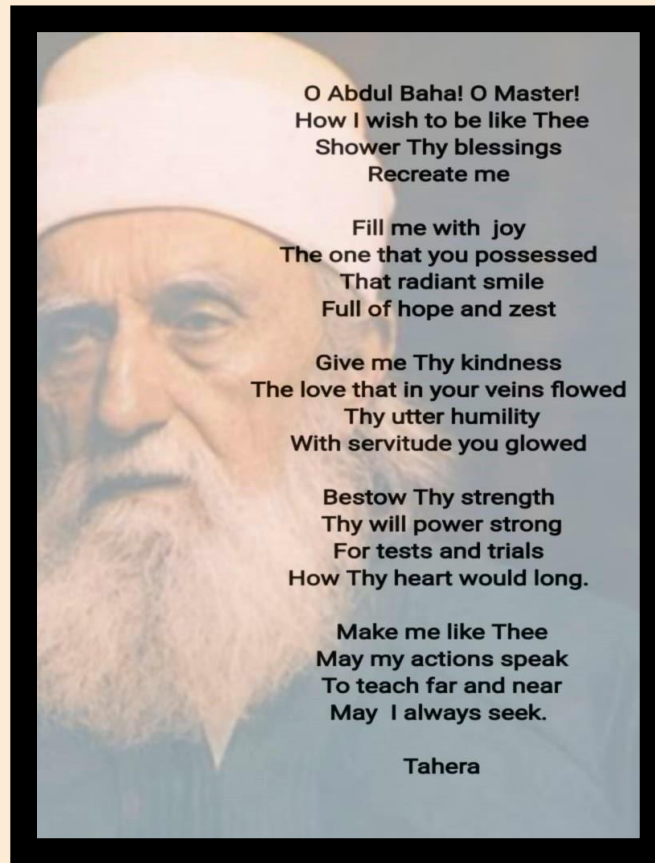
Over the course of previous visits to the island nation of Madagascar, [Mercy Ships](#) collaborated with the government Ministry of Health to provide more than 6,425 life-changing surgical procedures and over 52,395 dental procedures, while also training local health care providers in new techniques.

Don and Deyon Stephens founded the interdenominational Christian organization in Switzerland in 1978 with the purchase of their first ship. Since then, various Mercy Ships have visited more than 55 developing nations—and 18 developed nations around the world—with a focus on Africa. They currently operate a two-ship fleet consisting of the Global Mercy and the Africa Mercy.

They describe their mission as “bringing hope and healing to the forgotten poor, following the 2,000-year-old model of Jesus”. So far, they’ve treated 2.87 million patients free of charge—including more than 117,000 surgeries and a half million dental procedures—without regard to religion, race, age, or gender.

And they inspire little boys to become doctors.

By Tahera:



Social Action

Making a difference in the lives of others



Darley Polony sits in her office splashed with posters, photos, and artwork that tell stories of her work with, and passion for youth. She radiates enthusiasm for life and change. The daughter of Haitian immigrants, Darley is thankful that her parents chose to raise their family in Canada and in Montreal in particular. She loves the city's diversity and opportunities.

Darley matured at a young age when she lost both parents and subsequently became her siblings' legal guardian. In late adolescence, while tutoring youth at BGC Dawson, her mentor/supervisor took a chance on her and recommended Darley become involved in the teen program.

At that time, she worked with youth in an impoverished, mostly English-speaking, straight, white neighborhood. She accepted the challenge of bringing a new perspective by proving she was there for these kids – despite cultural differences and her Francophone accent. It wasn't always easy. "When I started working here... there were not that many people who looked like me." She admits to initially being the recipient of verbal abuse, but over time the youth responded to her. She gives an example of how things changed over the years.

"I had a youth who apologized to me about one year ago. I'd known him since he was 11. When he was 22- or 23-years-old he said to me, "I apologize." He said, "Darley, let me just say, all ignorance – it's gone – sincerely, I apologize, from the bottom of my heart, I apologize. If it wasn't for Dawson, if it wasn't for you, if it wasn't for the teen program, for the teen staff, I don't know where I would be... I know I gave you a hard time." I was like, 'thank you; but you were forgiven way before now.'"

Darley became involved with Equitas in 2009, and this changed how she perceived herself in the world.

"When you're dealing with Equitas, it brings it out of you that it's okay to say... yes, I'm not from here; this [Canada] is my adopted country, and I am a proud immigrant. Being different is just a beautiful thing."

Credited with the inauguration of the Dawson Girls Group, she recognized the need to do more; Equitas' Young Women, Young Leaders (YWYL) program was the perfect next step. Their goal, to effect change within Dawson and throughout the neighborhood, led Darley on a journey of empowerment. She brought her message to Montreal's Sud-Ouest communities, encouraged participation in Dawson programs, and gave young women the opportunities and role modelling required to gain confidence and leadership skills. The program was life-changing for her and the young women involved! Darley tells a success story of one girl, ordinarily very shy and nervous about public speaking, who stepped up and attended an Equitas meeting on Darley's behalf. She returned from the workshop and said,

"Darley, you changed my life," and I said, "no I didn't change your life, you changed your life; I just gave you an opportunity through Equitas to step outside of your comfort zone."

Now, as Dawson's Education Program Manager, every program Darley touches has a human rights component. Darley oversees the Raising the Grade program, which provides academic support while attempting to bridge home and school life. Many youths at the centre know first-hand the challenges of addiction, physical, mental and emotional violence, as well as poverty. Darley's involvement with youth and their families give them the security of knowing there's always someone there for them.

Seeing herself as a "citizen of the world", Darley believes human rights education is vitally important. She encourages youth to celebrate their differences: backgrounds, nationalities, religions, belief

systems, and to accept others. Darley's involvement with Equitas' Speaking Rights program produced youth ambassadors who advocate against discrimination and encourage respect for diversity.

“The ripple effect in the community is what life is all about,” says Darley. She now understands what her mother meant when she said, “if you are not of service, then you are not fulfilling your role as a human being.”

From the Pages of History

Visits of Quddus to Kirman, Tihran, and Mazindaran

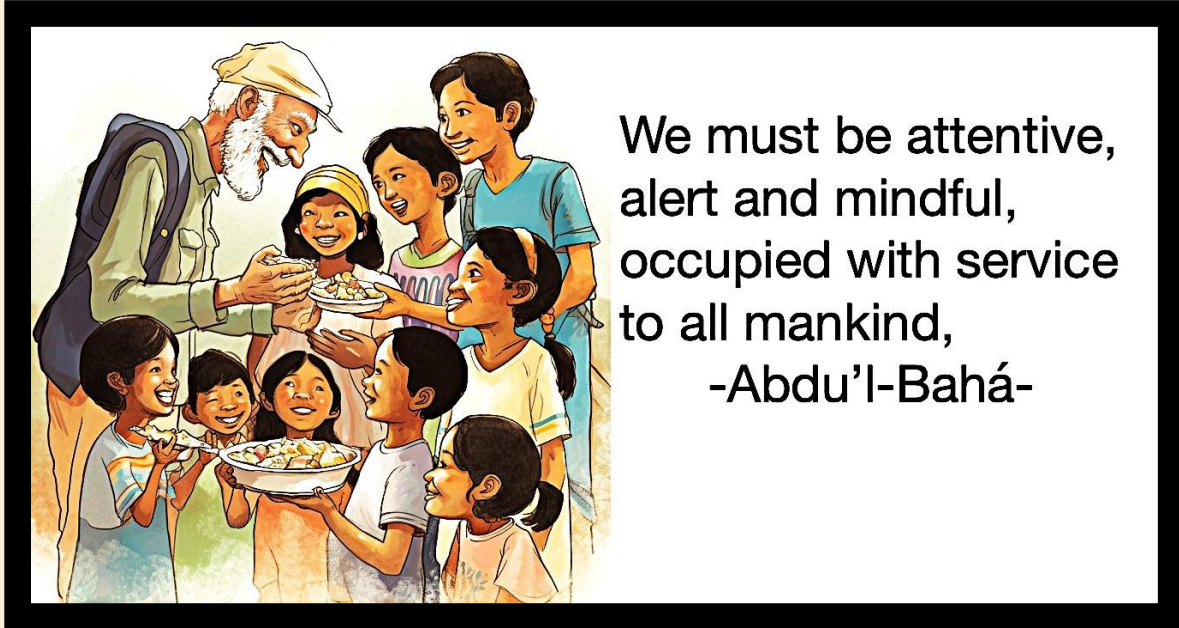
A word should now be said regarding the nature of their activities after their expulsion from that city. For a few days they continued to journey together, after which they separated, Quddus departing for Kirman in order to interview Haji Mirza Karim Khan, and Mulla Sadiq directing his steps towards Yazd with the intention of pursuing among the ulamas of that province the work which he had been so cruelly forced to abandon in Fars. Quddus was received, upon his arrival, at the home of Haji Siyyid Javad-i-Kirmani, whom he had known in Karbila and whose scholarship, skill, and competence were universally recognised by the people of Kirman.

At all the gatherings held in his home, he invariably assigned to his youthful guest the seat of honour and treated him with extreme deference and courtesy. So marked a preference for so young and seemingly mediocre a person kindled the envy of the disciples of Haji Mirza Karim Khan, who, describing in vivid and exaggerated language the honours which were being lavished upon Quddus, sought to excite the dormant hostility of their chief. “Behold,” they whispered in his ears, “he who is the best beloved, the trusted and most intimate companion of the Siyyid-i-Bab, is now the honoured guest of one who is admittedly the most powerful inhabitant of Kirman. If he be allowed to live in close companionship with Haji Siyyid Javad, he will no doubt instil his poison into his soul, and will fashion him as the instrument whereby he will succeed in disrupting your authority and in extinguishing your fame.” Alarmed by these evil whisperings, the cowardly Haji Mirza Karim Khan appealed to the governor and induced him to call in person upon Haji Siyyid Javad and demand that he terminate that dangerous association.

The representations of the governor inflamed the wrath of the intemperate Haji Siyyid Javad. “How often,” he violently protested, “have I advised you to ignore the whisperings of this evil plotter! My forbearance has emboldened him. Let him beware lest he overstep his bounds. Does he desire to usurp my position? Is he not the man who receives into his home thousands of abject and ignoble people and overwhelms them with servile flattery? Has he not, again and again, striven to exalt the ungodly and to silence the innocent? Has he not, year after year, by reinforcing the hand of the evil-doer, sought to ally himself with him and gratify his carnal desires? Does he not until this day persist in uttering his blasphemies against all that is pure and holy in Islam? My silence seems to have added to his temerity and insolence. He gives himself the liberty of committing the foulest deeds, and refuses to allow me to receive and honour in my own home a man of such integrity, such learning and nobleness. Should he refuse to desist from his practice, let him be warned that the worst elements of the city will, at my instigation, expel him from Kirman.” Disconcerted by such vehement denunciations, the governor apologised for his action. Ere he retired, he assured Haji Siyyid Javad that he need entertain no fear, that he himself would endeavour to awaken Haji Mirza Karim Khan to the folly of his behaviour, and would induce him to repent. ~ **The Dawn Breakers & Nabil's Narrative**

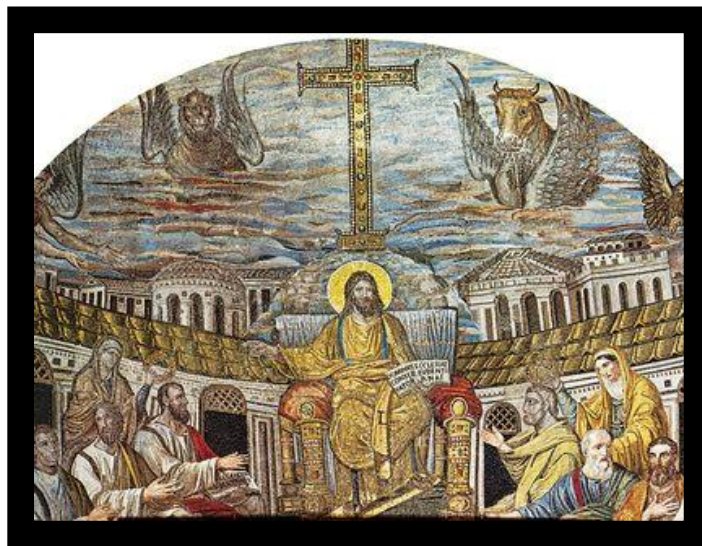
Sharing

Douglas Wilson's sharing:



History, News and Nuggets from Other Religions and Communities

Christianity



Christianity, major religion stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ, or the Anointed One of God) in the 1st century CE. It has become the largest of the world's

religions and, geographically, the most widely diffused of all faiths. It has a constituency of more than two billion believers. Its largest groups are the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and the Protestant churches. The Oriental Orthodox churches constitute one of the oldest branches of the tradition but had been out of contact with Western Christianity and Eastern Orthodoxy from the middle of the 5th century until the late 20th century because of a dispute over Christology (the doctrine of Jesus Christ's nature and significance). Significant movements within the broader Christian world and sometimes transcending denominational boundaries are Pentecostalism, Charismatic Christianity, Evangelicalism, and fundamentalism. In addition, there are numerous independent churches throughout the world.

This article first considers the nature and development of the Christian religion, its ideas, and its institutions. This is followed by an examination of several intellectual manifestations of Christianity. Finally, the position of Christianity in the world, the relations among its divisions and denominations, its missionary outreach to other peoples, and its relations with other world religions are discussed.

The essence and identity of Christianity

At its most basic, Christianity is the faith tradition that focuses on the figure of Jesus Christ. In this context, faith refers both to the believers' act of trust and to the content of their faith. As a tradition, Christianity is more than a system of religious belief. It also has generated a culture, a set of ideas and ways of life, practices, and artifacts that have been handed down from generation to generation since Jesus first became the object of faith. Christianity is thus both a living tradition of faith and the culture that the faith leaves behind. The agent of Christianity is the church, the community of people who make up the body of believers.

To say that Christianity "focuses" on Jesus Christ is to say that somehow it brings together its beliefs and practices and other traditions in reference to a historical figure. Few Christians, however, would be content to keep this reference merely historical. Although their faith tradition is historical—i.e., they believe that transactions with the divine do not occur in the realm of timeless ideas but among ordinary humans through the ages—the vast majority of Christians focus their faith in Jesus Christ as someone who is also a present reality. They may include many other references in their tradition and thus may speak of "God" and "human nature" or of the "church" and the "world," but they would not be called Christian if they did not bring their attentions first and last to Jesus Christ.

While there is something simple about this focus on Jesus as the central figure, there is also something very complicated. That complexity is revealed by the thousands of separate churches, sects, and denominations that make up the modern Christian tradition. To project these separate bodies against the background of their development in the nations of the world is to suggest the bewildering variety. To picture people expressing their adherence to that tradition in their prayer life and church-building, in their quiet worship or their strenuous efforts to change the world, is to suggest even more of the variety.

Given such complexity, it is natural that throughout Christian history both those in the tradition and those surrounding it have made attempts at simplification. Two ways to do this have been to concentrate on the "essence" of the faith, and thus on the ideas that are integral to it, or to be concerned with the "identity" of the tradition, and thus on the boundaries of its historical experience.

Modern scholars have located the focus of this faith tradition in the context of monotheistic religions. Christianity addresses the historical figure of Jesus Christ against the background of, and while seeking to remain faithful to, the experience of one God. It has consistently rejected polytheism and atheism.

A second element of the faith tradition of Christianity, with rare exceptions, is a plan of salvation or redemption. That is to say, the believers in the church picture themselves as in a plight from which they need rescue. For whatever reason, they have been distanced from God and need to be saved. Christianity is based on a particular experience or scheme directed to the act of saving—that is, of bringing or “buying back,” which is part of what redemption means, these creatures of God to their source in God. The agent of that redemption is Jesus Christ.

It is possible that through the centuries the vast majority of believers have not used the term essence to describe the central focus of their faith. The term is itself of Greek origin and thus represents only one part of the tradition, one element in the terms that have gone into making up Christianity. Essence refers to those qualities that give something its identity and are at the centre of what makes that thing different from everything else. To Greek philosophers it meant something intrinsic to and inherent in a thing or category of things, which gave it its character and thus separated it from everything of different character. Thus, Jesus Christ belongs to the essential character of Christianity and gives it a unique identity.

If most people are not concerned with defining the essence of Christianity, in practice they must come to terms with what the word essence implies. Whether they are engaged in being saved or redeemed on the one hand, or thinking and speaking about that redemption, its agent, and its meaning on the other, they are concentrating on the essence of their experience. Those who have concentrated from within the faith tradition have also helped to give it its identity. It is not possible to speak of the essence of a historical tradition without referring to how its ideal qualities have been discussed through the ages. Yet one can take up the separate subjects of essence and identity in sequence, being always aware of how they interrelate.

From the Editor's Desk

Alleviating Poverty Through Virtues

For many years, I've tried to emphasize the need for humanity and morality in our economic systems — because I believe that lack of morality is the root cause of misery in the lives of billions of people.

Those people struggle daily to survive in the face of immoral economic injustice.

So in this brief essay, I will try to define economics as it is now practiced in most places, point out its problems, and suggest a remedy.

The complex subject of economics is hard to define, so here's an easy way to understand it by going to the original root of the term: economics is derived from the Greek word “Oikonomia,” which refers to managing a household or family. This means, obviously, that an economic system is supposed to help us manage our households — not only in the individual sense but in the collective one, as well.

Every economic system, then, should exist to help sustain the welfare of all the human family members so at a minimum, they can live comfortable lives and share their resources and earnings. That way, no family member lives in poverty or privation, and humanity as a whole can live a stable and productive existence. Historically, when great disparities in wealth exist, it destabilizes entire societies, provoking war and revolution – so a good economic system doesn't only ensure prosperity, it also keeps the peace.

Sadly, as most of us know, this lack of reciprocal kindness means our current economic systems do not work well – in the human family, one in ten people lives on less than \$2 a day. Globally, one-third of urban dwellers live in slums. What is the problem? Where did the system go wrong?

Perhaps the problem was exacerbated when Adam Smith, who observed economic activities in the marketplace as they relate to people's behavior, made some assumptions and came up with a system. He assumed that everyone wants to maximize their satisfaction or profits, with self-interest as the major motivation. He also said the market could correct itself, so no governmental intervention is necessary.

This made sense to many, but Mr. Smith's system left little room for morality or human virtues.

In today's economic reality, money has become like a religion; therefore, we follow the practice of everyone in it for themselves, making as much money as they want by any means. Nobody asks if someone is a good person or evinces praiseworthy actions. Many consider someone who is poor a failure because they believe we have been created to make money and get rich.

It is easy to criticize the system itself, but that does not solve the problem.

Instead, we can all have a hand in reforming the system when we start injecting virtues gradually and slowly into it so that it revives itself to become a system that is sensitive to the needs of humanity, sensitive to the poor people of the world, and responsive to the spiritual aspiration of human beings.

Every day we can practice virtues like truthfulness, kindness, generosity, and honesty in our economic activities. These spiritual virtues, common in all religions, create an environment of generosity, caring, and cooperation – all necessary for the poor to prosper. We can do the same by injecting human values into the political, educational, and other systems because all systems suffer from the same afflictions.

We must take action – because our inaction is partly responsible for the suffering of the poor. If we don't change the system, millions of people will continue to live in misery every day, deprived of God's purpose for them because they are too busy finding a few dollars to survive.

We need "Humanomics" – economics with human elements – because we are humans, and we all aspire to have those qualities and values. You may ask: how can we do this? What is my role? It is impossible to change a system, so why should I even try? All systems are subject to change, so, in countless small ways and some large ones, too, we all can make a difference.

We can create a yardstick that measures our material and spiritual achievements. A yardstick, which considers spirituality as well as material things, changes our perspective. At present, sadly, our measurements are incredibly lopsided.

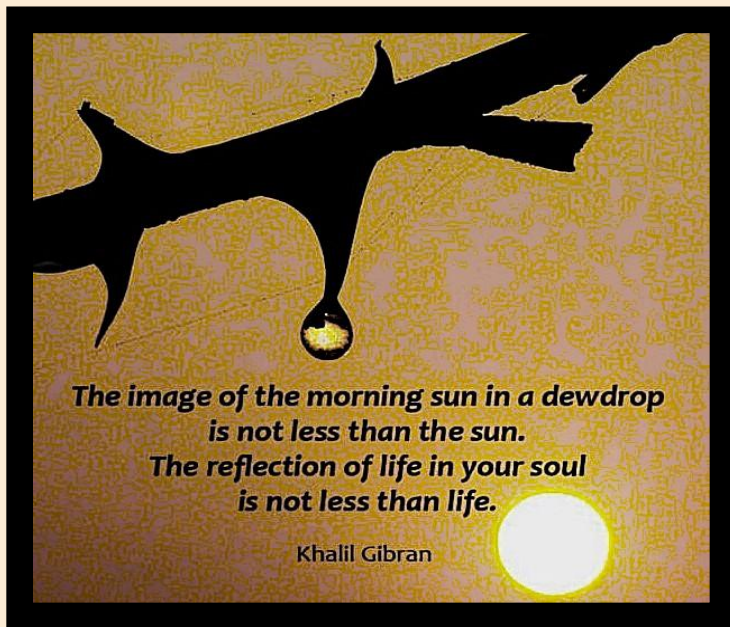
That personalized economic yardstick involves an important measurement: simple living. Throughout history, a great many people were symbols of simplicity and lived a simple life, avoided materialism,

and shared whatever they had with others. Simplicity also makes financial sense, which can relieve us of so many headaches.

The pandemic highlighted the poor's plight, widening the gap even more between the rich and the poor, and now the war in Europe has dragged millions more into poverty and starvation. The need for action is dire and urgent. The Baha'i teachings urge every human being not to close their eyes to the sufferings of members of our human family:

“Fear the sighs of the poor and of the upright in heart who, at every break of day, bewail their plight ... They, verily, are thy treasures on earth. It behoveth thee, therefore, to safeguard thy treasures from the assaults of them who wish to rob thee. Inquire into their affairs, and ascertain, every year, nay every month, their condition, and be not of them that are careless of their duty.” - Baha'u'llah

By introducing spiritual virtues into our economic life, we begin to revolutionize the economic system from within and change it to a humane system that meets the material needs and spiritual aspirations that God meant for everybody.



Writings to Ponder and Practice

“Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs. Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another's projects and plans. Grieve over one another ... “ -Abdu'l-Baha

For sharing materials and questions, write to bshams@telus.net