

Spirituality and Scholarship: The Path to the 21st Century

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The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah is divided into three Ages: the Heroic Age (1844-1921), the Formative Age (1921-), and the Golden Age. We are currently in the 5th Epoch of the Formative Age. The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith explained that the Baha'i World would go through seven stages during the process of its development: (1) obscurity, (2) oppression, (3) emancipation, (4) independent status, (5) the emergence of the Baha'i Faith as a state religion, (6) the emergence of a Baha'i state, (7) the emergence of a Baha'i world commonwealth. During the 21st century, the process of destruction of the old order and the construction of the new order will continue. In this time of transition, Baha'i scholarship should be carried forward with the following points in mind: (1) The Creative Word of God must be the central focus of the acquisition of knowledge; (2) Spirituality and materiality do not conflict with each other; therefore, the Baha'i teachings must be fully utilized in contributing to solving contemporary social issues; (3) The Baha'i law is organic and progressively applied and matters which are not revealed in the Kitab-i-Aqdas are to be legislated by the Universal House of Justice; (4) There is no ecclesiastical order in the Baha'i Faith; all must seek truth for themselves. However, the authority to interpret the Holy Writings is limited to the Center of the Covenant and the Guardian. We must therefore be obedient to the Covenant. Baha'i scholarly activities may be categorized into 5 types: (1) historical study of the Baha'i Faith; (2) analysis of the Holy Writings; (3) research of religious concepts; (4) application of the Baha'i teachings to contemporary social issues; (5) relating the Baha'i teachings to social and historical phenomena. The attitudes desired for Baha'i scholars are to be humble regarding one's achievements, to be non-exclusive, and to be non-adversarial towards other scholars¹.

¹ The latter part of this presentation is based on the Statement prepared by the International Teaching Centre, titled "A Statement on the Encouragement of Baha'i Scholarship" dated August 9, 1984. The English statement and its Japanese translation are included in the present Proceedings.