

Combatting Climate Change with Science and Religion

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Baha'is trust science. Religion without science, the Baha'i teachings say, is nothing more than superstition:

If religion does not agree with science, it is superstition and ignorance; for God has endowed man with reason in order that he may perceive reality. The foundations of religion are reasonable. God has created us with intelligence to perceive them. If they are opposed to science and reason, how could they be believed and followed? – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 128.

This adherence to the basic Baha'i principle of the agreement of science and religion means that Baha'is must reconcile the spiritual teachings of their Faith with scientific realities like climate change.

We know that the Earth's atmosphere and its oceans are warming, and the vast majority of scientists agree that warming is caused by human activity. In order to protect the Earth—and humanity—from the consequences, we have to come to a point where the spiritual and the scientific collide and ultimately cohere. This, as any student of history knows, is not always easy. In its letter concerning climate change to a group of Baha'is in November of 2017, the democratically-elected global administrative body of the Baha'i Faith, the Universal House of Justice, addressed through its Secretariat the overwhelming importance of science to every Baha'i and every human being:

Among the Baha'i teachings are those concerning the importance of science. "Great indeed is the claim of scientists ... on the peoples of the world," Baha'u'llah observed. Abdu'l-Baha wrote that the "sciences of today are bridges to reality" and repeatedly emphasized that "religion must be in conformity with science and reason." Significantly, on an occasion when a scientific question was asked of Shoghi Effendi, he responded in a letter written on his behalf that "we are

a religion and not qualified to pass on scientific matters.” And in reply to scientific issues raised on a number of occasions, he consistently advised Baha’is that such matters would need to be investigated by scientists.

Scientific inquiry into the question of human contributions to global warming has gradually unfolded over a century of investigation and, more recently, with intense scrutiny. While there will naturally be differences of view among individual scientists, there does exist at present a striking degree of agreement among experts in relevant fields about the cause and impact of climate change. Sound scientific results, obtained through the employment of sound scientific methods, produce knowledge that can be acted upon; ultimately, the outcomes of action must stand the test of further scientific inquiry and the objective facts of the physical world. In the spectrum of issues under discussion—which includes the extent of human contribution, projections of the possible future consequences, and alternatives for response—some aspects are, of course, less supported than others by scientific findings and hence subject to additional critical analysis. – The Universal House of Justice, 29 November 2017, to a group of individual Baha’is. **“... there does exist at present a striking degree of agreement among experts in relevant fields about the cause and impact of climate change,”** the Universal House of Justice wrote. Their letter goes on to say, “Sound scientific results, obtained through the employment of sound scientific methods, produce knowledge that can be acted upon ...”

We now know, then, that science and the human spirit can and should work together to avert and prevent the worst possible outcomes of our environmental problems. How can that happen? The Baha’i teachings recommend a coordinated, scientifically based and eminently reasonable approach to those problems. Most importantly, Baha’is believe, we must develop a widespread human consciousness of world citizenship:

O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth! Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you. Then will the effulgence of the world’s great Luminary envelop the whole earth, and its inhabitants become the citizens of one city, and the occupants of one and the same throne. – Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, p. 217.

No matter how stringent their environmental policies and laws, individual nations cannot solve a worldwide problem. By definition, universal issues require universal solutions. We are now faced—all of us, as world citizens—with a global environmental crisis. Climate change transcends national borders. No matter where heat-trapping gases originate, we all share the same atmosphere. That atmosphere is heating up at unsustainable levels, science tells us—so what can we do?

The Baha’i teachings say that our best course of action involves unity—we need a concerted, universal, global strategy that will sustain the human population, regulate the extraction and use of the planet’s resources, and unite the Earth in one commonwealth. Without that animating principle of world unity, we won’t have the tools necessary to save our planet:

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Baha'u'llah, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. ... In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will cooperate, and will harmoniously develop. – Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 203-204.