

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Religion in an ever-advancing civilization

Michael R. Hampton

A BAHAI PERSPECTIVE

As members of the Baha'i faith, we have been welcomed by people of all faiths and the secular community in our work through the Kaufman Interfaith Institute in contributing to building a more unified West Michigan community. This, in turn, contributes to the building of an emerging global civilization, which may seem counter to the noise of disunity so often expressed in the media.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i faith. Throughout the world, in virtually every country, celebrations of his birth are occurring — including here in West Michigan. There will be celebrations of this anniversary throughout the region, including events in Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Holland and Kalamazoo. For details, contact interfaith@gvsu.edu.

The Baha'i community in Grand Rapids invites the community to a celebration at 2 p.m. Oct. 22 at East Grand Rapids High School Performing Arts Center. This will be a celebration of the unity, diversity, capacity and dignity of the human race through music and the arts.

The excitement of this occasion has caused me to reflect on the growth of our interfaith community here. In West Michigan, the Baha'is participate in community building through many interfaith activities and service projects. The "Camelot Proj-

ect" serves a neighborhood of immigrants and refugees where children and youth are empowered through interfaith classes, service projects and multi-faith awareness visits to mosques, temples, and churches. Using the Camelot model, other neighborhood programs for children and youth have developed classes and service projects in other areas of Grand Rapids, as well as in Muskegon, Plainfield Township and Rockford.

The Baha'i community throughout West Michigan has ongoing interfaith devotionals, worship services called Nineteen Day Feasts, educational courses on developing community life, adult and youth workshops and participation in many interfaith activities sponsored by the Kaufman Institute.

This is true all over the world, as the Baha'i community joins the world's great faiths in affirming the existence of an all-loving God and who seek understanding in the spiritual dimension of life.

ADVANCING CIVILIZATION

As stated in a recent publication of the Baha'i International Community:

"Over the thousands of years of humanity's collective infancy and adolescence, the systems of shared belief brought by the world's great religions have enabled people to unite and create bonds of trust and cooperation at ever-higher levels of social organization — from the family, to the tribe, to the city-state and nation. As the human race moves toward a global civilization, this power of religion to promote cooperation

and propel cultural evolution can perhaps be better understood today than ever before. It is an insight that is increasingly being recognized and is affirmed in the work of evolutionary psychologists and cultural anthropologists.

"The teachings of the founders of the world's religions have inspired breathtaking achievements in literature, architecture, art, and music. They have fostered the promotion of reason, sciences, and education. Their moral principles have been translated into universal codes of law, regulating and elevating human relationships. These uniquely endowed individuals are referred to as 'Manifestations of God' in the Baha'i writings, and include (among others) Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, the Bab, and Baha'u'llah. History provides countless examples of how these figures have awakened in whole populations the capacities to love, to forgive, to create, to dare greatly, to overcome prejudices, to sacrifice for the common good, and to discipline the impulses of humanity's baser instincts. These achievements can be recognized as the common spiritual heritage of the human race.

"Today, humanity faces the limits of a social order inadequate to meet the compelling challenges of a world that has virtually shrunk to a neighborhood. On this small planet, sovereign nations find themselves caught between cooperation and competition. The well-being of humanity and of the environment are too often compromised for

national self-interest. Propelled by competing ideologies, divided by various constructs of 'us' versus 'them,' the people of the world are plunged into one crisis after another -- brought on by war, terrorism, prejudice, oppression, economic disparity and environmental upheaval, among others."

As our community celebrates the 200th anniversary of the birth of our founder, Baha'u'llah, we recognize his vision of the "oneness of humanity, a moral framework, and teachings that, founded on the harmony of science and religion, directly address today's problems. ... He offers to the peoples of the world a unifying story consistent with our scientific understanding of reality. He calls on us to recognize our common humanity, to ourselves as member of one family, to end estrangement and prejudice, and to come together."

Join us as we seek these goals for all mankind and celebrate together.

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Baha'i celebration

Celebrate unity, diversity, and dignity of the human race through music, dance and the arts.

When: Oct. 22 at 2 p.m.

Where: East Grand Rapids High School Performing Arts Center, 2211 Lake Drive SE, East Grand Rapids