



Inside:



4

A "Peace Chariot," pulled by oxen, opens new horizons to India's villages with a unique mix of high and low technologies.



6

The Sacred Literature Trust will bring together the world's scriptures in an ambitious new interfaith publishing venture.



12

A global perspective on drug and alcohol abuse: an interview with Dr. A. M. Ghadirian, psychiatrist and author.



16

The threat of modernism: a review of Ervin Laszlo's new book, *The Inner Limits of Mankind*.



This thatched roof waiting room was erected by an indigenous health worker in a village near Sarh, Chad. Although simple, it reflects a significant advance for the village, which would otherwise be without on-site medical assistance entirely, and represents the kind of initiative seen when villagers are themselves trained to provide primary health care.

Simple methods, simple training are keys to primary health care in villages

Building networks of indigenous workers in remote areas can have a powerful impact

SARH, Chad — Left unattended, common diarrhea can kill a malnourished infant in less than eight hours.

The treatment itself is simple: administer a mixture of sugar, salt and water — along with basic instructions about infant care and hygiene.

But delivering such simple forms of first aid to resource-poor villagers — like those who inhabit this remote part of southern Chad — remains a difficult challenge around the world, even for sophisticated international aid agencies. The roads that weave from village to village here are little more than beaten dirt tracks, and during the rainy season even those trails become all but impassable. Nor can the economic base support doctors or nurses.

According to health and development specialists, one means of answering basic health needs in remote and underdeveloped areas is the training and support of indigenous primary health care workers. Although armed with the simplest of techniques and often semi-literate, such workers, because they serve their own villages, can have a powerful impact.

(Continued on page 8)

ONE COUNTRY

is published quarterly by the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community. The Bahá'í International Community is an international non-governmental organization which encompasses and represents the worldwide membership of the Bahá'í Faith.

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International Community

A Global Framework for the Environment

After years of slumber, the world seems at last awakening to the magnitude of the problems facing the global environment. The seriousness of interest is welcome.

In the general discussion about how to solve this crisis, however, the crucial element often remains missing. That element is the global framework necessary to protect the environment.

The most pressing environmental problems are international in nature. Whether the issue is ocean pollution, the over-production of "greenhouse" gases, the extinction of species, or deforestation, the problem pays no respect to national boundaries. Of necessity, any real solution must involve transnational cooperation.

Yet, environmentalists and policy-makers are wary of addressing the larger issue of world order and global unity. Although there is talk of "coordinated" efforts, or of taking a "global view," few proposals for preserving the environment consider the necessity of seriously revising the world's political charter.

Careful reflection on the scope and nature of the threats to the planet's environment, however, make clear that global action of just such magnitude is required.

What is more, the causes of the various environmental threats are complex, with aspects that are social, technological, political, cultural and even spiritual. Consider two examples:

Rainforests supply much of the world's oxygen and contain a storehouse of plant and animal species. They are being rapidly destroyed, however, by agents ranging from acid rain to impoverished families seeking open farm land.

Any attempt to preserve the rainforests, then, must address issues ranging from industrial policy to the disparities between the rich and the poor. Ultimately, efforts to achieve universal literacy will be as important as creating conservation districts.

Likewise, limiting the use of fossil fuels will require campaigns of consumer education. The implementation of new tech-

nologies must be done on a global scale. New outlooks and lifestyles are essential.

The current focus on the environment has aroused a flood of idealism and commitment in many countries. This body of opinion can only grow larger and more urgent, as the magnitude of the dangers threatening our children's future become daily clearer. If provided with a vision and direction, it represents an unprecedented resource for significant social change. This is the real challenge to the environmental movement.

More than 100 years ago, Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, called for the establishment of a new world order. Built around the idea of a commonwealth of nations, with an international parliament and executive to carry out its will, this new political order would serve to embrace and unite all humanity and to promote the flowering of an "ever-advancing civilization."

"... that environmental degradation could prove as devastating as world war should cause enlightened men and women everywhere to enlarge the concept of collective security to encompass the environmental crisis."

Such a new order must of necessity be based on principles of economic justice, racial equality, equal rights for men and women, and universal education.

"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established," Bahá'u'lláh wrote. "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

More than any trend in recent times, the growing environmental crisis has pointed to the truth and depth of these words.

Although the idea of a commonwealth of nations has been widely discussed in this century as a means to world peace, the growing recognition that environmental degradation could prove as devastating as world war should cause enlightened men and women everywhere to enlarge the concept of collective security to encompass the environmental crisis. ☉



Photo © Paul Slaughter

Since 1984, Bahá'ís have initiated conservation projects in more than 20 countries. They range from tree planting, like this effort near Panchgani, Maharashtra, India, pictured above, to the manufacture of fuel-efficient stoves, from environmental education classes to international collaboration with organizations like the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature).

New Conservation Initiative Planned

NEW YORK — The Bahá'í International Community will launch a major new environmental initiative this fall, aimed at furthering the Bahá'í world's commitment to "the preservation of the ecological balance of the world."

Full details on the initiative, including its name, will be released in October at a luncheon in London commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of the late Richard St. Barbe Baker, a Bahá'í who was internationally known for his far-seeing work in reforestation and conservation.

The director for the project, Lawrence Arturo, a 31-year-old development communications specialist from Australia, will coordinate the initiative from the Bahá'í International Community's New York Office.

Mr. Arturo said the initial focus of the project will be on tree planting. Already, he said, Bahá'í communities are engaged in tree planting projects in more than 20 countries. The new initiative will build on that work and encourage wider collaboration with other non-governmental organizations interested in environmental conservation.

"The project promises to be one of the

largest environmental campaigns ever undertaken by a religious community," Mr. Arturo said. "We hope to stimulate locally based conservation activities not only in many of the 125,000 local Bahá'í communities in the world, but in other communities as well, through collaboration with other agencies and organizations."

Mr. Arturo said that the New York office will help coordinate international activities, and act as a catalyst in stimulating conservation activities at the local level. Such work will include the dissemination of technical and project information and the development of a database of case studies and field examples.

"It is not intended to direct projects or to become a kind of top-down development agency," Mr. Arturo said. "We expect the local projects to take many different forms, from shelter-belt tree plantings by youth, to educational fairs, agro-forestry projects, urban greening projects, the inclusion of conservation education modules in certain Bahá'í schools, and the broadcast of programs with conservation content on Bahá'í radio stations." ☉

“Peace Chariot,” pulled by bullocks, opens new horizons to India’s Villages

Mobile video unit uses high and low technologies to spread development message

“...the emphasis is on educational tapes that promote literacy, personal hygiene, and simple health measures.”

UTTAR PRADESH, India — Pulled by two stately bullocks, the contrivance looks from a distance like an old-fashioned ice wagon, or perhaps an imaginative new European camping trailer.

The lettering on the side, in both Hindi and English, proclaims the arrival of something else: the vehicle is a “Shanti Rath” or, in English, “Peace Chariot.”

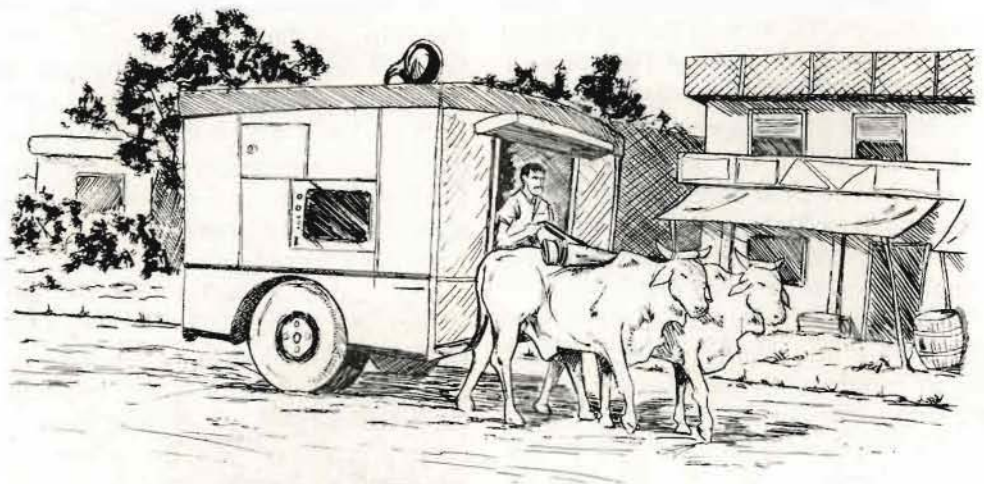
Despite that lofty-sounding name, the wagon has a very down-to-earth purpose. Currently making its way among the villages of this remote state in northern India, the Peace Chariot seeks, through a unique combination of high and low technologies, to bring key messages about literacy, hygiene, reforestation and social organization to a population that is for the most part cut off from modern life.

The cart, with metal walls and rubber tires, contains an assemblage of television sets, a video player and an electrical generator that permits the showing of development-oriented videotapes — regardless of the location or the availability of power.

And despite the apparent mismatch of technologies, the use of oxen as the motive power plays a key role in the vehicle’s mission, according to Stephen Waite, head of the Department of Social and Economic Development and Education for the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of India, the governing council for India’s 1.9 million Bahá’ís, which operates the project.

“Prime time in the village is in the evening, between 7 and 11 p.m.,” Mr. Waite said. “A bullock cart cannot move very fast. This, in turn, ensures that the video programs will be available when the villagers are.”

“Because if we had chosen a motor vehicle,” Mr. Waite added, “the driver who runs it would expect to be back home in his own bed in the evening.”



Other important concessions to the cultural and social life of the people of Uttar Pradesh have been made. The cart, which is set up in the village center for up to a week at a time, has two television screens — one on each side of the vehicle.

"If you had just one screen, women would lose out," Mr. Waite said. "They would be forced to watch from the rooftops or somewhere." In this part of India, he explained,



women and men do not assemble together in groups. "Having two screens allows the men to view the video from one side, while the women are able to view it from the other."

The video program continues to evolve. Currently, the emphasis is on educational tapes that promote literacy, personal hygiene, and simple health care measures.

An eight-hour, government-produced program on literacy, directed primarily toward women and in the Hindi language, has been featured recently on the chariot. A Hindi-language version of the WHO (World Health Organization) film entitled "Health for All by the Year 2000" has also been shown.

"The WHO film focuses on basic health issues that people in the villages need to be aware of," Waite said. Other government- or internationally produced films on various development issues, ranging from reforestation to hygiene, are also being acquired.

The idea is to build a very flexible program. During the day, for example, the bullock cart can be used by the village school to show educational programs to the children. Special groups, such as farmers, might also be invited for an hour-long agricultural

extension program. Then, in the evening, programs of general interest can be shown.

Because many of the people in the area are newly declared Bahá'ís, educational programs on the principles and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith are also shown. A film on the award-winning Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi has been featured recently, for example.

The vehicle is operated under the overall direction of Mr. H.V. Singh, who also designed and had it built. He is well-known in the area, having descended from the local rajahs.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India views the Peace Chariot as a prototype, and hopes to construct more bullock carts for the area. With more than 250,000 Bahá'ís in Uttar Pradesh, mostly in a region encompassing about 900 villages in the districts of Etawah, Kanpur and Furukabad, their need for information cannot be met by itinerant teachers alone.

Mr. Waite said the first Peace Chariot cost about 60,000 rupees — about US\$ 4,000. "We hope to get that cost down to about 45,000 rupees, or about US\$ 3,000," he said. The average audience is several hundred. In some villages, more than 500 have turned out for the evening program.

The program is reported to be a great success. Large numbers of people have been reached with important information at a low cost. For people with little education and limited exposure to television, this project opens limitless new horizons. ☸

The "Peace Chariot," pictured left, uses two bullocks for its motive power, and carries a tape player, two television sets and an electrical generator. Thus equipped, it is used to bring development videotapes to villagers in the Uttar Pradesh region of India, near Kanpur, shown in the map below.



Ambitious New Interfaith Publishing Venture Launched

Sacred Literature Trust will bring together the scriptures of the world's religions.

NEW YORK — When representatives of some of the world's major faiths sat down together three years ago in Assisi, Italy, to discuss how religion relates to environmental conservation, they hit an unforeseen snag: the sacred texts they hoped to discuss were sometimes not available in well-known languages.

While the spirits were willing, it seems, the translations were sometimes weak.

In an effort to remedy this problem, an ambitious and ground-breaking new interfaith venture has been launched: the Sacred Literature Trust (SLT).

Announced by HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, at the United Nations on May 22, the Trust is bringing together, for the first time, scholars and literary figures from the world's major religious communities in an effort to produce new English translations of the world's key sacred texts.

"It is the largest interfaith publishing venture ever undertaken," said Kerry Brown, an executive officer of the Trust, which is based in Manchester, England. "The whole fabric of the spiritual heritage of the world will be made available in English through the series."

So far, the Trust has received commitments of support and involvement from representatives of eight of the world's major religions — Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism, and the Bahá'í Faith. Representatives of regional belief systems and indigenous peoples will also collaborate with the Trust to bring to print heretofore untranslated or unpublished sacred writings and oral traditions.

The effort is further distinguished by its emphasis on having individuals from each

faith community oversee the translation of their own sacred texts — instead of relying on outside scholars for translation.

"There have been multi-faith publishing projects done by one faith or one culture," said Brown, but there has never been a "publishing venture that attempts to work with the scholars from the different faiths themselves."

For its contribution, the Bahá'í International Community is preparing a major new English-language compilation drawn from the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith. The compilation will include some texts translated into English for the first time.

The first volume of this compilation is planned for publication in 1992, to coincide with the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, who wrote in Arabic and Persian.

"The promise of this new publishing initiative goes far beyond simply re-translating and re-printing the world's great religious writings, which is nevertheless a major event in itself," said Douglas Martin, director general of the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community.

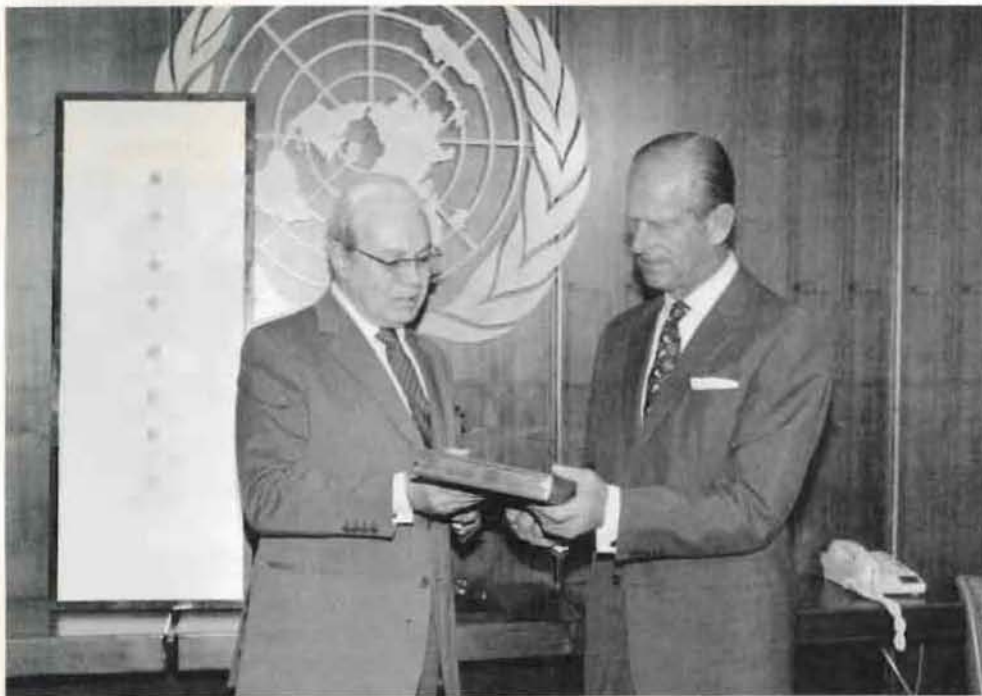
"Owing to the depth and breadth of its involvement with the diversity of the world's faith communities, we believe that the Sacred Literature Trust represents a major step towards religious understanding and tolerance."

Among the projects undertaken by other faiths are an approved English translation of the Qur'an, a first-ever translation of the Greek Orthodox Bible and the translation of rare or largely unknown Jewish texts.

"At the present time, for example, we're working with our Jewish literary editor on a translation of the Sha'are Oah, which means 'The Gates of Illumination,'" Ms. Brown said. "This is a primary source for cabalistic thought. It is unknown in the West and has never before been translated."

Ms. Brown said that the agreements had been reached with publishing giant Harper and Row of San Francisco to publish, market and distribute the books. The first books





United Nations Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, left, meets with H.R.H. The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, before announcing the Sacred Literature Trust at the U.N. on May 22. In the background, left, is a calligraphic scroll commemorating the Trust's formation. The scroll features the symbols of the eight major world religions. Those symbols are shown along the sides of these two pages. The scroll was presented to Mr. de Cuéllar by the Prince. In return, Mr. de Cuéllar presented the Prince with a bound copy of the U.N. Charter.

will be ready in about 1992, she added.

"The goal is to produce books that will be very readable, and that will also be accurate as to the cultural and religious thought of the original — a translation that would be considered true by the followers of that Faith," Ms. Brown said.

The idea for the SLT grew out of the meeting in Assisi, when the Network on Conservation and Religion was founded. That Network, organized by the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), aims to bring forth the ethical and spiritual teachings from the world's faiths as they relate to nature and conservation.

The purpose of the Network is for the faiths to talk to each other, as well as to their own followers, about the sacred teachings as they relate to the environment," Ms. Brown said. Finding that the translations of the sacred texts were often of poor quality or non-existent, the Sacred Literature Trust emerged as a solution in "sort of a chain reaction," she said.

HRH Prince Philip, in his role as President of the WWF, lent his name and reputation to the Trust by agreeing to launch it at the

United Nations — his first press conference there. His remarks indicate the hopes he has for the project.

"I believe that there is a very real possibility that the Sacred Literature Trust will make a significant contribution to inter-faith dialogue and, hopefully, to a better understanding between followers of the different religions and beliefs," Prince Philip said on May 22.

The Prince noted that it was appropriate that the Trust should be announced at the U.N. "This building symbolizes the yearning of all people of goodwill for a more peaceful and cooperative world. This can only be achieved when the great political and religious movements learn to be more tolerant and understanding of each other."

In addition to the Prince, a number of world figures have confirmed their support, including Mr. Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress; British Poet Laureate Ted Hughes; His Excellency Dr. Karan Singh, India's Ambassador to the United States; and Madame Rúhiyyih Rabbání, a leading dignitary of the Bahá'í Faith. ☸

The symbols of the eight major world religions, as used in a calligraphic scroll commemorating the launch of the Sacred Literature Trust, are shown on the sides of these two pages. They are, running top to bottom down page six: Bahá'í, Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism; and top to bottom down this page: Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, and Taoism.



Primary health care in villages

Training networks of indigenous health care workers can have a powerful impact



A community health worker training session, held last December at the Menu Bahá'í Institute in Western Province, Kenya. Dr. Ethel Martens, who conducted the session, is standing, center. The Kenyan program, like most other Bahá'í health care worker training projects, has experienced a relatively low drop-out rate.

(Continued from front page)

Here in southern Chad, and in more than a dozen other sites throughout Africa and Asia, projects to train primary health care workers at the village level are a special focus of Bahá'í communities. And, because of the strong organization inherent in local Bahá'í councils, an emphasis on self-sufficiency, and a heartfelt commitment that drives individuals to make unusual sacrifices, these projects are emerging as models for the kind of sustainable, grassroots health care projects that are increasingly called for by development specialists.

The project in southern Chad was started by Elyce and Naim Nasseri, who moved from the United States in the early 1970s. After the civil war broke out, they volunteered to assist refugee organizations to distribute food and medicine. Because of the relatively large number of indigenous Bahá'ís among the population in surrounding villages, that community emerged as an important link to the grassroots level, which made the Nasseri's work especially effective.

As stability returned to the region, the couple began focusing on primary health care. "We were here and they needed help," said Elyce, who has given birth to and raised two sons here. "And this work was the best thing we thought we could do."

In a collaboration with the Red Crescent Society, which provides training and some materials, the Nasseris and local Bahá'í councils have trained indigenous primary health care workers in more than 60 neighboring villages. Two full-time paramedical supervisors travel from village to village on small motorized bicycles to coordinate and re-supply the local workers.

The effort provides an example of what can be done with limited resources when the workers are motivated and well-organized. In one village, for example, a local health worker had painstakingly erected a waiting room, made of branches and thatch, to shield his patients from the sun. He had also carefully constructed a pit latrine as a

"Bahá'ís really have focused on 'Small is Beautiful' and on getting things done with a minimum of resources."

— Dr. Al Henn, Harvard Institute for International Development

demonstration project for his village.

His entire medical kit comprised a small box, where he kept a register of his patients, a few tools, like a scissors, and basic medications — including the sugar and salt solution.

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tion used to combat infantile diarrhea, and chloroquine for malaria.

He donated his time freely, charging only about 10 cents per visit, to pay for fresh medicines and bandages. On this basis, and with the support of local Bahá'í councils, the project is nearly self-sufficient.

With a broad mandate to oversee the spiritual and material well-being of the local population, local spiritual assemblies function as an important link with the village population at large.

"The Bahá'ís have their finger on the right target," said Dr. Al Henn, health program director of the Harvard Institute for International Development in Massachusetts, USA, referring to the emphasis on sustainability, grassroots support and the empowerment of local people — which he said is a general trend in successful health projects. "Bahá'ís really have focused on 'Small is Beautiful' and on getting things done with a minimum of resources," he added.

Worldwide, Bahá'ís currently operate more than 70 locally based health care projects. More than a dozen of these focus on the training of village health care workers like the Sarh Primary Health Care Project. Such efforts are ongoing in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

"The training of community health workers is a key element of primary health care in general," said Dr. Ethel Martens of Canada, a health consultant to the Bahá'í International Community who has conducted numerous classes to train health workers in Africa and Asia and who holds advanced degrees in social preventive medicine and public health.

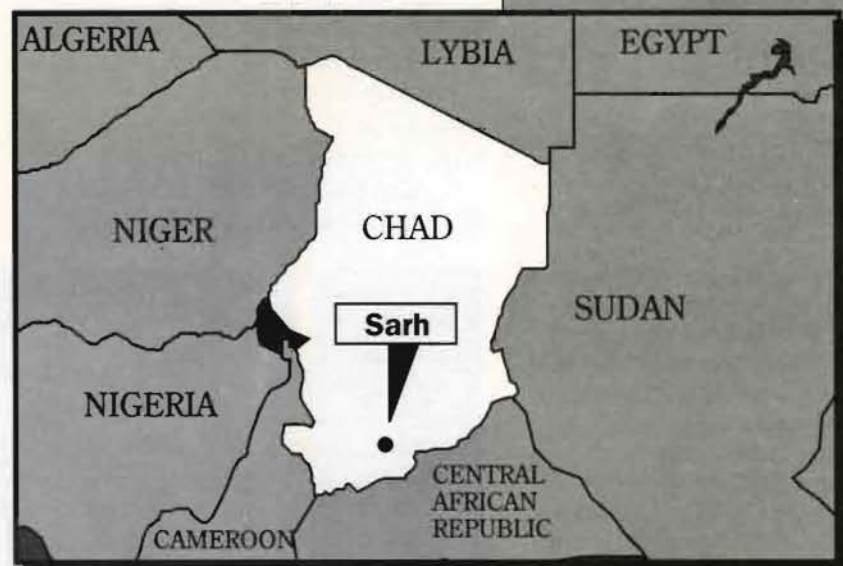
Bahá'í-run programs, Dr. Martens added, have been especially successful at retaining workers. "In some African countries, the drop-out rate in government-run programs is anywhere from 40 to 70 percent," said Dr. Martens. "In Bahá'í projects, the comparable rate over two years has been from two

to five percent. In one project in Kenya, for example, two out of 40 workers dropped out. In Zambia, one is inactive out of 19."

That success is attributed to three factors: better training, strong local support from the Bahá'í administrative structure, and a commitment that stems from spiritual conviction.

"One important difference in Bahá'í projects has been the use of participatory, workshop-based training methods," Dr. Martens said. "These training methods are oriented toward problem-solving and involve more than just sitting in a classroom and receiving information. As such, they have been quite successful."

Workers also get strong support from local Bahá'í councils. Called local spiritual assemblies, these councils are elected each year by the adult Bahá'ís in a given village, town or city. With a broad mandate to oversee both the spiritual and material well-being of the local population, they function as an important link with the village population at large.



"A third reason, I believe, for our successes is the focus on service to mankind," Dr. Martens said. "We do not pay our workers. But there is a spiritual element that keeps our workers going. It can make a big difference." ☸

— Reporting in Chad by Mona Grieser. Ms. Grieser is an international health consultant and director of a development communication support project funded by US AID (Agency for International Development).

The city of Sarh, located in southern Chad, serves as a base for the Sarh Primary Health Care project, a network of more than 60 indigenous village health care workers. The project serves as a model for the kind of sustainable, grassroots-oriented project that is increasingly called for by development specialists.

International Collaboration Plays a Key Role in Global Health Activities

WHO's global strategy, "Health for All by the Year 2000," is a goal for Bahá'í communities

GENEVA—Although regional and village health care efforts like the Sarh Primary Health Care project in Chad [see cover story] have emerged very much from activity at the grassroots, Bahá'í involvement at the national and international level in primary health care is also unfolding rapidly.

In March, for example, the Bahá'í International Community entered into a formal working relationship with the World Health Organization (WHO). Over the next two years, various forms of collaboration will be explored, including co-sponsorship of a public health association in Burkina Faso, the publication of WHO technical papers in Bahá'í publications, and a general effort among Bahá'í communities to promote WHO's "Health for All" strategy.

Within this larger overall collaboration, the Bahá'í International Community has

also joined with some 70 other medical and children's organizations as partners in the "Facts for Life" venture currently being launched by UNICEF, WHO, and UNESCO. The project focuses on the distribution of a simple, easy-to-understand booklet that presents basic information about child health care, including the importance of breast-feeding, immunization, home hygiene and the treatment of diarrhea.

Through a network of health, education and/or development projects in 41 target countries, participating national Bahá'í communities will distribute these booklets and encourage their use in women's groups, Bahá'í schools, youth activities, adult literacy programs and regional conferences.

"WHO's global strategy for 'Health for All by the Year 2000' is very much a part of the goal of our communities around the world," said Giovanni Ballerio, a Bahá'í International Community representative to the United Nations in Geneva.

"The growing involvement of our communities at the grassroots level in health-related projects exemplifies this, as does the

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The Bread and Peace theatre troupe, sponsored by Radio Bahá'í in Puno, Peru, is shown performing *El Retorno del Robachicos* ("The Return of the Baby-snatchers"), a play that uses traditional costumes and characters to present basic infant health care information.





For the sixth year, the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Argentina participated in an annual book fair in Buenos Aires. An estimated 1,000,000 people visited the fair last April.

WWF Official Visits Bahá'í World Center

HAIFA—Frank Schmidt, assistant director general of the World Wide Fund for Nature—International (WWF), visited the Bahá'í World Center for three days in July to consult about Bahá'í participation in WWF's Network on Conservation and Religion.

Mr. Schmidt, who oversees WWF's collaboration with the Network, discussed various ongoing and planned environmental

initiatives with Bahá'í officials. For their part as a member of the Network, Bahá'ís have launched an environmental education campaign at schools and institutes, published a statement on the connection between Bahá'í sacred writings and nature, and assisted in the launching of "The Arts for Nature," an effort to draw artists into the conservation movement. ☉

International Collaboration in Health

(Continued from previous page)

work of our international community, which participates in the 'Facts for Life' program. Bahá'ís have participated for many years in the United Nations system, also, at international conferences on health."

A range of health education projects are operated by national Bahá'í communities. Radio stations in Africa and South America regularly broadcast health care information. A station in Bolivia, Radio Bahá'í Caracolla, transmits health education programs, like the UNICEF-produced "Revolution in Infant Health," and has helped to establish 35 local listening centers for the discussion of these programs.

In Peru, a travelling theatre troupe, sponsored in part by the Bahá'í radio station in

Puno, performed a specially written play that dramatizes how simple measures like immunization and oral rehydration can save infants from "the baby-snatcher." The production was filmed by UNICEF for use in other health promotion efforts. Radio Bahá'í in Liberia participated in the production of a program on health care, broadcast in five languages.

Information about health care issues is also distributed through the Bahá'í International Health Agency (BIHA), established in 1982 by health care professionals in North America. Its membership has since expanded to include doctors, nurses and health care workers around the world. The BIHA publishes a quarterly bulletin and sponsors an annual conference. ☉

Preventing Drug and Alcohol Abuse: A Global View

An Interview
with
Dr. A. M.
Ghadirian

Last spring, Dr. Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian toured seven Latin American countries to meet with government and health officials on the theme of "The Prevention of Substance Abuse: a Global Vision." A professor of psychiatry at McGill University in Montreal, Dr. Ghadirian has worked extensively with adolescents in drug abuse prevention programs in Canada. Dr. Ghadirian is also a founding member of the Bahá'í International Health Agency and a consultant to the Bahá'í International Community on issues of alcoholism and drug abuse prevention. Over the last decade, he has participated in several major United Nations-sponsored international conferences on substance abuse and given numerous seminars on drug and alcohol abuse prevention in Europe and the Americas. He is the author of "In Search of Nirvana: A New Perspective on Alcohol and Drug Dependency" (George Ronald, Oxford, second edition, 1989).

ONE COUNTRY interviewed Dr. Ghadirian about his visit to Latin America and his views on the prevention of substance abuse.

Question: Obviously, the drug problem is becoming a national crisis in North American and European countries. Did you find similar problems in Central and South America?

Dr. Ghadirian: In the countries I visited, which included Belize, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana, I did find an increasing concern over drug and alcohol problems. Drug traffic from South American countries such as Bolivia and Colombia pass through many of these countries on their way to North America.

When I was in Suriname, for example, a private airplane landed and more than 100 kilograms of cocaine were seized, the largest seizure ever there. This was quite surprising to many officials. They didn't think they had a drug problem to that extent.

Because of transient drug trafficking like this, more and more young people are beginning to be affected. In some countries, also, they grow marijuana. So access and availability play a role. Drug abuse is not yet as bad as in North America and Europe, but it is on the rise.

Question: Are governments responding to these problems?

Dr. Ghadirian: Yes. The officials I met,

including the Prime Minister of Guyana and the President of Trinidad and Tobago, were all very much concerned. The ministers of health and education in Suriname told me that the government is going to implement an educational program in the secondary school curriculum for the prevention of drug

"The world is in a state of transition from a traditional way of life to a new way of life. The problems of addiction, drug abuse, violence, moral decadence and conflict are symptoms of a world in transition."

abuse. Its goal is to educate the children about the adverse effects of illicit drugs on the mind. There are many misconceptions about drugs among the youth. They don't know all the facts. Educational systems should give them the facts and a vision to prevent drug abuse.

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Question: To what do you attribute the rise in substance abuse, both in the countries you recently visited and worldwide?

Dr. Ghadirian: Drug availability and personal attitude towards alcohol and drug use play a major role. Among other contributing factors are the breakdown in family life and social isolation. Loneliness, particularly among women, peer pressure among youth and problems of boredom and unemployment are other psychosocial factors. The stress of rapid changes occurring in our modern world and the pressure of competitive urban life may encourage individual search for instant satisfaction through drugs.

In the wider sense, and as a global problem, I feel that the underlying concept of human happiness needs to be re-examined. In many countries, happiness is perceived as a commodity. People believe that you can buy it or find it through material means.

Drugs and alcohol are understood as providing this kind of happiness. And as humanity as a whole becomes more distressed and discouraged at the problems and stresses it faces, this kind of happiness becomes attractive.

Question: In your view, then, the issue of alcohol and drug abuse cannot be separated from the larger problems and stresses in society?

Dr. Ghadirian: In a broad sense, no. The

world is in a state of transition from a traditional way of life to a new way of life. The problems of addiction, drug abuse, violence, moral decadence and conflict are symptoms of a world in transition. Old values and order are breaking down. As a result, many people become uncertain and insecure, and drugs provide what appears

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to be an easy means of alleviating these insecurities.

To give some examples, we see crises everywhere — crisis in education, crisis in politics, crisis in law and ethics and crisis in religion. We see similar crises in medicine, psychology and economics, all of which deeply affect human relationships.

In a Bahá'í perspective, all of these crises are part of a natural evolutionary process, which will lead to a new world civilization, based on the oneness of humanity, and full



Dr. A.M. Ghadirian, left, meets with Dr. H. Alimohamed, the Minister of Health in Suriname as part of a seven-nation tour to promote substance abuse prevention.

Preventing Drug and Alcohol Abuse: An Interview with Dr. A. M. Ghadirian

"...the human being is essentially a noble being, a being that has both material and spiritual aspirations, a being that must have a sense of purpose in life. If human beings are not allowed to fulfill these aspirations, they will search for other routes to happiness — like drugs and alcohol."

(Continued from previous page)

planetary interdependence. But these new ways of thinking tend to shake up the old system, which causes a lot of tension in society.

If people don't have a clear view of the spiritual meaning of this transition, of where the world is heading, then they are caught by these stresses and anxieties. But if they do feel that a new civilization, a new system of values, and a new world order will replace the outdated and decadent past traditional system, which is falling apart everywhere, then that understanding gives a new meaning to world affairs which will result in a sense of assurance and freedom from the need to escape into substance abuse.

Question: What does all this mean for treating drug and alcohol abuse?

Dr. Ghadirian: It means we need to take a multi-dimensional approach which operates at several levels of human society: the individual level, the family level, the societal level, and the global level.

On the individual level, we have to have a clear perception and understanding of human values and the nature of a human being.

We need to understand that the human being is essentially a noble being, a being that has both material and spiritual aspirations, a being that must have a sense of purpose in life. If human beings are not allowed to fulfill these aspirations, they will search for other routes to happiness — like drugs and alcohol.

The spiritual perspective of life gives greater tolerance in this search for fulfillment. This fact has been proved over and over around the world, within many religious traditions. People who have a meaningful perspective of life are able to tolerate stresses more easily than those who are obsessed with the material side of their needs and immediate gratification.

Question: What about the family level?

Dr. Ghadirian: I believe that family plays a crucial role in drug prevention. Today in many parts of the world both parents work and there is no extended family to attend to the children. As a result, children grow up without adequate affectional contact and communication with their parents. Some-

times drugs become an attractive means to fill this vacuum. Children need to learn from their parents what to expect from life. Parents should set an example for their children. Moreover, when a family is united and together, that unity brings a sense of security to the members of the family. In my contact with people, I noted that very often one of the reasons parents fail to convince their children to avoid drugs is because they themselves drink alcohol or use drugs.

Question: And the societal level?

Dr. Ghadirian: At the societal level, we should make our society or community a caring and healing community, in which individuals would be allowed to relate in peaceful and non-competitive ways.

Substance abuse prevention programs should focus on strengthening the individual's sense of self-worth and dignity. Education should go beyond its current emphasis on material success; programs should be added that help individuals to discover a new meaning in life.

We have reached such a level of technological advancement that many of our desires can be instantly satisfied. Encouraged by publicity in the media, many have come to believe that all our needs should be immediately gratified. As an instrument of society, the media should refrain from such encouragement.

Question: What can Bahá'ís add to the discussion about substance abuse?

Dr. Ghadirian: Our principle of abstinence from alcohol and non-prescribed drugs is a major tool for the prevention of substance abuse. The Bahá'í community serves as a model, showing that it is possible to be moderate in an achievement-oriented society, and that it is possible to be happy without the satisfaction derived from drugs.

On a practical level Bahá'ís are seeking to promote social and economic justice. Women and youth, for example, sometimes turn to drugs because they cannot accept the inequalities and discrimination in society. Through various social and economic development projects, Bahá'ís are attempting to address these injustices. The point is that our approach to fighting substance abuse must operate on many levels taking into consideration all aspects of human reality. ☉

Review: Is Modern Thinking Humanity's Greatest Threat?

(Continued from back page)

of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

The transition to a global society is inevitable, Dr. Laszlo believes, barring catastrophic war or environmental breakdown. Such a shift from the modern age to the global age is predicted, he writes, by recent advances in scientific and evolutionary theory — and, he adds, by the 19th century writings of the Bahá'í Faith.

In the scientific realm, advances in systems theory indicate the potential for a great and perhaps sudden transformation to a global society. Systems theory describes how non-linear change occurs in complex, "open" systems. It applies to dynamic systems of all types — physical, chemical, biological, and even social — and can be used to show how sudden changes lead to higher levels of complexity. Laszlo believes that systems theory, applied to history, provides a new tool for the analysis of human society.

Dr. Laszlo, although not himself an adherent of any religious faith, then adds: "Although the scientific concept [of systems theory and social change] has been discovered only recently, remarkably enough, its main outlines have been anticipated in the nineteenth century by a Persian prophet whose influence is only now beginning to be felt on the world."

He further explains that more than a hundred years ago, Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, "proclaimed that the oneness of mankind will be achieved in evolutionary stages" — stages that started with the birth of the family, expanded to the tribal unit, continued with the advent of city-states and then expanded to the present-day foundation of independent sovereign nations. Dr. Laszlo writes:

"The next stage in this social evolution, Bahá'u'lláh taught, is the organization of human society as a planetary civilization which will be characterized by the emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship and the founding of a world civilization and culture which

would allow for infinite diversity in the characteristics of its components."

This vision, he says, and the scientific insights of systems and evolutionary theory, "suggests that if the historical process continues to unfold without major catastrophes, it will bring about a globally integrated social, cultural and technological system."

Such a system, Dr. Laszlo says, would "operate on multiple levels of organization, ranging from the grassroots level of villages, farming communities and urban neighborhoods, through levels of townships, districts, provinces, national and federated states... all the way to the global level."

Information would flow freely both vertically and horizontally at each level, as would energy, material and people. "In a society indicated by the evolutionary perspective, the utilization of energies available in the environment will be increased, though not in gross terms," he adds, describing how increased efficiencies in the use of excess heat and waste products will mean that more is done with less.

"Differentiation with integration would be the hallmark of future society," he concludes, a trend that would produce unity with diversity in all areas and on all levels. Centralization and homogenization, tendencies currently prevalent, will transform into "decentralization with coordination, and mutual solidarity with respect for differences."

Anyone who is concerned about the future will find this book of great interest. Dr. Laszlo's vision for a new planetary civilization is concrete, addresses today's most pressing concerns and is firmly rooted in the latest theories about social evolution.

Ultimately, however, the book's strength lies in its potential to inspire readers to cast off the "inner limits" imposed by outmoded traditions, values and cultural ideals, and to work actively towards building the kind of global society outlined here. In this context, the book deserves a wide audience. ☉

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Is Modern Thinking Humanity's Greatest Threat?

The Inner Limits of Mankind — Heretical Reflections on Today's Values, Culture and Politics

By Ervin Laszlo

Oneworld Publications

London

The critical global problems in these final decades of the 20th century are often seen in terms of physical limits. In this view, the energy crisis stems from limited fuel sources, environmental problems and world hunger occur because of limited natural resources, and overpopulation and national security conflicts result from limited land area.

In his latest book, noted philosopher and scientist Ervin Laszlo argues that such "outer" limits to human progress are of little consequence when compared with the "inner" limits imposed by outmoded psychological, cultural and political ways of thinking.

Indeed, the book's title, *The Inner Limits of Mankind: Heretical Reflections on Today's Values, Culture and Politics*, effectively sums up the bold theme and iconoclastic nature of this new work, which deserves a place on the bookshelf of anyone genuinely concerned with the deep and severe problems that afflict humanity.

Dr. Laszlo begins his analysis of the "world problematique" by listing ideas that epitomize modern thinking. The list includes the notion that science can solve all problems and that efficiency can be equated with maximum productivity. Nationalism and the commonly held belief that some one system of economic and social organization is superior to all others are also addressed.

Taken together, Dr. Laszlo says, these and other ideas define the modern age. They also represent, he adds, the greatest threat to humanity's continued advancement — and perhaps to its very survival. He writes:

"After some five centuries of history — and many notable accomplishments in science, medicine, industry, agriculture, and communications — the modern age is now on the way out. Its achievements need to be preserved and furthered, but they must be framed in a new social, economic, political, and cultural context, since the traditional values and aims of modernism are beginning to backfire."

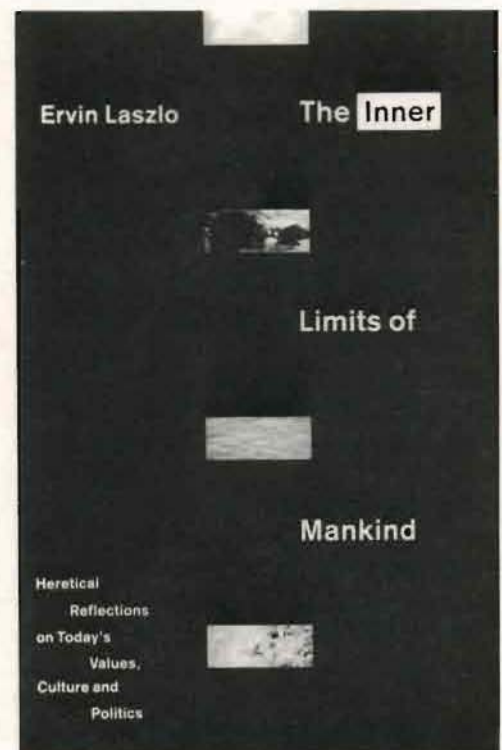
Modernism, he continues, has given mankind a higher material standard of living but has also triggered the popula-

tion explosion. It has vastly increased the demand for the benefits of modernism, but has proved unable to provide them. It has given humanity more power over nature than previously thought possible, but at great expense to the environment. It has also, he notes, brought the prospect for nuclear self-destruction.

If humanity is to survive and advance, modernism must give way to a new "global age," Dr. Laszlo believes, an age where the dominant worldview will focus on patterns of thought and culture that are global in nature. The emphasis would be on interdependence and diversity — and not on any single system of politics or culture. Further, he suggests, humanity should draw on the time-proven values and ideals found in the world's great religions for their moral and ethical guidance.

Dr. Laszlo, it should be noted, is well

Review



qualified to make such predictions. A member of the prestigious Club of Rome and the International Academy of the Philosophy of Science, Dr. Laszlo serves on the board of numerous journals and scientific and futures research bodies. The author of some 50 books and more than 250 articles, he currently serves as Rector of the Vienna Academy for the Study of the Future and is the science advisor to the Director General