



ONE COUNTRY

"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens" – Bahá'u'lláh

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In Panama, volunteers provide much needed educational services

Homegrown schools, bare-bones basic and staffed by indigenous teachers, give children in the remote and underserved Ngabe-Bugle region virtually their only chance for a primary education.

CHIRIQUI PROVINCE, Panama — At 5 a.m., dawn's light spread like a crimson streak across the dark sky and Victorino Rodriguez was already on his way. Like every Monday, he was making the three-hour walk from his home in Soloy to the tiny village of Quebrada Venado, high in the lush green mountains of Western Panama, to the small school there.

The 36-year-old teacher hurried along the narrow trails, anxious to arrive by 8 a.m. for the start of classes. With only some coffee for breakfast, he nevertheless wound energetically through green rice fields, banana groves, and up past moss-covered rocks, thick red clay coating his worn shoes.

A dozen children had been standing lookout since 7:30. With their parents working in the fields since dawn, the children were alone. As Mr. Rodriguez came around the last hill, a joyful shout went up and the students rushed out to greet their teacher. He named and embraced each one tenderly and then, putting his arms around them, walked the last kilometer together to the village school.

One of ten primary schools operated by Panama's Bahá'í community here in the Ngabe-Bugle region, the school in Quebrada Venado is bare-bones basic, just simple cinder block construction with open frame windows, furnished with a few desks. Other Bahá'í-run schools here are even simpler, consisting of thatched palm or corrugated metal roofs on wooden poles.

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Victorino Rodriguez, surrounded by students, examines a photograph of his class.

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The modern malady

When social scientists discuss the basic needs for human existence, the list usually starts with material things: air, water, food, and shelter. These are things that no one can survive without, at least not for long.

But those who have thought seriously about what it means to be a human being rarely stop there. The list of basic needs, it is widely acknowledged, includes a number of much more "intangible" items. Among them are love, friendship, esteem, and purpose.

Because we have material bodies, the hierarchy of these needs usually starts with those things that sustain physical life. And, certainly, for the starving person, food becomes the highest priority. For the homeless, a search for shelter dominates.

Yet, for those whose basic material needs are satisfied, as is the case with the great majority of people in the West, the quest to satisfy the second set of intangible needs is a major preoccupation.

The search for love, esteem, companionship, and purpose is reflected in pursuits ranging from participation in sporting events to watching the cinema, from the reading of romance novels to weekly worship services.

In times of turmoil, the relative value of some of these pursuits is sometimes called into question. Whether in the form of global calamity, such as war, pandemic, or terrorism, or in the form of personal trauma, such as divorce, economic loss, or ill health, tumult and disorder often force a reevaluation of priorities.

One of the curious features of the modern mindset is that, in the search for satisfaction of intangible needs, many people start with the assumption that their best hope for success lies with material means.

In the West, especially, if you ask people what will make them happy, they will quite often give a list of material possessions: a nice home, a better car, a more exciting vacation, a higher paying job. The underlying assumption is that the possession of higher value externals will somehow also lead to deeper love, more esteem from friends, and a greater sense of fulfillment.

Yet it takes little reflection to recognize that more and better material goods do not automatically translate into a more satisfying life. Frequently, the reality is just the opposite. Opulence often breeds dissatisfaction. The rates of suicide, depression, and the like in developed countries are just one indicator of this fact.

This conundrum can be answered by understanding that our intangible needs are, in fact, spiritual needs — and realizing that such needs can only be satisfied by spiritual means.

What do we mean by spiritual means?

It is important to understand that human nature has two sides: the material side referred to above and a spiritual side. This notion is common to all of the world's religions and is increasingly supported by scientific research into the nature of consciousness.

The spiritual side of human nature — commonly referred to as the soul — is that part of our being that continually seeks to know and to love, that is touched by awe and splendor, and that holds to that which is eternal and good.

"It is the first among all created things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him," said Bahá'u'lláh.

Yet spiritual reality is intangible and cannot be directly observed. "Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel," said Bahá'u'lláh.

Yet we can perceive its existence by the signs it leaves and by the indirect observation of its effects — much as the existence of subatomic particles cannot be directly observed but are divined by the traces they leave.

Among the traces of the spiritual side of human nature are the willingness of people to sacrifice immediate self-interest in the pursuit of higher goals, whether for family, neighborhood, country, or planet; the feelings of transcendence that are felt by all men and women at various moments of their lives; and the great

power of human imagination and hope, which are among the real means for human progress and advancement.

The fact of intangible human needs likewise offers evidence of our spiritual nature. Take the quality of love. It cannot be detected or directly observed. Yet the power of its existence is manifestly clear to every human being who has ever loved or been loved.

And the fact that the great majority of people around the world identify themselves with religious belief offers still more evidence. That the majority choose to follow one of the great world religions, all of which set high standards of morality, demanding a certain level of personal sacrifice, runs counter to what we know about materialistic self-interest.

This proof can be put another way: throughout history there have been sects and cults that have demanded very little of their followers, or that have taught that heaven or paradise can be obtained through hedonism or devil worship or other essentially materialistic means. Yet none of these “religions” has ever gained a significant foothold in our collective consciousness. The soul is, indeed, the first to “recognize” its Creator.

Yet despite all of the evidence of a spiritual reality, our modern world is ruled by a materialistic approach to life. People evaluate the course of their lives with a materialistic expectation of outcomes. Do I have a larger house than my neighbor? Is my corporation growing faster than the competition? Will this little pill cure my illness?

Why not ask: is my family happier than my neighbor's? Or, better yet, how can I make our entire neighborhood happier?

Why not ask: is my corporation serving its customers well? Or, better yet, is my corporation contributing to the well-being of the world at large?

Why not ask: with what we now know about the body's capacity to heal, might not exercise, diet, or meditation provide an alternative cure? Or, better yet, how can I contribute to the health of those around me, given our essential interdependence?

This is not to say that material means are not important — or that they are not sometimes the most effective route to a goal. Sometimes, indeed, a particular pill or vaccine is the best cure.

Yet in our modern world, the balance has in many ways been given over almost wholly to the materialistic approach to life — and that has had severe consequences.



On 11 March 2003, Bani Dugal Gujral was appointed Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations. Ms. Dugal Gujral had been serving as interim representative, since the resignation of Techeste Ahderom in 2001. Ms. Dugal Gujral came to the Bahá'í International Community in 1994, and has served as Director of the Community's Office for the Advancement of Women. A native of India, where she practiced law before coming to the United States, Ms. Dugal Gujral holds a Master's degree in Environmental Law from Pace University School of Law in New York.

On a personal level, this imbalance can be seen in the seemingly endless pursuit of “false” forms of love, esteem, and transcendence in objects ranging from pornography to gaudy clothing to mind-altering drugs.

On a social level, this imbalance manifests itself in approaches to commerce, education, medicine, and justice that stress immediate material results over long-term human satisfaction. Whether in the form of a flashy marketing plan, a new quick-fix pill, or a contentious lawsuit, such approaches flow from a belief in material efficacy rather than spiritual insight.

And on a global level, this imbalance can be seen most significantly in the failure of peoples and nations to recognize their essential interdependence and oneness. It is a failure that can be characterized as a “survival of the fittest” approach, versus a worldview that emphasizes cooperation and consultation — and which stresses unity of thought and action above all else.

“That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race,” said Bahá'u'lláh. “The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth.”✽

In our modern world, the balance has in many ways been given over almost wholly to the materialistic approach to life — and that has had severe consequences.

A medical breakthrough brings ‘Star Wars’ technology to remote hospitals

On 28 February 2003, Dr. Mehran Anvari, left, used a specialized “robot,” which guides instruments used in laparoscopic surgery, to perform an historic operation via “telerobotics” at a hospital operating room some 400 kilometers distant.



Photos courtesy St. Joseph's Healthcare

In Canada, in a world's first clinical use, surgeon Mehran Anvari successfully performs an operation at a distance of 400 kilometers — a potential breakthrough for underserved rural areas and, ultimately, the developing world.

HAMILTON, Ontario — Mehran Anvari first discovered his love for surgery in high school while dissecting frogs and other small animals.

“I was pretty good in dissection class, and I felt this was something I really enjoyed,” said the 43-year-old Canadian physician. “I remember we did dogfish, we did frogs, we did rats.”

Dr. Anvari has come a long way from carving up specimens preserved in formaldehyde. The founder and director of the Center for Minimal Access Surgery (CMAS) at McMaster University here, he is among the world's leading practitioners of laparoscopic surgery.

“The layman's term is ‘keyhole’ surgery,” said Dr. Anvari, describing a process where the surgeon operates through a small incision via a long slender tube (usually equipped with miniature video camera) that allows him to see and work inside the body.

The technique is important because such “minimally invasive” surgery causes less trauma to the patient, allowing faster heal-

ing and lowering the probability of post-operative infection.

Recently, Dr. Anvari broke new ground when he used a specially configured laparoscopic robot, which measured and then precisely transmitted the movements of his hands and fingers, to operate on a patient some 400 kilometers away, in North Bay, Ontario.

Performed on 28 February 2003, it was the world's first hospital-to-hospital operation of this kind.

“It is a tremendously exciting thing he has done,” said Dr. William Orovan, chair of the department of surgery at McMaster. “It has huge applications in a country like Canada, which has a small population scattered over a wide area. It brings first-rate surgical care to remote communities.”

A science fiction dream, the development of such “telerobotic” surgery has been long talked about for use in outer space and at remote research outposts. And Dr. Anvari and others believe it has great potential not only in Canada but also in the developing world.

Dr. Anvari, however, views his work as much more than simply developing a high technology platform for doing delicate operations at a distance.

In related endeavors to develop and promote “telementoring” — in which he “looks over the shoulder” of another surgeon via video relay and guides him or her by voice — Dr. Anvari has demonstrated a strong desire to serve the whole of humankind — an impulse that stems from his practice of the Bahá’í Faith.

Though founded just four years ago, CMAS has become a hub for training in minimally invasive surgical techniques. More than 500 doctors have received training at CMAS — and at least 50 have been from outside Canada, coming from countries as far away as India, China, and Russia.

“The Bahá’í ideals have given me very much clarity about the fact that we live in a world that is very connected, and I believe it is important to look not only at what you can do to help yourself, but at what you can do to help others,” said Dr. Anvari.

Dr. Anvari spends considerable time — often without the prospect of remuneration — showing other surgeons how to do minimally invasive surgery, sometimes in person and sometimes via telementoring.

“It is the global outlook, given to me by the Faith, that has stirred me to do this kind of work,” he said.

His activities as a Bahá’í are also responsible, at least in part, for his interest in telerobotics. Until last year, he served on a Bahá’í committee in Canada that was charged with spreading the Bahá’í teachings

to all parts of the country, something that often took him as far as the Arctic Circle.

“Because of my Bahá’í activities, I had a chance to travel to many parts of Canada — and around the world — and I saw the need across the country, and globally, for improved surgery and health care,” said Dr. Anvari.

“Ideas don’t develop in isolation,” Dr. Anvari added. “I suppose if I was not made aware of those needs, if I did not aim to help people, I may not have pursued the whole idea of looking at telerobotics.”

Born in Iran, Dr. Anvari was raised in a family where both parents were involved in the medical profession. “My mother is a pharmacist and my father is a specialist in laboratory medicine,” he said, adding that he had always been interested in medicine and patient care. “But I found I enjoyed working with my hands, and so I specialized in surgery.”

Both parents are also Bahá’ís, and in the mid-1970s they saw that Bahá’ís in Iran were increasingly becoming the targets of religious persecution. They sent Dr. Anvari and his brother to England for secondary school and, then, just before the Iranian revolution in 1979, left Iran themselves.

Dr. Anvari went on to medical school in England, did his surgical residency in Canada at McMaster, obtained a PhD in Australia, and then returned to McMaster, where he is now a Professor of Surgery.

His work in telerobotics is not so much a matter of inventing new equipment, but rather of creating an integrated system from current medical technologies.

For some time, for example, surgeons

“We live in a world that is very connected, and I believe it is important to look not only at what you can do to help yourself, but at what you can do to help others.”

— Dr. Mehran Anvari



Some 400 kilometers away, in North Bay, Ontario, Dr. Craig McKinley assists Dr. Anvari by guiding the laparoscopic equipment and monitoring the patient’s progress.

"The new thing is the way we have configured the robots to use day-to-day telecommunications, in a system where this can be done as a regular clinical service."

—Dr. Mehran Anvari

Dr. Mehran Anvari, above, guides operating instruments, below, via a specialized surgical robot.

have used tiny video cameras to guide their instruments in the body. Specialized robots, also, have been devised to give added precision and stability to such work.

Dr. Anvari's breakthrough came about by combining advances in information technology with laparoscopic robotics, enabling him to do delicate surgery at a distance.

"The new thing is the way we have configured the robots to use day-to-day telecommunications, in a system where this can be done as a regular clinical service," said Dr. Anvari. "All I did was to think about a way to put things together, things that exist in other health care settings."

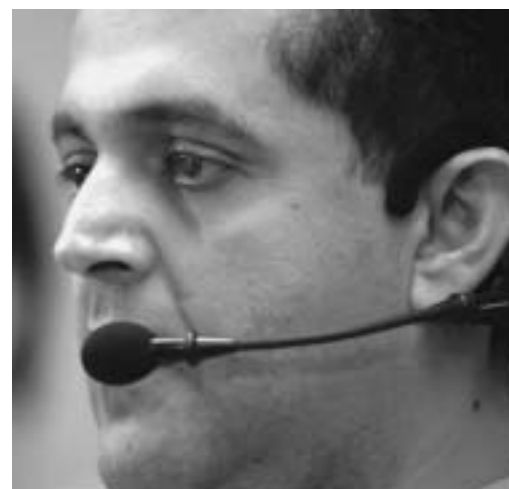
Specifically, Dr. Anvari used a "surgical system" called ZEUS, developed by a company in California, Computer Motion. The ZEUS robot was connected and supported by Bell Canada's Virtual Private Network Service to the robotic 'arms' in North Bay General Hospital's operating room.

Dr. Anvari's hand, wrist, and finger movements were translated from the ZEUS console, with a delay of no longer than 150 milliseconds, to control the endoscopic camera and the surgical instruments in the abdomen of the patient in North Bay.

At the patient's side in North Bay, a local surgeon, Craig McKinley, positioned the robotically controlled instruments and assisted in the surgery.

"With the challenge of attracting specialized surgeons to Canada's northern communities, this technology allows us to provide necessary services close to home and family," said Dr. McKinley.

The operation was widely reported. Articles about it were carried in the *Toronto Star*, the *National Post*, the *Globe and Mail*, and



the *Toronto Sun*. As well, *TIME Canada*, CBC Radio and TV, CTV, and Global have reported on Dr. Anvari's research efforts.

A map of Canada explains the significance of the story. With a land area of nearly 10 million square kilometers, Canada is the second largest country in the world. Some 85 percent of the population lives within 300 kilometers of the southern border, but about one-third of the population lives in rural areas.

The rural population is often widely scattered, making it difficult to attract and support medical specialists, especially those with experience in complex surgical techniques.

"The number of specialists is very low in rural Canada," said Lee Teperman, administrator of the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada. "In many cases, it means you must transport patients a long distance."

Dr. Anvari said that while the machines used in telerobotics currently cost up to US\$1 million, the price is likely to come down to about US\$250,000 soon — making it quite affordable for rural medical centers in Canada.

He believes further decreases in price and improvements in telecommunications will make telerobotics and telementoring important in the developing world.

"The robotic surgery attracts a lot of attention because it is new and very 'Star Wars'-ish," said Dr. Anvari. "But a very important and critical aspect of our work is focused on establishing new centers in other countries, in training other surgeons, and in providing mentoring and telementoring."

Dr. Anvari said CMAS is currently exploring setting up collaborative programs with medical centers in Haiti, Yemen, and Uganda. "We have learned a number of things here that can help improve the quality of health in many countries." *



UN addresses violence against women

UNITED NATIONS — At a panel discussion on the problem of violence against women, Radhika Coomaraswamy told of a young Nepalese girl who eloped with a young man — who then placed her in a brothel in India before disappearing.

The tale reflects the complex connection between violence against women and the abuse of basic human rights around the world.

That connection was among the key points that emerged at a panel discussion entitled “Violence against Women,” held on 4 March 2003 during the 47th Commission on the Status of Women. Sponsored by the Bahá’í International Community and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the panel was among dozens of side events at the Commission.

The Commission this year addressed two major themes: 1) violence against women and girls, and 2) women and the media, in relation to their participation and access and to new technologies.

Delegates stressed that women be given more presence, voice, and visibility in the media, and deplored the degrading images they often portray. They also emphasized the urgent need to strengthen legislation on domestic violence, trafficking in women, and sexual exploitation, as well as to educate government officials and set up government bodies to protect and pro-

mote women’s rights.

Indeed, the 4 March panel discussion reflected well the deliberations of the Commission, an arm of the UN Economic and Social Council.

“The promotion and protection of all human rights is one of the best ways to eliminate violence against women,” said Mara Bustelo of the OHCHR, on 4 March. “It introduces the concept of legal obligations and entitlements. Protection from violence is not just something that would be nice for women to have, it is their right and an obligation for the State.”

Violence against women is not always easily assessed, panel members said, because perpetrators attempt to justify some practices based on religious or cultural customs. Female genital cutting, honor crimes, and widow rituals fall into this category, and often women themselves participate in the perpetuation of such practices. In many cases, shame keeps women from reporting these incidents.

Denial of property rights and adequate housing threatens women in another way, said Ms. Bustelo, and is worsened by lack of legal protection in many parts of the world. War and armed conflict also pose particular threats to women’s safety and dignity.

Panel, continued on page 14

“The promotion and protection of all human rights is one of the best ways to eliminate violence against women.”

— Mara Bustelo,
Office of the High
Commissioner for
Human Rights



A panel discussion, on Violence against Women, and held at United Nations headquarters in New York, was sponsored by the Bahá’í International Community and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on 4 March 2003. The panel was among dozens of side events held during the annual Commission on the Status of Women.

In Europe, businesspeople apply spiritual insights to economic problems

Participants at the 11th annual conference of the European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF), which was held 22–24 September 2000 in DePoort, the Netherlands.



TURIN, Italy — Eighty percent of the automobiles made in Italy are manufactured in this bustling northern Piedmont city. Home of the Fiat Group, workers here build Fiat, Lancia, and Alfa Romeo cars, as well as Iveco trucks.

Turin is also the home of the International Training Centre (ITC), an arm of the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO). The ITC seeks to “assemble, package and deliver the best thinking, practice, and experience — at global level — concerning issues related to the world of work.”

Over the last few years, a major concern at the Centre, as well as of workers and industrialists in Turin — and, indeed, in Europe as a whole — has been how to “restructure” businesses in a way that causes the least harm to owners, employees, and communities.

Restructuring often means laying off workers in the search for greater efficiency. Global competition has put pressure on companies like Fiat to improve productivity and profits. Late last year, for example, Fiat proposed laying off some 8,100 workers in just such a restructuring plan, a move that was met with strikes and protests here.

In the search for answers, the ILO has chosen to collaborate with the European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF), a private voluntary association that promotes, among other things, the application of spiritual principles to economic problems.

Since 2000, the EBBF and the ILO have

produced a joint paper and sponsored a series of workshops, all on the topic of “socially responsible enterprise restructuring.” Many of the workshops have been held at the ILO Centre in Turin, and many have featured the participation of the EBBF's Secretary-General, George Starcher.

According to Mr. Starcher, who is one of the principal authors of the joint paper, companies need not resort first to layoffs in hard times. “There are ways to restructure without reducing personnel, and, even if you eventually have to lay off people, there are ways to do it that minimize the effect on people and the communities in which they work and live,” said Mr. Starcher.

That insights into economic problems would emerge from a faith-based group may seem odd, but a number of secular organizations have recently begun to work with the EBBF, in large part because of its distinctive orientation. In addition to the ILO, the European Commission and AIESEC, the world's largest student-run non-governmental organization, have participated in collaborative efforts with the EBBF.

“Whether you call it religious or spiritual or whatever, I think that ethical issues are coming to the forefront in a whole range of different areas,” said Michael Henriques, Director of the Job Creation and Enterprise Development Department at the ILO. “It's an idea whose time has come.”

Others agree that business, industry, and

An increasing number of secular organizations have entered into collaboration with the European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF), a faith-based, private voluntary association that promotes ethical values, personal virtues, and moral leadership in business and organizations of social change.

related organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of ethics and values — a trend that has opened the door to organizations like the EBBF.

The wake of scandal

“This need is more pressing than ever, in the wake of the Enron scandal, the Argentinian economic collapse, stock market deflation, and the general divorce of business from ethics,” said Marcello Palazzi, head of the Progressio Foundation, a Dutch-based, non-profit group that focuses on strategic public-private partnerships.

The EBBF “meets the need of business leaders from different faiths to connect, learn, be inspired, and create joint initiatives,” said Mr. Palazzi, who himself joined the EBBF in 1996. “[EBBF’s] professionalism, integrity, good management, and networking capacity have created a unique community of committed business leaders.”

Founded in 1990 by a group of Bahá’í businesspeople, the EBBF today has a membership of more than 300 men and women in some 50 countries. Registered as a non-profit organization and open to individuals from all religious backgrounds, the Forum’s overall mission is to promote ethical values, personal virtues, and moral leadership in business and organizations of social change.

“Our whole mission,” said Mr. Starcher, “is one of trying to make some contribution to the prosperity of humankind through promoting values in business.”

Those values, in addition to business ethics and social responsibility, include “stewardship of the earth’s resources,” “partnership of women and men in all fields of endeavor,” and “non-adversarial decision-making through consultation.” Although these principles — which are all based on the Bahá’í teachings — are not always considered within the domain of businesses, EBBF members believe they are “fundamental to achieving a responsible business community,” said Mr. Starcher.

The joint effort with the ILO to develop the concept of “socially responsible enterprise restructuring” (SRER) is a good example of how the EBBF seeks to show how spiritually based values can provide practical solutions to economic problems.

The collaboration began in April 2000, with the publication of a 120-page joint ILO/EBBF working paper on the topic. Among other things, it discusses a number of alternatives to layoffs. It suggests, for example, that

changes in overall strategy and/or ownership may be more fruitful than downsizing, and that greater efficiency may be found through better use of information technology, improved purchasing and logistics practices, and better labor-management cooperation.

The paper also argues, in terms businesspeople understand, for the importance of treating employees as a valuable resource. “[H]uman and social capital are becoming all-important in the post-industrial economy,” states the paper. “Human capital includes intelligence, values, technical knowledge, experience, creativity, network of contacts, corporate memory, as well as professional skills and experience.”

The paper has been translated into several languages and has been the centerpiece of workshops on socially responsible enterprise restructuring at the ILO training center in Turin and elsewhere.

In November 2001, nine members of Russia’s Parliament were among the eighteen participants at a conference on SRER at the Turin Centre. Other participants included an economist working for the president of Russia and representatives from offices involving social and labor policy in that country.

More recently, training sessions based on the joint paper have included a seminar for Japanese trade union leaders at the ILO Training Centre, and a presentation to a tripartite delegation from Macedonia.

“[The collaboration] has worked well in this particular context,” said Mr. Henriques. “I certainly felt there was good synergy between the Business Forum and ourselves.”

According to Mr. Starcher, since the term “Socially Responsible Enterprise Restructuring” first appeared in the joint paper, it has increasingly been adopted by other organizations. For example, the ILO received support from the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission in the sponsorship and organization of an international conference on SRER, held in Athens in April 2003.

A comfortable fit

“When EBBF started, hardly anyone was talking about spirituality in the workplace,” said Dr. Wendi Momen, chair of the EBBF. “Now it is commonplace; similarly with values and moral leadership. So EBBF is a much more comfortable ‘fit’ now in the business world.”

Another important collaboration has been with AIESEC (Association Internationale des

“This need is more pressing than ever, in the wake of the Enron scandal, the Argentinian economic collapse, stock market deflation, and the general divorce of business from ethics.”

— Marcello Palazzi,
Progressio
Foundation



EBBF Secretary-General George Starcher addresses a joint EBBF/AIESEC Conference in Italy in March 2000.

Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales), which is composed of more than 30,000 business and economics students in 800 universities and 85 countries.

The EBBF assisted in organizing AIESEC's largest international event, the 53rd International Congress in Lenk, Switzerland, held in August 2001. The EBBF has also worked with AIESEC in many countries throughout Europe in administering conferences and training sessions for young entrepreneurs.

"It is a relationship based on sharing our values and helping each other in achieving our mission," said Susana Muhamad, an AIESEC alumna, who oversaw the relationship with the EBBF from 2001 to 2002, when she was director of AIESEC International. She added that EBBF's "network of values-based leaders in the corporate sector" makes it an attractive collaborator.

Several EBBF members have played an active role in a series of meetings organized by the European Commission to consult on policy for promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Europe. The EBBF responded with a written memorandum to an initial draft "green paper" on CSR and was invited to participate in three meetings in Brussels presided over by officials of the EC. In addition, EBBF members were among the more than 1,000 people invited to participate in a two-day conference organized by the Belgian Presidency of the European Union on CSR.

"[The EC] had a very positive point of view on the EBBF," said Mr. Starcher, "because we were a network of businesspeople and not just an NGO with a bunch of ideas..."

Representation at high-level international conferences has also raised the profile of the group. Most recently, members sponsored two seminars at the World Summit on Sus-

tainable Development in Johannesburg, in August and September 2002. An EBBF booth at the Summit also provided literature for participants, including a Zulu translation of "Emerging Values for a Global Economy," an EBBF paper.

The EBBF's latest annual conference was highlighted by the participation of such prestigious non-members as the speaker of the Parliament of Namibia, who is also a vice president of the Interparliamentary Forum, which comprises parliamentarians from some 160 nations. Simon Zadek, Chief Executive Officer of AccountAbility, a non-profit professional institute, offered the keynote address on "The Business Case for Social Responsibility."

Another recent development was the creation of a new chair at the University of Bari, Italy: the Chair for a New World Order, to which EBBF member Giuseppe Robiati has been appointed. The creation of the chair reflects the efforts of Mr. Robiati and EBBF to introduce its core values into the curriculum at this and several other universities in Italy.

Indeed, the willingness of the business world to engage in discussions of about values is visible in the increasing participation of businesses and entrepreneurs in conferences such as those sponsored by the Spirit in Business Institute (SiB). The EBBF participated in SiB's world conference in April 2002, which attracted over 500 participants, and will be represented at the upcoming conference in June 2003, to be held in San Francisco, California. The conferences are focused on increasing discussion about improving business practices through ethical and spiritual means.

"As we are coming to understand, spiritual values in leadership are not a passing trend but the integration of a new level of awareness that will enhance community in the workplace," said Barbara Krumsiek, President and CEO of Calvert Group, quoted on the Web site for the Spirit in Business Institute.

To catalyze that transformation, EBBF is bringing a new perspective that stresses personal and ethical virtues in business dealings, which it hopes will invest a greater sense of social responsibility in corporate actions.

"EBBF's work," said Mr. Palazzi, "is about the values and principles which unite [people] from all religions and countries in their practice of business. Good business, like good governance, rests on these values and principles. Without them, there is nothing."*

— By Alex McGee

"Spiritual values in leadership are not a passing trend but the integration of a new level of awareness that will enhance community in the workplace."

— Barbara Krumsiek, the Calvert Group

The first annual conference of the EBBF's Italian branch, held 11 May 2002 in Milan.



Nur University embarks major new teacher training program in Bolivia

SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia — Collaborating in a United States initiative to improve reading and writing in the Americas, Nur University has embarked on a major project to train primary school teachers in Bolivia.

Nur, a Bahá'í-inspired institution, has begun assembling a team of educators to set up and run a pilot program for the training of some 700 primary school teachers.

The university is being funded in the work by a two-year grant from the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

Officials from the Agency said Nur was awarded the contract because of its regional credibility, experience with training school teachers in rural areas, and innovative approaches to education.

"One of the things Nur brought was their experience in distance education and their commitment to supporting development in rural Bolivia," said Barbara Knox-Seith, a Policy Fellow in USAID's Latin America Bureau. "They have also worked with teachers who don't have much training."

The program, Centers of Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT), was announced in April 2001 by US President George Bush at the Summit of the Americas.

It will operate not only in Bolivia but also in 10 other Latin American and Caribbean countries, where counterpart institutions have, like Nur, received contracts.

"The Achilles heel of the education reform throughout Latin America has been the whole issue of providing effective reading instruction for children," said Eloy Anello, president of Nur University and coordinator of the program in Bolivia.

"If children don't learn to read effectively by the fourth grade, they tend to drop out," Dr Anello said. "The best way to address this is to improve the way we train teachers to teach reading."

"So our belief is that, ultimately, this is one of the most effective ways to eliminate illiteracy throughout the Americas," said Dr. Anello.

The CETT program aims to train some 15,000 teachers in Latin America and the

Caribbean over the course of five years, subject to the availability of funds.

The program has been divided into three regions: the Caribbean, Central America, and the Andes.

Nur will participate in the Andean regional project, which encompasses the three nations of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru. Two other universities in the region, Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia in Peru and Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar in Ecuador, will coordinate the project in those countries.

"The idea behind this is to create an innovative teacher training program that will improve teacher ability in the area of reading instruction and, through that, to improve literacy rates," said Dr. Knox-Seith of USAID.

Nur, which was founded by Bahá'ís, is not only helping to develop the basic materials but will also take a leading role in publishing the materials and making them accessible over the Internet, said Dr. Anello.

"The Bahá'í teachings emphasize the importance of education in developing human potential and promoting social transformation," said Dr. Anello. "Because of this, Nur has committed itself to supporting the educational reforms in Latin America — and it has concluded that one of the best ways to do this is through teacher training." *

"One of the things Nur brought was their experience in distance education and their commitment to supporting development in rural Bolivia."

— Barbara Knox-Seith, USAID, Latin America Bureau

Nur University, in Santa Cruz, Bolivia.



In Panama, volunteers provide much needed educational services

Students of the Bahá'í school in the community of Naranja play a game outside their small classroom building. The school is one of 10 such schools, staffed by volunteer teachers, that serve some 300 children in the remote areas of the Ngabe-Bugle region in Western Panama.



Photo by David Simmons

Panama, continued from page one

“The children, because of the remote communities in which they live, would receive no education at all, were it not for these schools.”

— Rosemary Baily,
secretary of the
Foundation for
Development and
Culture

Together, these schools serve more than 300 students. More important, they offer the children in the far reaches of this remote region virtually their only chance for an academic education. With the region's low population density and isolation — all of the villages served by the Bahá'í schools are accessible only by foot or horse — the government has not been able to maintain a school system here.

“The children, because of the remote communities in which they live, which are up to six hours walking distance from the nearest town, would receive no education at all, were it not for these schools,” said Rosemary Baily, secretary of the Foundation for Development and Culture (FUNDESCU), a Bahá'í-inspired non-governmental organization that supports the schools. “So this effort really does make a huge difference in the lives of the children.”

Most of the teachers, indigenous people themselves, are not formally trained. Rather,

they are among those who have more education than others in the Ngabe-Bugle community, and so they feel obligated to pass along their learning.

“History testifies to the great material, cultural, and spiritual wealth that indigenous peoples have enjoyed in the past, but for lack of education, they have not been able to develop,” said Mr. Rodriguez, who himself has finished the 10th grade. “I have chosen the path of service in order to help generate the step-by-step process of development needed by the community, especially by the children who are the future of the Ngabe-Bugle region in Panama.”

The schools began nearly 20 years ago as small local initiatives of the Bahá'ís of Panama, who sought to provide basic bilingual (Spanish and native Ngabere) pre-school and elementary education to the Ngabe-Bugle people, who are sometimes known as the Guaymí. The schools have developed gradually, as the resources of the

community have grown.

In the early 1990s, after a number of volunteer teachers had been forced to look for work elsewhere, a group of young Bahá'ís in the Ngabe-Bugle community came together to talk about how to keep the schools going. They made a solemn pact to offer themselves as teachers and to remain for as long as they were needed, even without salary, whatever the sacrifice.

"Our own families are poor, but how can we leave these precious children without education?" said Mr. Rodriguez, who has now been teaching for seven years.

The group, composed of about a dozen individuals, initially worked without pay. More recently, FUNDESCU has been able to raise enough money to provide the teachers — there are currently 13 — with a monthly stipend equivalent to about US\$50. The funds have come from the Bahá'í sources, as well as from private foundations and contributors.

"I began my service as a volunteer," said Alexis Bejerano, who must travel each week from his home some three hours by bus, three hours by boat, and then three hours on foot to reach the Bahá'í school of San Felix Bocas del Toro, where he teaches fourth, fifth, and sixth graders.

"I am serving my people because of the love and affection I feel for the children," added Mr. Bejerano. "The Bahá'í Faith has given me this light — that of sharing what one has learned. I feel so satisfied and I gain so much every day that I am in contact with the children. I learn a lot just by sharing the limited knowledge gained during my own studies."

Government officials have praised the project for filling an important need. Indeed, the Ministry of Education recently began funding the salary for a 14th teacher.

On a visit to the Ngabe-Bugle region in October 2002, Professor Aguedo Acosta, Regional Director of the Department of Private Education in Chiriqui for the Ministry of Education, said: "You see me here today for a second time within the Ngabe-Bugle homeland, to visit you and to offer all the moral and legal support that the Bahá'í schools need."

Parents and local leaders tell of their happiness with the opportunities provided by the schools.

"I cannot read or write, but with these schools, my children will learn to read and write," said Enrique Espinoza, head of the

village council in Quebrada Molejon, where a Bahá'í school serves roughly 60 students in grades one through six.

Although the schools are run by the Bahá'ís, the teachers and administrators do not seek to convert the students. Some of the villagers are Bahá'ís, some are Catholics, some are Evangelicals, and some follow the native Mama Tata religion. In all, about half the students are Bahá'ís.

There is, however, a strong moral component to the program, taught at all of the schools. In addition to reading, writing, and mathematics, the curriculum includes a weekly class on "Virtues and Values."

"They need more than just education in science and math, but education of the spirit," said Benita Palacios, who has been serving as a teacher for nine years. "When I was school-aged, we females had few opportunities to study because of the belief that women should never go farther than their own homes."

Ms. Palacios, who teaches kindergarten in the village of Boca de Remedios, said that the Bahá'í teachings on the equality of women and men have inspired her to go beyond this limitation. "My own education only went as far as ninth grade, and it was with great difficulty that I was able to go even that far."

Like the others, Ms. Palacios started out as a volunteer. "As a Bahá'í, I felt I had a responsibility to my own community."

Over the years the teachers have received training from various Bahá'í organizations, facilitated by FUNDESCU. Last summer, for example, the

"My own education only went as far as ninth grade, and it was with great difficulty that I was able to go even that far. I felt I had a responsibility to my own community."

— Benita Palacios, teacher



Benita Palacios has been serving as a teacher for nine years. Like other Bahá'í teachers, she teaches on essentially a volunteer basis, receiving a marginal stipend of some US\$50 a month.

Mona Foundation, a United States-based, Bahá'í-inspired organization that strives to support grassroots educational initiatives around the world, held an in-depth training workshop on the fundamentals of educational philosophy and classroom management.

For Mr. Rodriguez, the \$50 monthly stipend barely covers the cost of rice and sometimes a small package of beans or lentils for himself, which he has learned to cook over an open fire after school each afternoon. That's after he has provided for his wife and three small children — a family he leaves behind each week when he walks up into the mountains.

The people of Quebrada Venado are cer-

tainly grateful. They treat Mr. Rodriguez with obvious respect. As subsistence farmers, they have no money or food to offer, but they take turns providing firewood for Victorino's outdoor kitchen. They have built him a small wood-framed shelter with corrugated metal panels on three sides, a packed mud floor, and a narrow wooden platform for his bed.

"The Bahá'í Faith has been a light to our people," said one Quebrada Venado villager. "With this school, our children will be freed from the darkness of ignorance. These children are our future." ❀

— By Randie Gottlieb

UN Commission addresses violence against women

Panel, continued from page 7

"As the Beijing Platform for Action outlines, violence must be assessed against the backdrop of the historical, social, political, cultural, and economic inequality of women," said Jean Augustine, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women in Canada. "Violence against women touches every aspect of life. It is a social issue, an economic issue, a health issue, an awareness and education issue, a justice and human rights issue."

Ms. Coomaraswamy, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, focused her remarks on the problem of trafficking in women and girls, which she said has increased in recent years as part of the "feminine side" of globalization.

As an example, she examined the case of the Nepalese girl who was sold into prostitution in India by her "husband."

"She was subjected to an enormous amount of torture, both physical and mental, until she agreed to become a sex worker," Ms. Coomaraswamy said. "After that she was taken to Bombay where she worked in Falkland Road, a place known for such activity, until finally she was rescued by a Nepalese NGO." The girl, now in an advanced stage of AIDS, is dying.

Cases like this illustrate the need for strong international conventions and strong national laws, said Ms. Coomaraswamy, coupled with "a sensitive police force which is not corruptible, a sensitive judiciary that actually convicts...and support services for victims."

Agreeing that violence against women is intricately entwined with human rights,

Michael Penn, an associate professor of psychology at Franklin and Marshall University in Pennsylvania, USA, said part of the remedy is greater participation by men, along with a campaign of spiritual and moral education grounded in "universal human values already endorsed" by the global community.

"The global campaign to elevate the status of women, to promote gender equality, and to eradicate gender-based violence is most likely to be effective if it is fueled and upheld both by enforceable local and international laws and by processes that address the inner terrain of human consciousness, human values, and human spiritual and moral development," said Dr. Penn, who has recently co-authored a book entitled *Overcoming Violence against Women and Girls*.

Dr. Penn, who is a Bahá'í, also offered hope for humanity's global moral improvement by comparing its development to the life of an individual, marked by different stages of growth, suggesting that humanity be viewed as still immature, but not without potential. "When we understand an organism's capacities from a developmental perspective, we are able to nurture it with confidence," he said.

The Commission on the Status of Women, established in 1946, prepares recommendations and reports to the UN Economic and Social Council on the promotion of women's rights, and advances the principle that men and women should have equal rights. Following the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the General Assembly mandated the Commission to follow up on implementation of the Platform of Action.❀

— By Veronica Shoffstall

Review: Minimalism

Review, continued from page 16

logic and how it can be applied to philosophical analysis. At times, accordingly, Dr. Hatcher's use of mathematical symbols can seem overwhelming to the casual reader.

Yet, aside from such explication, the book is eminently readable and even dramatically illuminating for its clear-headed exploration of contemporary currents in philosophy.

For example, one key issue in modern thought, cutting across a wide range of disciplines, from psychology to sociology to neurobiology, is the nature of subjectivity: how do you know what you know?

Philosophers throughout history have wrestled with this question. It stems from the obvious fact that our minds are locked inside bodies and all of our perceptions are filtered through the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Descartes faced up to this dilemma when he skeptically asked how we know whether anything exists at all. Perhaps we are all dreaming, he said. Or perhaps all that we see and hear is fed to us by an evil demon.

He resolved those doubts in a conclusion that is summed up in the famous quote: "I think, therefore I am." In acknowledging that the mere fact of thinking proves an existence of some sort, Descartes secured a foothold on a ladder of thought that, in his mind, gave certainty to an "objective" world outside himself and a "divine" world centered around God.

More recently, Descartes' formulation has been battered by relativism, to the point where some philosophers now question whether science itself can be objectively valued more than mysticism, intuition, or other "non-rational" belief systems.

Objectivity is a chimera, these philosophers say, since everyone — scientists included — is limited by their own subjective viewpoint.

Dr. Hatcher suggests that this limitation can be overcome by explicitly acknowledging one's viewpoint at the outset of any philosophical discussion — laying one's cards on the table, so to speak. He traces this idea back to Euclid, who deduced the mathematics of geometry from five basic axioms.

"The reader is free to reject Euclid's axioms if he so desires, but if he accepts them, then he cannot deny any of Euclid's further affirmations," Dr. Hatcher writes. "Euclid has

made his viewpoint totally explicit."

Applying that standard to philosophical discourse today, Dr. Hatcher writes, is a key step towards overcoming the split between the scientific materialists and the post-modern relativists on the issue of objectivity.

Another plank of the minimalist approach is that it does not close itself off to the possibility of non-material causes and realities.

"The philosophy of minimalism is open to the possibility of such phenomena as divine revelation, in which man may be given knowledge that transcends any possible rational basis that is currently known," he writes.

Indeed, Dr. Hatcher, who is himself a Bahá'í, said in an interview that much of his inspiration for the development of his method came from studying the Bahá'í writings, which uphold an highly rational view of God, religion, and theology — and also uphold the scientific method as the primary path for understanding physical reality.

He occasionally quotes 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the book, offering his insights as waypoints in the development of minimalism. Yet at the same time Dr. Hatcher indicates that while his inspiration may have come from his Bahá'í belief, his rigorous approach to applying relational logic to philosophical questions is original.

The success of his method is revealed towards the end of this short book, which is only 128 pages long, where he offers a logical proof for the existence of God.

Although Dr. Hatcher has offered this proof in previous books, in *Minimalism* he develops it fully. He essentially takes the reader by the hand and guides him/her through the sophisticated mathematical expressions of symbolic logic that, according to Dr. Hatcher, offer a virtually bulletproof argument for a single, universal, and eternal First Cause — something that is very much like God the Creator as named in all of the world's major religions.

That proof is too long to explain here, but suffice it to say that any reader with a modicum of reasoning power will find it compelling — if not wholly convincing.

Over the years, Dr. Hatcher has presented this proof in a variety of forums. No one, he said, has yet successfully refuted it, certainly not within the framework of modern logic. Assuming this holds, Dr. Hatcher — and his philosophy of minimalism — are quite likely to have a lasting influence. They certainly offer a more inspiring direction than the two other roads.*

"The philosophy of minimalism is open to the possibility of such phenomena as divine revelation, in which man may be given knowledge that transcends any possible rational basis that is currently known."

— Dr. William S. Hatcher

Computers, logic and a “middle way”

Minimalism: A Bridge between Classical Philosophy and the Bahá'í Revelation

By William S. Hatcher

Juxta Publishing

Hong Kong

While the application of the modern scientific method has reaped great rewards in terms of technological progress, its employment in the realm of philosophy has in many ways been a great disappointment.

At the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that the great scientific discoveries of the last hundred years or so have led philosophers down two divergent roads — and neither, it must be added, offers a very inspiring direction for humanity.

Down one road have gone the scientific materialists. Prompted in part by the apparent success of science at explaining physical reality (such as the nature of sub-atomic particles or the evolution of the human species), this group holds that there is nothing beyond that which can be objectified. There is no transcendent realm, no God, nothing that we cannot see, hear, touch, or experiment on.

Down the other road, so to speak, have gone the postmodern relativists. Inspired by modern scientific theories of relativity, chaos, and indeterminacy, this group concludes that nothing can be objectified. All is relative, whether culture, science, or values, and, in the end, you can't really *know* anything.

With the publication of *Minimalism: A Bridge between Classic Philosophy and the Bahá'í Revelation*, William S. Hatcher steps squarely into the middle of the fray, presenting a completely innovative philosophical approach to the kinds of questions faced by both groups of modernists.

In a nutshell, Dr. Hatcher has taken modern refinements in logic — specifically the creation of relational logic, which forms the basis for modern computing — and applied them in the realm of philosophy, in particular to the kinds of metaphysical and ethical questions that have seemed so stubbornly to resist modern analysis.

The approach offers new insights into the great questions of classic philosophers, such as whether there is a God, the nature of being, and the notion of good.

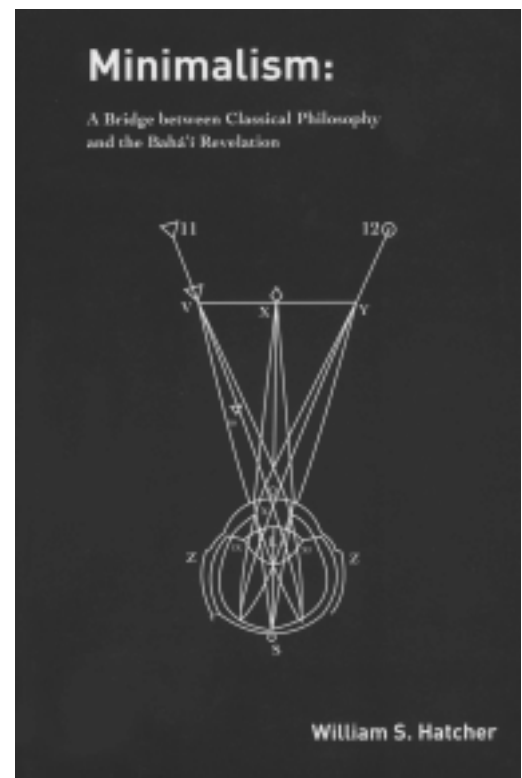
“[M]inimalism shows that there are general logical principles which are common to all intellectual endeavors, regardless of the domain of investigation in question,” he writes.

He terms his method “minimalism” because it “results from consistently making the most plausible and rational choice in the light of current knowledge” but goes no farther than is necessary.

Indeed, the essence of minimalism is rationality. As outlined by Dr. Hatcher, it steadfastly hews to logic, utilizes scientific empiricism where it is proven effective, and makes an explicit iteration of viewpoint (in an effort to circumvent the limitations imposed by human subjectivity).

At the same time, it makes no claim to possessing the ultimate truth, acknowledging that there are limits to human knowledge.

The result, he writes, is a “proactive philosophy that yields genuine results,” a



“middle way” between the “gratuitous restrictions of logical positivism” (and other scientific materialists) and the “gratuitous subjectivism of postmodernism.”

Much of the book is devoted to helping the reader understand the basics of relational

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