



## *Century of Light*

Keele Campus

The Inevitability of the First World War

*First Afternoon Session (105 minutes)*  
*8 August 2015*

## 2. Inevitability of WW1 & its Aftermath

### 2. Inevitability of WW1 & its Aftermath

Page 28: In one of the major newspapers in Montreal, where press coverage of [‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s] trip was particularly comprehensive, it was reported:

'All Europe is an armed camp. These warlike preparations will necessarily culminate in a great war. The very armaments themselves are productive of war. This great arsenal must go ablaze. There is nothing of the nature of prophecy about such a view', said 'Abdu'l- Bahá; 'it is based on reasoning solely.'

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We will now be looking at two rather dark issues, but out of their sequence in *Century of Light* because of the session lengths. Next time we will be considering what, in general, are some of the key challenges we are facing; these, in a sense, provide the overall context for what we are examining today.

The slide into war has a complex set of causes and the aftermath has many interwoven consequences.

### Group Work

For each group discussion the group should choose a facilitator: if the blended groups this morning worked well we can stick with them. It would be best to change the facilitator for each piece of group work over the series of workshops but the group will remain the same. During the consultation, the facilitator’s role is to keep track of the time, to ensure that:

1. everyone contributes something,
2. no one keeps repeating the same point, and
3. no one makes excessively long contributions.

The group also needs to agree who will keep a record of the main points for when there is a report back to everyone at the end of the group consultation. The aim should be to make the report back no longer than five minutes.

### Group One Task

#### A. Materialism, Science & War

A key component in the toxic mix of perspectives that led into WW1 was communism, with its messianic belief in the achievement of world revolution by any means no matter how violent:

Page 30: The Communist Party, deriving both its intellectual thrust and an unshakeable confidence in its ultimate triumph from the writings of the nineteenth century ideologue Karl Marx, had succeeded in establishing groups of committed supporters throughout Europe and various other countries. Convinced that the genius of its master had demonstrated beyond question **the essentially material nature of the forces that had given rise to both human consciousness and social organisation**, the Communist movement dismissed the validity of both religion and "bourgeois" moral standards. In its view, faith in God was a neurotic weakness indulged in by the human race, a weakness that had merely permitted successive ruling classes to manipulate superstition as an instrument for enslaving the masses.

The advances in science that materialism had helped make possible, added other sinister components into the mix:

- i. Ibid: To the leaders of the world, blindly edging their way towards the universal conflagration which pride and folly had prepared, the great strides being made by

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science and technology represented chiefly a means of **gaining military advantage** over their rivals.

ii. Page 31: Science and technology were also exerting other, more subtle pressures on the prevailing order. Large-scale industrial production, fuelled by the arms race, had accelerated **the movement of populations into urban centres**. By the end of the preceding century, this process was already **undermining inherited standards** and loyalties, exposing growing numbers of people to novel ideas for the bringing about of social change, and **exciting mass appetites for material benefits** previously available only to elite segments of society. . . . .

iii. Ibid: Beyond these implications of technological and economic change, scientific advancement seemed to encourage easy assumptions about human nature, the almost unnoticed overlay that Bahá'u'lláh has termed "the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge". These unexamined views communicated themselves to ever-widening audiences . . . and continued **to undermine** the authority of accepted religious doctrines, as well as of **prevailing moral standards**.

*These two workshops are largely focused on negative issues, but are an essential requirement if we are to understand (a) the predicament of those who lived through this period, (b) the roots of the problem, and (c) the challenges that confront us now. There are some key questions we now need to address.*

1. Why is materialism so toxic? Why does it matter that it confidently asserts what is now widely believed in the West, that we are nothing but the product of our physical bodies and material circumstances?
2. How is it, do we think, that science could so easily be commandeered to manufacture horrendous weapons, such as mustard gas, that would give us an edge in any conflict? Have we grown out of that kind of folly yet?
3. The quotation lists the damage that stemmed from industrialisation, including the erosion of standards and the appetite for material goods. What other problems do we think we have seen from an increasing use of industrial methods on a global scale?
4. In what ways does the undermining of religious standards matter?

### Group Two Task

#### B. The Costs of War

Page 32: It would serve no purpose here to review the exhaustively analysed cataclysm of World War I. The statistics themselves remain almost beyond the ability of the human mind to encompass: an estimated sixty million men eventually being thrown into the most horrific inferno that history had ever known, eight million of them perishing in the course of the war and an additional ten million or more being permanently disabled by crippling injuries, burned-out lungs and appalling disfigurements. Historians have suggested that the total financial cost may have reached thirty billion dollars, wiping out a substantial portion of the total capital wealth of Europe.

Even such massive losses do not begin to suggest the full scope of the ruin. One of the considerations that long held back President Woodrow Wilson from proposing to the United States Congress the declaration of war that had by then become virtually inescapable was his awareness of the **moral damage** that would ensue. Not the least of the distinctions that characterized this extraordinary man - a statesman whose vision both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have praised - was his understanding of the **brutalisation of human nature** that would be the worst legacy of the tragedy that was by then engulfing Europe, a legacy beyond human capacity to reverse.

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Page 33: The **ruinous reparations** demanded of the vanquished - and the injustice that required them to accept the full guilt for a war for which all parties had been, to one degree or another, responsible - were among the factors that would prepare demoralised peoples in Europe to embrace totalitarian promises of relief which they might not otherwise have contemplated.

. . . . The **deaths of millions of young men** who would have been urgently needed to meet the challenges of the coming decades was a loss that could never be recovered. Indeed, Europe itself - which only four brief years earlier had represented the apparent summit of civilisation and world influence - lost at one stroke this pre-eminence, and began the inexorable slide during the following decades toward the status of an auxiliary to a rising new centre of power in North America.

*These two workshops are largely focused on negative issues, but are an essential requirement if we are to understand (a) the predicament of those who lived through this period, (b) the roots of the problem, and (c) the challenges that confront us now. There are some key questions we now need to address.*

1. What do we think might have been, and perhaps still are, the signs of the 'moral damage' and 'brutalisation of human nature' caused by war? What part if any would the deaths of millions of young men have played in this process of brutalisation?
2. The Bahá'í Writings and evolutionary theory suggest that a sense of justice or fairness is inherent in human beings. How would this have affected the way that the conquered nations experienced the 'ruinous reparations' and how might their sense of righteous action have affected the victors?

**Report Back:** *One member of each group explains their conclusions and what they have learnt. Their group members can join in to field whatever questions and comments come their way.*

### Whole Group Session (Slide Presentation)

#### C. League of Nations & the United States

On pages 34-35 *Century of Light* explains the flawed process by which the League of Nations was set up and failed to function as a result. As Shoghi Effendi pointed out 'It received its initial impetus through the formulation of President Wilson's Fourteen Points, closely associating for the first time that republic with the fortunes of the Old World. It suffered its first set-back through the dissociation of that republic from the newly born League of Nations which that president had laboured to create . . .'

While the world must move 'to the emergence of a world government and the establishment of the Lesser Peace, as foretold by Bahá'u'lláh' the obstacles that still remain are many, and we will be looking at part of this process in a future workshop.

The League of Nations foundered on the rocks of other problems than simply the dissociation of the United States: 'it could take decisions only with the unanimous assent of the member states', and it failed 'to include some of the world's most powerful states: Germany had been rejected as a defeated nation held responsible for the war, Russia was initially denied entrance because of its Bolshevik regime, and the United States itself refused - as a result of narrow political partisanship in Congress - either to join the League or to ratify the treaty.' It is in this context that we begin to look at the heroic efforts of a key Bahá'í figure.

#### D. Shoghi Effendi's Ministry

A topic to which we will be returning for consideration in its own right is the station and role of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. For now we will simply look at the impact of the war's aftermath on the world within which he had to work.

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### i) The Context of his Work

The most obvious factor impacting upon his work is that (page 43) ‘the first half of [his] ministry unfolded between wars, a period marked by deepening uncertainty and anxiety about all aspects of human affairs.’

The situation thus created was not all bad (ibid): ‘On the one hand, significant advances had been made in **overcoming barriers between nations and classes**; on the other, **political impotence** and a resulting **economic paralysis** greatly handicapped efforts to take advantage of these openings.’

An important potential positive was that (ibid) ‘There was everywhere a sense that some fundamental redefinition of the nature of society and the role its institutions should play was urgently needed - a redefinition, indeed, of the purpose of human life itself.’

*Century of Light* spells out some of the details of these possible positives, some of which are the reverse side of the coin of the period’s downside (ibid):

In important respects, humanity found itself at the end of the first world war able to explore possibilities never before imagined (my numbering).

1. Throughout Europe and the Near East the absolutist systems that had been among the most powerful barriers to unity had been swept away.
2. To a great extent, too, fossilised religious dogmas that had lent moral endorsement to the forces of conflict and alienation were everywhere in question.
3. Former subject peoples were free to consider plans for their collective futures and to assume responsibility for their relationships with one another through the instrumentality of the new nation-states created by the Versailles settlement.
4. The same ingenuity that had gone into producing weapons of destruction was being turned to the challenging, but rewarding, tasks of economic expansion.
5. . . . Most important of all, an extraordinary effort of imagination had brought the unification of humanity one immense step forward. The world's leaders, however reluctantly, had created an international consultative system which, though crippled by vested interests, gave the ideal of international order its first suggestion of shape and structure.

*Century of Light* goes on to refer to the positive examples of [Sun Yat-Sen](#) in China and Mahandas Ghandi in India.

### ii) Shoghi Effendi’s Perspective

There is a key paragraph on page 52 (my numbering):

The landscape of international affairs would, he said, be increasingly reshaped by twin forces of "integration" and "disintegration", both of them ultimately beyond human control. In the light of what meets our eyes today, his previsioning of the operation of this dual process is breathtaking:

- a) the creation of "a mechanism of world inter-communication ... functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity";
- b) the undermining of the nation-state as the chief arbiter of human destiny;
- c) the devastating effects that advancing moral breakdown throughout the world would have on social cohesion;
- d) the widespread public disillusionment produced by political corruption; and

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- e) - unimaginable to others of his generation - the rise of global agencies dedicated to promoting human welfare, coordinating economic activity, defining international standards, and encouraging a sense of solidarity among diverse races and cultures.

These and other developments, the Guardian explained, would fundamentally alter the conditions in which the Bahá'í Cause would pursue its mission in the decades lying ahead.

1. In terms of the world as we understand it, how accurate do we feel this analysis is?
2. What, if any, do we feel are the weaknesses of the many global agencies now in existence to effectively address the problems of the planet and of humanity?
3. Do those weaknesses have any remedies?

*(End of Presentation)*

### Group Work

#### Group One Task

#### E. The Corrosion of Ungodliness

*Century of Light* describes how the Bahá'í Faith is gaining increasing recognition while the social fabric surrounding it increasingly disintegrates (page 59): 'As the Bahá'í community was constructing administrative foundations which would permit it to play an effective role in human affairs, the accelerating process of disintegration that Shoghi Effendi had discerned was undermining the fabric of social order. Its origins, however determinedly ignored by many social and political theorists, are beginning, after the lapse of several decades, to gain recognition at international conferences devoted to peace and development.' Alongside this comes an increased recognition of **'the essential role that "spiritual" and "moral" forces must play in achieving solutions to urgent problems.'**

That there is still prevalent a **'corrosion of ungodliness'** is primarily, in the Guardian's view, the 'responsibility . . . . of the world's religious leaders. Bahá'u'lláh's severest condemnation is reserved for those who, presuming to speak in God's name, have imposed on credulous **masses a welter of dogmas and prejudices that have constituted the greatest single obstacle against which the advancement of civilisation has been forced to struggle,**' while he acknowledges at the same time 'the humanitarian services of countless individual clerics.'

Their mistakes have left a vacuum that had to be filled (pages 59-60): **'The yearning for belief is inextinguishable,** an inherent part of what makes one human. When it is blocked or betrayed, **the rational soul is driven to seek some new compass point,** however inadequate or unworthy, around which it can organise experience and dare again to assume the risks that are an inescapable aspect of life.'

This is something that Bahá'ís must take into full account. Nowadays, in the Guardian's words, **'an idolatrous world passionately and clamorously hails and worships the false gods which its own idle fancies have fatuously created,** and its misguided hands so impiously exalted.... Their high priests are the politicians and the worldly-wise, the so-called sages of the age; their sacrifice, the flesh and blood of the slaughtered multitudes . . . .'

#### Additional Ideas from John Fitzgerald Medina's *Faith, Physics & Psychology*:

Page 184: [He speaks of] classical science's de-spiritualised view of the natural world. Francis Bacon, an early classical scientist, provides a quintessential example of this

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despiritualised view. He wrote that nature should be ‘hounded in her wanderings,’ ‘bound into service,’ and made a ‘slave, while the goal of the scientist is to ‘torture nature’s secrets from her.’

Page 217: [cf *Blackfoot Physics* by F. David Peat]: Quantum physics now supports a picture of the universe as a dynamic, indivisible whole in which everything is interconnected and interrelated. . . .

Page 223-24: . . . in a much needed move, Enlightenment intellectuals did much to expose the gross corruption of the worldly, power-seeking clergy of their time. Unfortunately, because of their ‘blind rationalism’ and their overzealous efforts to expose church superstition, fanaticism, and hypocrisy, they ultimately promulgated an antimetaphysical outlook that has done much to undermine the faith and spirituality of people to this day.

Page 226: Unbalanced materialism has ultimately resulted in a loss of reverence for life and has diminished our appreciation for the supreme values of life such as compassion, justice, unity, joyfulness, love, service, generosity, patience, moderation, humility – all of which lead to personal wholeness and add an essential richness, beauty, and purpose to life.

Page 227: Locke’s ideas eventually led to the establishment of Western economic values such as free markets, property rights, individualism, and self interest as the primary force that motivates the actions of individuals, and the idea that prices are determined objectively by supply and demand. According to Locke, the right to private property represents the fruits of one’s labours. Furthermore, he emphasises the idea that the purpose of government is to protect individual private property.

. . . . Unfortunately, as will be shown later, Locke’s ideas (as is the case with most Cartesian-Newtonian concepts) have led to destructive outcomes.

Page 230: In retrospect, considering all the defects of *laissez-faire* capitalism, it can be argued that had it not been for the eventual “interference” of government reforms, *laissez-faire* capitalism would have doomed, to this day, the European and American masses to industrial slavery.

. . . it is important to note that the alternative economic system of socialism is also fundamentally flawed. . . Both systems place undue importance on economics as the core of civilisation. . . . From a spiritual perspective, in spite of all their surface differences, capitalism and socialism, when applied in actual practice, have both been destructive to human beings, communities, and the environment.

Page 238: . . . Herman Daly, a World Bank economist, and John Cobb, a Protestant theologian, . . affirm that the exclusion of religious and spiritual values from ‘economic science’ has had a devastating impact on people, communities, and the environment. They state, ‘Adam Smith himself emphasised in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that the market [freemarket capitalism] is a system so dangerous that it presupposes the moral force of shared community values as its necessary restraining context.’

Pages 250-51: Holistic advocates, in contrast, insist that the entire global order must be transformed in order to honour the true spiritual potential of people. They assert that transcendent spiritual qualities make human beings inherently capable of great acts of altruism, love, generosity, and self-sacrifice; however, the current global order encourages the development of greed, self-centredness, competition, hedonism, and the like.

1. Why might spiritual and moral forces be so crucial to solving the world’s current problems?
2. Why is ungodliness corrosive? What is the evidence, do we think, for the idea that ‘the rational soul is driven to seek some new compass point, however inadequate or unworthy, around which it can organise experience’?

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3. The cost in flesh and blood of our idolatries was evident throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Are we still paying the same price for the same reason?

4. Are the checks and balances that have been introduced to reduce the injustices of the untrammelled sufficient? If so, how do they work? If not, why not?

### Group Two Task

#### F. The Three 'Crooked Doctrines'

We have already met one of these – communism – earlier today: the other two, according to Shoghi Effendi (pages 60-63), are Nationalism and Racism. These are among the ideologies that amount to being false religions in terms of the fanatical fervour they elicit from their adherents. He spells out the distinction between the latter two: ' . . . While sharing Fascism's idolatry of the state, its sister ideology Nazism made itself the voice of a far more ancient and insidious perversion. At its dark heart was an obsession with what its proponents called "race purity". . . . The Nazi system was unique in **the sheer bestiality of the act most commonly associated with its name, the programme of genocide systematically carried out against populations considered either valueless or harmful to humanity's future**, a programme that included a deliberate attempt literally to exterminate the entire Jewish people. . . '

Communism was, however, not well placed to claim the moral high ground: 'For long years, the Soviet system created by Vladimir Lenin succeeded in representing itself to many as a benefactor of humankind and the champion of social justice. In the light of historical events, such pretensions were grotesque. The documentation now available provides **irrefutable evidence of crimes so enormous and follies so abysmal as to have no parallel in the six thousand years of recorded history. . .**' As a result partly of the influence of these three pernicious perspectives 'The brutalisation that the first world war had engendered now became an omnipresent feature of social life throughout much of the planet.'

#### Additional Ideas from John Fitzgerald Medina's *Faith, Physics & Psychology*:

Page 112: As proof that such secular spirituality is highly dubious, consider the fact that many Enlightenment philosophers spoke eloquently about justice, equality, and liberty, and yet in the end, supported slavery, racism, classism, sexism, and genocide against American Indians.

Page 233: It is ironic that Marxist revolutionary Communists set themselves up as the primary mortal enemies of *laissez-faire* capitalism because, in actuality, Marxist Communism and *laissez-faire* capitalism are both extreme manifestations of the same Cartesian-Newtonian worldview.

Page 235: Many fervent advocates of capitalism boast that the failures of socialist schemes prove the inherent superiority and basic soundness of capitalist theory. Such boasts are warranted only if one thinks that capitalism and socialism are the only two economic choices available to humanity. The fact that so many people have been conditioned to think that capitalism and socialism are the only two plausible economic choices clearly reveals the Cartesian-Newtonian stranglehold on the Western imagination.

Page 272: Based on an overall view history, it is clear that the Cartesian-Newtonian world view that began to emerge in the 1500s is a common denominator connecting all the following movements:

1. The Scientific Revolution and the development of the Age of Science (from the 1500s until now);

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2. The establishment of the American colonies and the founding and consolidation of the United States – including the conquest of the Indians and the enslavement of Blacks (from the late 1500s through the late 1800s);
3. The formal development of the ideology of racism – the ideology of White racial superiority and on-White inferiority (from the late 1600s until now); . . .

Page 274: In his book *Racial Unity: An Imperative for Social Progress*, [Historian Richard] Thomas writes,

American fashioned a special brand of political and moral compromise that helped it to rationalise both the conquest of the native people and the enslavement of blacks. Since America was not about to abandon slave labour or its policy of dispossessing the native peoples of their land, the only real and practical choice was to minimise the nature of its sins: blacks and native peoples (Indians) were not to be considered on the same level of humanity as whites; blacks were heathen and immoral, next to the apes in the scale of evolution. Gradually an ideology emerged in the United States and Britain which explained that white racial dominance was a blessing... Both countries began formulating a racist ideology to cover those moral contradictions that collided with certain Christian and Enlightenment beliefs [all men created equal, inalienable rights, et cetera]. . . .

He explains how the pathology of racism, as we now know it, can be traced to the conquest of American Indians and the enslavement of Blacks in the American colonies beginning in the late 1600s.

Page 282: One of the most tragic aspects of this [the 1950s] period is that some of it could have been prevented had American leaders acted with wisdom and courage. Sadly, even President Dwight D Eisenhower, the same man who, as a ranking general, had commanded great armies against the forces of Nazi oppression in Europe, publicly made it clear that he was not in favour of school integration and that he thought the Supreme Court decision requiring desegregation was wrong.

Page 344: Nonetheless, as seen in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, it is unnecessary to adopt a moral relativist attitude to combat cultural imperialism and racism. The Bahá'í teachings assert that there are some absolute values such as justice and compassion, which apply equally to all the members of the human race irrespective of culture.

1. How is it possible for huge numbers of human beings to commit such large scale atrocities?
2. When we look around us now, where do we see evidence of brutalisation?
3. How can people on the one hand advocate equality, as the founding fathers of America did, and yet at the same time condone slavery and effective genocide.
4. What are the dangers of 'moral relativism'? Does this mean there are no problems with moral absolutes? Are absolutes such as justice and compassion free from any of these dangers? If so, why? If not, why not?

**Report Back:** *One member of each group explains their conclusions and what they have learnt. Their group members can join in to field whatever questions and comments come their way.*

**AND please don't forget the memorisation practice over night!**

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### Supplementary Material for Group Work (to be tackled if there is time or deferred to Session 4)

Having confronted over the last hour or so the dark side of human reality, now we can begin to examine the flickering of various candles beginning to combat this darkness.

#### Group One Task

##### G. Unity and the UN

*Century of Light* explains how even the darkness itself contains hints of potential light (pages 70-71): 'At a relatively early point in the second world war, the Guardian set that conflict in a perspective for Bahá'ís that was very different from the one generally prevailing. The war should be regarded, he said, "as the direct continuation" of the conflagration ignited in 1914. It would come to be seen as the **"essential pre-requisite to world unification"**. The entry into the war by the **United States**, whose president had initiated the project of a system of international order, but which had itself rejected this visionary initiative, would lead that nation, Shoghi Effendi predicted, to "assume through adversity **its preponderating share of responsibility to lay down, once for all, broad, worldwide, unassailable foundations of that discredited yet immortal System.**"

The dimly discerned positives relate to the key concept we will be exploring more fully later (page 71): 'If the change could not yet be described as an emerging conviction about **the oneness of humankind**, no objective observer could mistake the fact that **barriers blocking such a realisation**, which had survived all the assaults against them earlier in the century, **were at last giving way**. . . . The years immediately following 1945 witnessed advances in framing a new social order that went far beyond the brightest hopes of earlier decades.' The clearest example of this, they explain, (pages 71-72) is found when, 'Meeting in San Francisco in April 1945 - in the state where 'Abdu'l-Bahá had prophetically declared, "May the first flag of international peace be upraised in this state" - delegates of fifty nations adopted the Charter of the United Nations Organisation, the name proposed for it by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. . . .'

This led onto (pages 72-73) 'the United Nations' adoption of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. The moral commitment it represented was institutionalized in the subsequent establishment of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. In due course, the Bahá'í community itself would have good cause to appreciate, at first-hand, the system's importance as **a shield protecting minorities from the abuses of the past.**'

And even the shibboleth of national sovereignty had taken a hit (page 73): '[Concerning the trial of Nazi leaders] Although the integrity of the proceedings was gravely marred by the participation of judges appointed by a Soviet dictatorship whose own crimes matched or exceeded those of the defendants' regime, the act set an historic precedent. It demonstrated, for the first time, that **the fetish of "national sovereignty" has recognizable and enforceable limits.**'

Most of what is said immediately above is straightforward history. There are two questions we might want to deal with briefly.

1. Do we wish briefly to explore the nature of such prejudices as have caused great suffering not only to the Bahá'ís in Iran but to many other minorities elsewhere?
2. Why does *Century of Light* describe 'national sovereignty' as a 'fetish'? (*Fetish* means an obsession or idol in this context.)

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### H. Green Shoots

Page 74: Beyond all the continuing educational disadvantages, the economic inequities, and the obstructions created by political and diplomatic manoeuvring - beyond all these practical but historically transient limitations - **a new authority was at work in human affairs to which all might reasonably hope somehow to appeal.** . . . [Once subject peoples were now being represented.]

. . . . As time passed, growing numbers of outstanding figures in every walk of life would escape the familiar limits of racial, cultural or religious identity. In every continent of the globe, names like Anne Frank, Martin Luther King Jr., [Paolo Freire](#), [Ravi Shankar](#), [Gabriel Garcia Marques](#), [Kiri Te Kanawa](#), [Andrei Sakharov](#), Mother Teresa and [Zhang Yimou](#) became sources of inspiration and encouragement to great numbers of their fellow citizens. . . . The world-wide outpouring of affection and rejoicing that was to greet the release from prison of Nelson Mandela and his subsequent election as president of his country would reflect a sense among peoples of every race and nation that these historic events represented victories of the human family itself.

*Question.* Apart from the most famous ones in the list, ie Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Anne Frank and Nelson Mandela, do we know why the others are mentioned? What does this suggest about the possibility of a sea-change in world affairs?

### Group Two Task

#### I. The Cold War & beyond

After the second world war we moved into a period termed the 'Cold War.' *Century of Light* summarises the situation (page 87): 'Hardly had hostilities ended than the ideological divisions between Marxism and liberal democracy burst out into attempts to secure dominance between the respective blocs of nations they inspired. The phenomenon of "Cold War", in which **the struggle for advantage stopped just short of military conflict**, emerged as the prevailing political paradigm of the next several decades.

This tense stand off was in response to the atom bomb's threat of '**mutually assured destruction**' (page 88): 'For Bahá'ís, the prospect could only bring vividly to mind the sombre warning uttered by Bahá'u'lláh decades earlier: "Strange and astonishing things exist in the earth but they are hidden from the minds and the understanding of men. These things are capable of changing the whole atmosphere of the earth and their contamination would prove lethal."' **The Soviet Union sought to capitalise on the injustices of colonialism** in what was termed the 'Third World' while '**the response of the West** - wherever development aid failed to retain the loyalties of recipient populations - **was to resort to the encouragement and arming of a wide variety of authoritarian regimes.**'

Even after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, materialism continued effectively unchallenged (pages 89-90): 'impulses to devise and promote any formal materialistic belief system disappeared. Nor would any useful purpose have been served by such efforts, as materialism was soon facing no significant challenge in most parts of the world. **Religion, where not simply driven back into fanaticism and unthinking rejection of progress, became progressively reduced to a kind of personal preference, a predilection, a pursuit designed to satisfy spiritual and emotional needs of the individual.** The sense of historical mission that had defined the major Faiths learned to content itself with providing religious endorsement for campaigns of social change carried on by secular movements. The academic world, once the scene of great exploits of the mind and spirit, settled into **the role of a kind of**

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**scholastic industry** preoccupied with tending its machinery of dissertations, symposia, publication credits and grants.'

1. How can we explain how religion in certain places at certain times slides into fanaticism?
2. At the same time, elsewhere, it becomes a consumer fad. How does that happen, do we think?

Whether as world-view or simple appetite, **materialism's effect is to leach out of human motivation - and even interest - the spiritual impulses** that distinguish the rational soul. "For **self-love**," 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said, "**is kneaded into the very clay of man**, and it is not possible that, without any hope of a substantial reward, he should neglect his own present material good." In the absence of conviction about the spiritual nature of reality and the fulfilment it alone offers, it is not surprising to find at the very heart of the current crisis of civilisation **a cult of individualism** that increasingly admits of no restraint and that elevates acquisition and personal advancement to the status of major cultural values. The resulting **atomisation of society** has marked a new stage in the process of disintegration about which the writings of Shoghi Effendi speak so urgently.

. . . . However important the application of legal, sociological or technological expertise to such issues undoubtedly is, it would be unrealistic to imagine that efforts of this kind will produce any significant recovery **without a fundamental change of moral consciousness and behaviour**.

Page 91-92: . . . **the unification of humankind under a system of governance** that can release the full potentialities latent in human nature, and **allow their expression in programmes for the benefit of all**, is clearly the next stage in the evolution of civilisation. The **physical unification of the planet** in our time and **the awakening aspirations of the mass of its inhabitants** have at last produced the conditions that permit achievement of the ideal, although in a manner far different from that imagined by imperial dreamers of the past. . . .

. . . . That yet greater suffering and disillusionment will be required to impel humanity to this great leap forward appears, alas, equally clear. Its establishment will require **national governments and other centres of power to surrender to international determination**, unconditionally and irreversibly, the full measure of overriding authority implicit in the word "government".

The quotations immediately above pinpoint precisely the opposing forces of integration and disintegration.

1. In what way could 'the spiritual impulses that distinguish the rational soul' lead to 'a fundamental change of moral consciousness and behaviour' that would reverse the 'atomisation of society'?
2. How would such a transformation assist humanity to relinquish its attachment to the nation state and allow 'national governments and other centres of power to surrender' their authority 'to international determination'? The current debate over the European Union helps give us a sense of what might be involved.

*Group Report Back: this is to be done as an exercise in role play. As far as time permits, one member of each group takes it in turns to explain to a member of the other group what they have learnt and needs to field whatever questions and comments come their way.*

## 2. Inevitability of WW1 & its Aftermath

### **Next time:**

We will be examining the components of the wreck preparatory to inching towards an understanding of what we all need to do in response, whether Bahá'ís or not.