

Partisan Conflict

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While watching or reading the news I am often reminded of the words of the prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith, who wrote, "No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united. The evidences of discord and malice are apparent everywhere, though all were made for harmony and union."

Just the negative economic impact of partisan conflict has led researchers to devise the Partisan Conflict Index. Published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, the index tracks the degree of political disagreement among U.S. politicians at the federal level. The bank says, "Research suggests that increased partisan conflict increases uncertainty among firms and households. Such uncertainty has been shown to slow economic activity by delaying business investment and consumer spending."

Regarding the outcome of conflicts, the Baha'i writings say, "when thou traversest the regions of the world, thou shalt conclude that all progress is the result of association and co-operation, while ruin is the outcome of animosity and hatred."

"Consider the phenomenon of composition and decomposition, of existence and non-existence. Every created thing in the contingent world is made up of many and varied atoms, and its existence is dependent on the composition of these. But when the order is deranged, decomposition is produced and disintegration setteth in, then that thing ceaseth to exist. Through affinity and attraction all living things like plants, animals and men come into existence, while division and discord bring about decomposition and destruction."

Against the backdrop of partisan division in our country, the United Religions Initiative (URI) hosted the international Accelerate Peace conference at Stanford University on June 26-27. It was incredibly inspiring to see people from all faiths and cultures come together under one roof to peacefully discuss "the interfaith strategies for global peacebuilding."

One might ask what has caused this group of people to be united despite all their religious and cultural differences. In answer the Baha'i writings offer these analogies:

"Consider the flowers of a garden: though differing in kind, colour, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm, and addeth unto their beauty. Thus when that unifying force, the penetrating influence of the Word of God, taketh effect, the difference of customs, manners, habits, ideas, opinions and dispositions embellisheth the world of humanity."

"This difference is like the naturally created dissimilarity and variety of the limbs and organs of the human body, for each one contributeth to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole. When these different limbs and organs come under the influence of man's sovereign soul, and the soul's power pervadeth the limbs and members, veins and arteries of the body, then difference reinforceth harmony, diversity strengtheneth love, and multiplicity is the greatest factor for coordination."

These writings go on to emphasize that, "Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men."

By continued concord and cooperation among our faith communities let us show the rest of the nation the influence, potency and unifying power of the Word of God.