

THE PROSPERITY OF HUMANKIND

Bahá'í International Community

Office of Public Information 1995

Part IV – Knowledge, science and religion

in simplified language

Prosperity of Humankind - 5

Access to knowledge

The development of a global society calls for levels of capacity far beyond anything the human race has so far known. This will require a great expansion in access to knowledge for both individuals and social organisations. Universal education will be an essential contributor to this process of capacity building, but the effort will require the reorganisation of human affairs so that both individuals and groups in every part of society can acquire knowledge and apply it to human affairs.

Science and religion

Throughout history, human consciousness has depended upon two basic knowledge systems to express its growing potential: science and religion. Through these two complementary systems, our experience has been organised, our environment interpreted, our undeveloped powers explored, and our moral and intellectual life disciplined. They have acted as the real creators of civilization. Looking back, it is clear that this dual structure has been most effective when religion and science were able to work together.

Science tells us our future and the risks we face

Scenarios from *Limits to Growth – 1972* (Meadows et al. (1992) *Beyond the Limits*)

SCENARIO 1

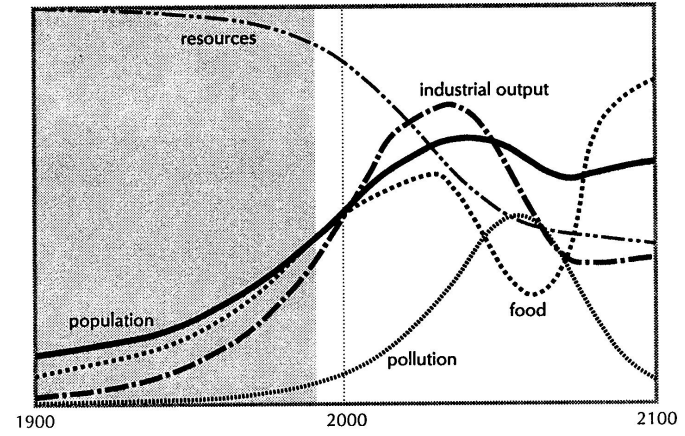
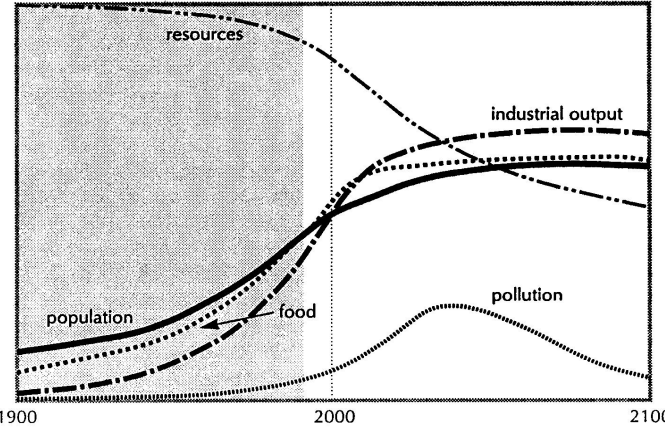
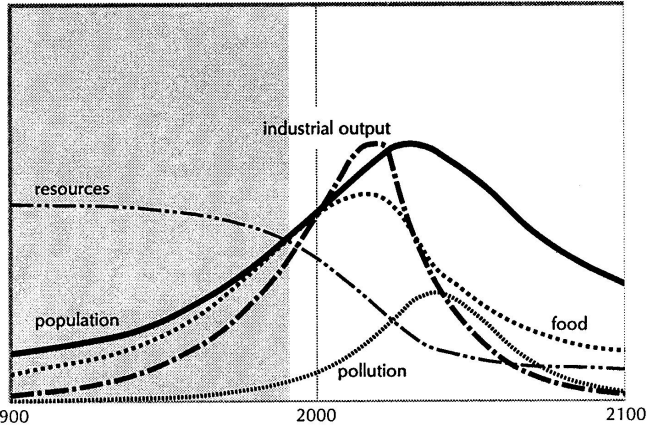
SCENARIO 10

SCENARIO 12

State of the world

State of the world

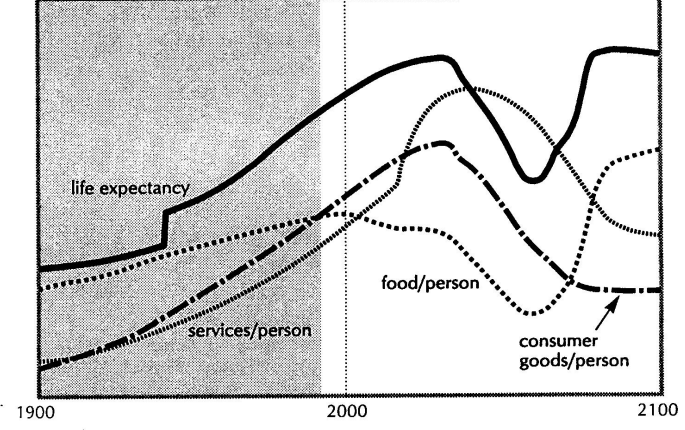
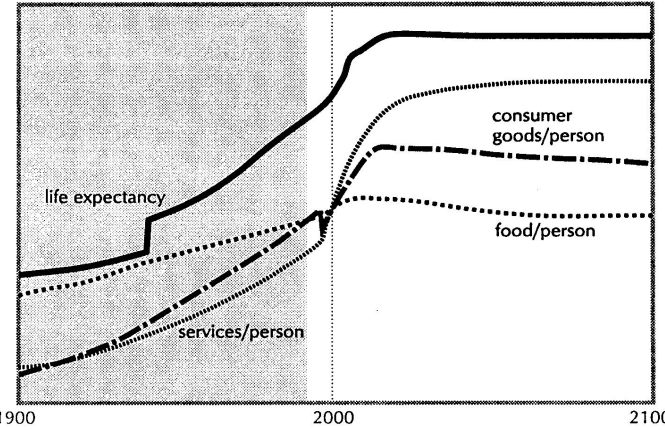
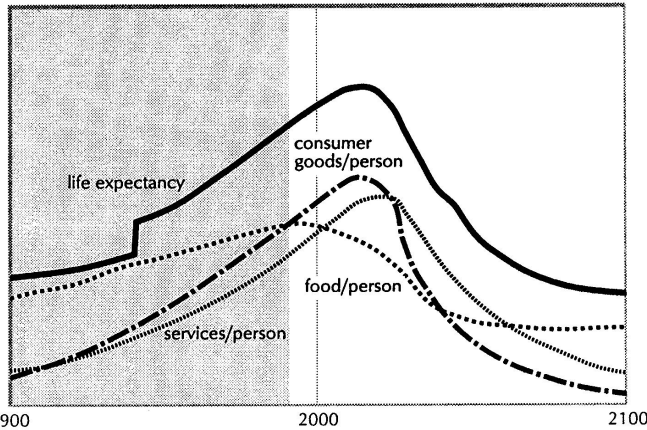
State of the world



Material standard of living

Material standard of living

Material standard of living



Business as usual

Transition 1995

Transition 2015

Science

Science is almost universally respected today. For a strategy of social and economic development, the issue is how scientific and technological activity is to be organised. If the work involved is reserved for top people in a small number of nations, it is obvious that the large gap already created between the world's rich and poor will only widen, with a disastrous effect on the world's economy. If most people continue to be seen mainly as users of products of science and technology created elsewhere, then programmes supposed to serve their needs cannot be called "development".

Centres of learning

The big challenge is the expansion of scientific and technological activity. These are such powerful tools of social and economic change that they must no longer belong only to advantaged parts of society, and must be so organised as to permit people everywhere to participate based on their capacity. Programmes should make the required education available to all who are able to benefit from it. Then centres of learning should be established throughout the world to enable all peoples to create and apply knowledge.

Equal access

While there are wide differences in individual capacity, development strategy must take as a major goal making it possible for all of the earth's peoples to access on an equal basis the processes of science and technology. The rapid development of communication technologies now brings information and training within reach of people around the globe, wherever they may be, whatever their culture.

Religious life

There are different but equally great challenges facing humanity in its religious life. For most people in the world, it is true that human nature has a spiritual dimension and our fundamental identity is spiritual. This is an understanding of reality that goes back to the earliest civilizations and that is found for several thousand years in every one of the great religions. Its lasting achievements in law, the fine arts, and the civilising of human relations give content and meaning to history. In one form or another it has a daily influence in the lives of most people on earth and it awakens powerful hopes.

Spiritual capacities

Efforts of any kind to promote human progress should obviously try to draw on capacities so universal and so creative. Why, then, have spiritual issues facing humanity not been central to talk of development? Why have most of the priorities and assumptions of international development been determined so far by the materialistic world views of a small minority of the earth's population? How can experts say they support universal participation but refuse the participants' defining cultural experience?

Spiritual and moral issues

Some say that spiritual and moral issues have historically been linked to quarrels about doctrines which cannot be proven objectively, so these issues are outside the international community's development concerns. To give them a role would open the door to influences creating social conflict and blocking human progress. This may be partly true. Those who speak for the world's religious systems are responsible both for the bad reputation of faith among many progressive thinkers, and for fears and distortions when talking about spiritual meaning.

Spiritual and moral issues

This does not mean that one should not investigate spiritual reality and ignore the deepest roots of human motivation. The refusal to consider these issues has only given the power to shape humanity's future to those that argue that truth is without morals and facts are independent of values.

Religion and morality

With respect to life on earth, many of the greatest achievements of religion have been about morality. Through its teachings and those who lived by these teachings, many people in all ages and lands have developed the capacity to love. They have learned to discipline the animal side of their natures, to make great sacrifices for the common good, to practice forgiveness, generosity, and trust, to use wealth and other resources to advance civilization.

Religion and morality

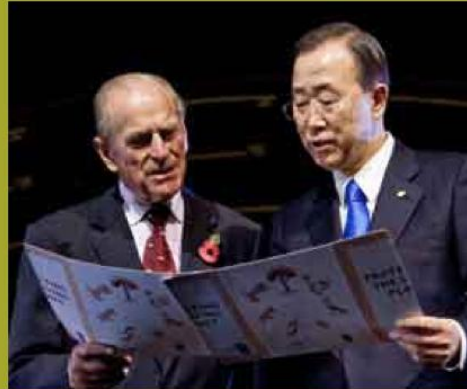
Institutions have been created to apply these moral advances to social life. While they may be hidden by later interpretations and conflict between sects, the spiritual forces set in motion by such transcendent figures as Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Muhammad have been the chief influence in the civilising of human character.

Dialogue between science and religion

Our challenge today is to help humankind to advance through a great increase in access to knowledge. The strategy to make this possible must be built around an increasing dialogue between science and religion. It is obvious that, in all human activity and at every level, the knowledge and skills from science must be combined with the force of spiritual commitment and moral principle to be applied in the right way.

Windsor Celebration 2009

Religion and Climate Change



Dialogue between science and religion

People need, for example, to learn how to separate fact from guesses, and their personal views from the reality outside. In order to contribute to human progress, individuals and institutions will need to be devoted to truth and detached from their own interests and passions.

Dialogue between science and religion

Science must also cultivate in all people the capacity to think in terms of process, how things happen, including in history. For this intellectual progress to contribute to development, it must not be influenced by prejudices of race, culture, sex, or narrow religious belief. Similarly, training people to produce wealth will advance development only if the desire comes from the spiritual understanding that service to humankind is the purpose of both individual life and social organisation.