



became known for His generosity and kindness which made Him deeply loved among His countrymen.

This privileged position did not long survive Bahá'u'lláh's announcement of support for the message of the Báb. Engulfed in the waves of violence unleashed upon the Bábis after the Báb's execution Bahá'u'lláh suffered not only the loss of all His worldly endowments but was subjected to imprisonment, torture, and a series of banishments. The first was to Baghdad where, in 1863, He announced Himself as the One promised by the Báb. From Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh was sent to Constantinople, to Adrianople, and finally to Acre, in the Holy Land, where He arrived as a prisoner in 1868.

From Adrianople and later from Acre, Bahá'u'lláh addressed a series of letters

to the rulers of His day that are among the most remarkable documents in religious history. They proclaimed the coming unification of humanity and the emergence of a world civilization.

The kings, emperors, and presidents of the nineteenth century were called upon to reconcile their differences, curtail their armaments, and devote their energies to the establishment of universal peace.

Bahá'u'lláh passed away at Bahjí, just north of Acre, and is buried there.

His

teachings had already begun to spread beyond the confines of the Middle East, and His Shrine is today the focal point of the world community which these teachings have brought into being.

### A Way of Life

Bahá'u'lláh taught that each human being is "a mine rich in gems" unknown even to the owner, let alone to others, and inexhaustible in its wealth. The purpose of life is to develop these capacities both for one's own life and for the service of humanity. Life in this world, as Bahá'u'lláh presents it, is like

the life of a child in the womb of its mother: the moral, intellectual, and spiritual powers which a human being develops here, with the help of God, will be the "limbs" and "organs" needed for the soul's progress in the worlds beyond this earthly one.

The way of life which Bahá'ís seek to cultivate, therefore, is one that encourages personal development. Daily prayer and meditation free the soul from conditioned patterns and open it to new possibilities. Joining in projects with peoples of diverse backgrounds breaks down traditional prejudices. The use of alcohol or narcotic drugs is avoided, except when prescribed for medical reasons, because these substances eventually deaden the mind. The latter is also true of the habit of backbiting, which weakens trust between people and undermines the spirit of unity upon which human progress depends. Bahá'u'lláh's writings attach great importance to the institution of the family as the foundation of human society. The sanctity of marriage,

recognition of the equality of the husband and wife, and the use of consultation are especially emphasized.

For the individual, the day-to-day practice of the Bahá'í Faith gradually becomes an entirely new way of life. Yet, in contrast to the image of a religious lifestyle that is cloistered or ignorant of worldly concerns, the way of life for Bahá'ís and their families is one which is at once and the same time both deeply spiritual and eminently practical.

For while Bahá'ís are encouraged -- indeed, it is considered a religious obligation -- to pray and meditate every day, they are also expected to be wholly engaged with the world at large. In particular, Bahá'u'lláh asks that Bahá'ís view service to humanity as among their highest priorities.

In this regard, Bahá'ís outwardly appear to lead a life that is in many respects not much different from their friends and neighbors: they work, raise families, participate in community affairs and enjoy such modern social activities as watching movies or television, attending or competing in athletic games, and taking part in festivals and other general cultural events.

On another level, however, those who have become Bahá'ís find that their inner lives, their outlook on life, as well as the nature and quality of their personal relationships and social interactions, all change rather dramatically over time, leading to an entirely new sense of purpose, a new vitality in the approach to challenges and difficulties, and an overall feeling of well-being, even in the face of obstacles. It is, many Bahá'ís will tell you, exactly the sort of spiritual rebirth that is promised by all of the world's great religions -- but one which is wholly compatible and consonant with a modern global society.

Whether one is born into a Bahá'í family or a new declarant, the spiritual growth that one strives for as a Bahá'í becomes a life-long process. Whether in terms of spiritual practice, moral behavior, social activism or community participation, Bahá'ís seek to continually improve themselves and the world around them.

#### The Inner Life

Like the Messengers of God that have come before Him, Bahá'u'lláh explained that prayer is among the most important ways to cultivate spiritual growth and development. Bahá'u'lláh wrote thousands of prayers. There are prayers for general use, for healing, for spiritual growth, for tests and trials, for marriage, for community life, for children and for humanity itself.

Bahá'u'lláh also said that although the supplicant may at first remain unaware of the effect of prayer, the grace of God "must needs sooner or later exercise

its influence upon his soul."

Bahá'u'lláh also provided instructions on how to pray. He asks that Bahá'ís pray daily, and He specifically asks that Bahá'ís choose one of three "obligatory" prayers for recitation each day. The shortest of these obligatory prayers is just three sentences long, and says much about the relationship between God and humanity. It reads:

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou has created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

Other spiritual obligations include meditation and fasting. Bahá'u'lláh asked that His followers spend some time each day reading the Word of God and reflecting on its meaning. Bahá'ís understand that the writings of Bahá'u'lláh are the Word of God for this age, and that such reading and meditation has a transforming effect on the soul.

Bahá'u'lláh did not, however, specify a particular format for meditation. Instead, each individual is free to choose his or her own form of meditation. For some Bahá'ís it may be enough to spend a few minutes contemplating the meaning of a passage in the Bahá'í writings each day. Others may incorporate more rigorous forms into their daily routine. One important practice, however, is to reflect on the day's events each evening, to consider the value and worth of one's deeds.

The obligation to fast occurs yearly, a practice which is common among virtually all of the world's religions. For Bahá'ís the Fast occurs every March, for nineteen days from the 2nd to the 20th. During this period, Bahá'ís abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset, about 12 hours each day. It is considered to be a time for deep reflection and spiritual renewal. However, for those who are ill, pregnant and/or nursing, traveling, or over 70 years old, the Fast is not obligatory.

"I know that when I first became a Bahá'í, I approached the fast with trepidation, because I was afraid of doing without food," said Beverly Burris, a Jamaican who became a Bahá'í in 1974. "But once I started, I found I did not feel hungry. Instead I felt an inner peace. And now I look forward to the fast. It's a blessing, a way of taking stock internally, a way of focusing on what is going on mentally, spiritually and physically inside of me."

In all of the Faith's spiritual practices, there are essentially no rituals. The only time Bahá'ís are obligated to pray in a congregational manner, for example, is in praying for the dead. Nor is there a priesthood or a clergy. The

individual is, accordingly, responsible for his or her own spiritual growth.

All

forms of superstition are eschewed, and people are not reliant on rituals or clergy for their spiritual progress.

### The Outer World

Beyond the essentials of prayer, meditation and fasting, Bahá'ís view good deeds and service to humanity as the most important elements of spiritual training and progress.

The principles which guide Bahá'ís in their interactions with the outside world are the same high moral values that have been taught in all of the world's major religions: love, compassion, courtesy, charity, faithfulness, honesty, trustworthiness, and humility.

In the concept of service, all of these values come together. Whether in terms of family relationships, where the goal is to serve one's spouse, children and parents, or in terms of the community at large, where one is to promote the well-being of others either through their profession, trade, business or volunteer community projects, Bahá'ís understand that it is through service to others that we can best develop our own selves -- and reach the highest levels of human happiness.

"I say if you want to change the world, you have to serve others," said Shahnaz Daghighi-Maher, a 53-year-old general practitioner in Angers, France, who, since 1991, has travelled alone three times a year to Albania, where, at the sacrifice of a lucrative private practice in France, she has established a free clinic in the southern city of Korcha. "The first goal is to help the world."

When in Korcha, she stays with a local family in a simple, single room in their home. From there, she travels daily to some 16 outlying villages, setting up her "clinic" out of her medical bag and a few boxes of carefully packed medicines.

During her visits, she also gives talks, speaking of preventive health care and also of basic social principles, such as the equality of women and men. And she finds, too, that these meetings draw more women than men.

"I think it is important for women to go and do this kind of thing," said Dr. Daghighi-Maher. "Because, at least in my area, it always seems that men are doing the humanitarian work. And as a Bahá'í, I take action."

### Basic Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh taught that there is one God whose successive revelations of His will to humanity have been the chief civilizing force in history. The agents of this process have been the Divine Messengers whom people have seen chiefly as the founders of separate religious systems but whose common purpose has been to bring the human race to spiritual and moral maturity.

Humanity is now coming of age. It is this that makes possible the unification of the human family and the building of a peaceful, global society. Among the principles which the Bahá'í Faith promotes as vital to the achievement of this goal are

1. the abandonment of all forms of prejudice

Bahá'u'lláh gave special attention to the problem of prejudice. At the heart of

His message is a call for mutual understanding and fellowship among nations, cultures, and peoples. There is, Bahá'u'lláh insists, only one human race. Assertions that a particular group of people is in some way superior to the rest of humanity are without foundation. Prejudice--whether based on race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or class--is a baneful heritage that must

be overcome if humanity is to create a peaceful and just global society.

Bahá'u'lláh specifically counseled His followers to make an active effort to rid themselves of all prejudices which breed contention and strife. In His primary ethical work, *The Hidden Words*, Bahá'u'lláh exhorted human beings to reflect on this question:

O CHILDREN OF MEN!

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since we have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest.<sup>1</sup>

The very diversity of the human race is, in fact, a means for creating a world based on unity rather than uniformity. It is not by the suppression of differences that we will arrive at unity, but rather by an increased awareness of and respect for the intrinsic value of each separate culture, and indeed, of each individual. It is not diversity itself which is the cause of conflict, but rather our immature attitude towards it, our intolerance and misconceptions of others. 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed this viewpoint in the following passage:

Should any one contend that true and enduring unity can in no wise be realized in this world, inasmuch as its people widely differ in their manners and habits, their tastes, their temperament and character, their thoughts and their views, to this we make reply that differences are of two kinds; the one is

the cause of destruction, as exemplified by the spirit of contention and strife which animates mutually conflicting and antagonistic peoples and nations, whilst the other is the sign of diversity, the symbol and the secret of perfection, and the revealer of the bounties of the All-glorious.

Consider the flowers of the garden; though differing in kind, color, 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.

How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruit, the branches, and the trees of the garden were all of the same shape and color! Diversity of color, form and shape enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when divers shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. 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.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. assurance to women of full equality of opportunity with men

"The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations.

There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge."

This position, taken from a statement on peace written by the Universal House of Justice in 1985, reiterates the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh that society must reorganize its life to give practical expression to the principle of equality between women and men.

Since its inception nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, the Bahá'í Faith has taught the equality of the sexes. Indeed, the Bahá'í Faith is the only independent world religion whose Founder has stated unequivocally that women and men are equal.

"Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God," said Bahá'u'lláh.

In accordance with this teaching, the worldwide Bahá'í community has been at the forefront of the movement to advance the rights of women for more than a century. And the Bahá'í approach, which advocates full equality and a firm sense of partnership between women and men, is increasingly recognized as being on the cutting edge of women's issues worldwide.

Bahá'ís understand, for example, that the values which women bring to human interaction are necessary to the proper functioning and advancement of modern society, and that qualities that have formerly been associated with

the feminine sides of our natures--such as compassion, nurturing, cooperation and empathy--will be increasingly important in creating a peaceful, just, and sustainable world civilization.

Bahá'í institutions around the world promote various educational efforts for women, and work to raise the consciousness of both women and men about this fundamental equality. Many of its schools, learning centers, and grassroots social and economic development projects specifically include the promotion of women's advancement into their curricula or agendas.

Women compose approximately 30 percent of elected leadership in Bahá'í councils at the national level, comparing favorably to national parliaments, which average 10 percent women worldwide.

Bahá'í women have long been active in the struggle to promote women's equality. The Bahá'í Faith was founded in 1844 in Iran and among its early followers was Táhirih, a Persian poet and scholar. In 1852, she laid down her life in defense of her beliefs, which included her right to lay aside the veil and to work for the complete emancipation of women.

Laura Dreyfus-Barney, a member of the first Bahá'í community in Europe, was among the leading figures in promoting the advancement of women in the early years of this century. In the years after World War I, she focused her attention on mobilizing women for peace. She represented the International Council of Women (ICW) in the League of Nations and was President of ICW's Peace and Arbitration Commission.

After World War II, Ms. Dreyfus-Barney played an important role in the development of the relationship between the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Martha Root, an American journalist from Pennsylvania, circled the globe several times in the 1920s and 1930s to promote the cause of women's equality--along with the other progressive principles of the Bahá'í Faith. With a unique facility for approaching high dignitaries, she took the Bahá'í message of interdependence and oneness to kings, queens, presidents, ministers, statesmen, professors, clergymen and poets in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia.

Since the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) obtained consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1970, it has cooperated officially with the United Nations in its work to improve the status of women throughout the world.

The Bahá'í International Community has worked directly with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and its Secretariat, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women. In addition, the BIC has

established close, cooperative relationships with other international nongovernmental organizations at the United Nations that seek to promote the advancement of women.

Initially the BIC contributed to the work of the United Nations by submitting statements to United Nations bodies, and in particular the Commission on the Status of Women, on various aspects of equality. Such statements have addressed the education of girls, the importance of elevating the status of women as mothers, the relevance of women's participation at local, national and international levels to the establishment of world peace.

As part of International Women's Year in 1975, the BIC participated in the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City. Two Bahá'í representatives were officially accredited to attend the Conference and nine representatives attended the NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) Tribune, the parallel meeting for non-governmental organizations.

During the next ten years, designated the United Nations Decade for Women, the Bahá'í International Community developed a solid reputation for its work promoting the advancement of women. BIC representatives served on NGO committees on the Status of Women in New York, Geneva and Vienna and participated in the World Conferences on Women held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1980, in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985, and in Beijing, China in 1995.

The Community's representatives have also been involved in planning parallel activities for NGOs at these meetings. Relationships were established with major organizations worldwide whose focus is also the promotion of the advancement of women.

The BIC collaborates on an increasing basis with UN agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA).

### 3. recognition of the unity and relativity of religious truth

The principle of the unity of religion is at the center of Bahá'í teachings. Bahá'u'lláh states that humanity is engaged in a collective growth process quite similar to the growth process of an individual: just as a person begins life as a helpless infant and attains maturity in successive stages, so humankind began its collective social life in a primitive state, gradually attaining maturity. In the case of the individual, it is clear that his or her development takes place as a result of the education he or she receives from parents, teachers, and society in general. But what is the motive force in humankind's collective evolution?

The answer the Bahá'í Faith provides to this question is "revealed religion." In one of His major works, the Kitáb-i-Íqán (the Book of Certitude), Bahá'u'lláh explained that God, the Creator, has intervened and will continue to intervene in human history by means of chosen Messengers. These Messengers, Whom Bahá'u'lláh called "Manifestations of God," are

principally the Founders of the major revealed religions, such as Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammad, and so forth. It is the spirit released by the coming of these Manifestations, together with the influence of Their teachings and the social systems established by Their laws and precepts, that enable humankind to progress in its collective evolution. Simply put: the Manifestations of God are the chief educators of humanity. With regard to the various religious systems that have appeared in human history, Bahá'u'lláh has said:

These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the principle of the unity of religion means that all of the great religious Founders--the Manifestations--have come from God, and that all of the religious systems established by Them are part of a single divine plan directed by God.

In reality, there is only one religion, the religion of God. This one religion is continually evolving, and each particular religious system represents a stage in the evolution of the whole. The Bahá'í Faith represents the current stage in the evolution of religion. To emphasize the idea that all of the teachings and actions of the Manifestation are directed by God and do not originate from natural, human sources, Bahá'u'lláh used the term "revelation" to describe the phenomenon that occurs each time a Manifestation appears. In particular, the writings of the Manifestation represent the infallible Word of God. Because these writings remain long after the earthly life of the Manifestation is finished, they constitute an especially important part of the phenomenon of revelation. So much is this so, that the term "revelation" is sometimes used in a restricted sense to refer to the writings and words of the Manifestation.

Religious history is seen as a succession of revelations from God and the term "progressive revelation" is used to describe this process. Thus, according to Bahá'ís, progressive revelation is the motive force of human progress, and the Manifestation Bahá'u'lláh is the most recent instance of revelation.

Bahá'u'lláh taught that the time interval between two Manifestations may be about one thousand years. He also taught that the process of revelation will not stop with His revelation and that another Manifestation will come after Him, though not before the expiration of one thousand years from Bahá'u'lláh's coming. According to the Bahá'í writings, the process of revelation will continue indefinitely into the future and humankind will see the coming of a great many more Manifestations.

To put the Bahá'í concept of religion more clearly in focus, let us compare it with some other ways in which religion has been regarded. On one hand is the view that the various religious systems result from human striving after truth. In this conception, the Founders of the great religions do not reveal God to us, but are rather philosophers or thinkers, human beings who may have progressed farther than others in the discovery of truth. This notion excludes the idea of a basic unity of religion since the various religious systems are seen as representing different opinions and beliefs arrived at by fallible human beings rather than infallible revelations of truth from a single source.

Many orthodox adherents of various religious traditions, on the other hand, argue that the Prophet or Founder of their particular tradition represents a true revelation of God to humanity, but that the other religious Founders are false prophets, or at least essentially inferior to the Founder of the tradition in question. For example, many Jews believe that Moses was a true Messenger of God, but that Jesus was not. Similarly, many Christians believe in Jesus' revelation, but consider that Muhammad was a false prophet, and hold that Moses was inferior in status to Christ.

The Bahá'í principle of the oneness of religion differs fundamentally from both of these traditional concepts. Bahá'u'lláh attributed the differences in some teachings of the great religions not to any human fallibility of the Founders, but rather to the different requirements of the ages in which the revelations occurred. Moreover, Bahá'ís consider that no one of the Founders is superior to another. Shoghi Effendi has summarized this view in the following words:

The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, the followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that

Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth

The unity of humankind foreseen by Bahá'u'lláh is unity based on justice. One of the most striking examples of injustice in the world today is the grave imbalance in economic and material conditions. A relatively small percentage of humankind has immense wealth, while the majority of the world's population lives in dire poverty and misery. This imbalance exists both within nations and between nations. Moreover, the gap that separates rich and

poor continues to widen, which indicates that existing economic systems are incapable of restoring a just balance.

A satisfactory solution to the world's present economic crisis lies in a profound change of heart and mind which only religion can produce. From the Bahá'í perspective, the prevailing materialistic assumptions about economic development reflect a profound error of conception about human nature itself. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that "The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit..."<sup>5</sup> "The disease which afflicts the body politic is lack of love and absence of altruism..."<sup>6</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh asserted that economic injustice is a moral evil and as such is condemned by God. In particular, Bahá'u'lláh warned:

O YE RICH ONES ON EARTH!

The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease.<sup>7</sup>

And:

O CHILDREN OF DUST!

Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth.<sup>8</sup>

The human and material resources at our disposal must be used for the longterm good of all, not for the short-term advantage of a few. This can be done only if cooperation becomes the basis of organized economic activity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that cooperation gives life to society just as the life of an organism is maintained by the cooperation of the various elements of which it is composed:

...the base of life is this mutual aid and helpfulness, and the cause of destruction and non-existence would be the interruption of this mutual assistance. The more the world aspires to civilization the more this important matter of cooperation becomes manifest.<sup>9</sup>

Within the framework of an economic system based on cooperation, the Bahá'í teachings accept the idea of private ownership of property and the need for private economic initiative. Moreover, the economic principles taught by Bahá'u'lláh do not imply that all individuals should receive the same income. There are natural differences in human needs and capacities, and some categories of service to society merit greater recompense than others.

However, all degrees of income should be established within absolute limits. There must be, on the one hand, a minimum income level that meets the basic needs for human well-being and of which all are assured. If, for whatever reason (incapacity or other misfortune), individuals are unable to meet their

essential needs, they would be assisted by community institutions. On the other hand, there should be an absolute maximum income level that would prevent extreme accumulations of wealth.

In short, the Bahá'í teachings envision that economic justice and prosperity will come about only when the essential connection between the spiritual and practical aspects of life is recognized.

#### 5. the realization of universal education

The acquisition of "knowledge," Bahá'u'lláh says, serves as "wings" for humanity's "ascent," and thus "is incumbent upon everyone." Knowledge plays a central role in human life and society: It is the process of generating and applying knowledge that lies at the heart of civilization. The advancement of society flows from it. In light of this teaching, the Universal House of Justice, in a 1985 statement on peace addressed to the peoples of the world, made the following declaration:

"The cause of universal education, which has already enlisted in its service an army of dedicated people from every faith and nation, deserves the utmost support that the governments of the world can lend it. For ignorance is indisputably the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice. No nation can achieve success unless education is accorded all its citizens. Lack of resources limits the ability of many nations to fulfil this necessity, imposing a certain ordering of priorities. The decisionmaking agencies involved would do well to consider giving first priority to the education of women and girls, since it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society. In keeping with the requirements of the times, consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child."

#### 6. the responsibility of each person to independently search for truth

Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes the fundamental obligation of human beings to acquire knowledge with their "own eyes and not through the eyes of others." One of the main sources of conflict in the world today is the fact that many people blindly and uncritically follow various traditions, movements, and opinions. God has given each human being a mind and the capacity to differentiate truth from falsehood. If individuals fail to use their reasoning capacities and choose instead to accept without question certain opinions and ideas, either out of admiration for or fear of those who hold them, then they are neglecting their basic moral responsibility as human beings. Moreover, when people act in this way, they often become attached to some particular opinion or tradition and thus intolerant of those who do not share it. Such attachments can, in turn, lead to conflict. History has witnessed conflict and even bloodshed over slight alterations in religious practice, or a minor change in the interpretation of doctrine. Personal search for truth enables the individual to know why he or she adheres to a given ideology or doctrine.

Bahá'ís believe that, as there is only one reality, all people will gradually discover its different facets and will ultimately come to common understanding and unity, provided they sincerely seek after truth. In this connection, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

Being one, truth cannot be divided, and the differences that appear to exist among the many nations only result from their attachment to prejudice. If only men would search out truth, they would find themselves united.<sup>10</sup>

And further:

The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity, and unity is necessary if we would reach truth, for truth is one.<sup>11</sup>

#### 7. the establishment of a global commonwealth of nations

The imperative of establishing and perpetuating the general peace of humankind is a central component of Bahá'í teachings. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Bahá'u'lláh called upon the world's rulers to reconcile their differences and to "lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace." He proclaimed that "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." In doing so, He outlined a number of steps that would lead to permanent stability in international relations. At the heart of His vision was a set of new social structures based on participation and consultation among the world's peoples. These new institutional mechanisms would eliminate conflicts of interest and thereby reduce the potential for disunity at all levels of society. A number of international institutions were envisaged: a world legislature with genuine representation and authority, an international court having final jurisdiction in all disputes between nations, and an international executive empowered to carry out the decisions of these legislative and judicial bodies.

These institutions would have the means to ensure and maintain a general disarmament by applying principles of collective security. They would neither usurp nor suppress the basic autonomy of nations, would safeguard the personal freedom and initiative of individuals, and would protect longcherished cultural traditions of the world's peoples. The system of governance outlined by Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes the importance of grassroots decisionmaking that is democratic in spirit and method, but also provides a level of coordination and authority that makes cooperation possible on a global scale.

#### 8. recognition that true religion is in harmony with reason and the pursuit of scientific knowledge

A major source of conflict and disunity in the world today is the widespread opinion that there is some basic opposition between science and religion, that

scientific truth contradicts religion on some points, and that one must choose between being a religious person, a believer in God, or a scientist, a follower of reason.<sup>12</sup>

The Bahá'í teachings stress the fundamental harmony of science and religion. This view derives from the belief that truth (or reality) is one. For if truth is indeed one, it is not possible for something to be scientifically false and religiously true. 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed forcefully this idea in the following passage:

If religious beliefs and opinions are found contrary to the standards of science, they are mere superstitions and imaginations; for the antithesis of knowledge is ignorance, and the child of ignorance is superstition. Unquestionably there must be agreement between true religion and science. If a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible, and there is no outcome but wavering and vacillation.<sup>13</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh affirmed that man's intelligence and reasoning powers are a gift from God: "This gift giveth man the power to discern the truth in all things, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to discover the secrets of creation."<sup>14</sup> Science results from our systematic use of these God-given powers. The truths of science are thus discovered truths. The truths of prophetic religion are revealed truths, i.e., truths which God has shown to us without our having to discover them for ourselves. Bahá'ís consider that it is the same unique God who is both the Author of revelation and the Creator of the reality which science investigates, and hence there can be no contradiction between the two.

Contradictions between science and traditional religious beliefs are attributed to human fallibility and arrogance. Over the centuries, distortions have gradually infiltrated the doctrines of many religious systems and diluted the pure teachings originally given by the Manifestation who was their Founder. With time these distortions become increasingly difficult to distinguish from the original message. Similarly, unsupported speculations of various schools of scientific thought have at times become more popular and influential than the results of rigorous scientific research, and have further blurred the picture.

'Abdu'l-Bahá affirmed that religion and science are, in fact, complementary:

Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism.<sup>15</sup>

In another passage from the same work, He affirmed that the result of the

practice of the unity of science and religion will be a strengthening of religion

rather than its weakening as is feared by many religious apologists:

When religion, shorn of its superstitions, traditions, and unintelligent dogmas, shows its conformity with science, then will there be a great unifying, cleansing force in the world which will sweep before it all wars, disagreements, discords and struggles--and then will mankind be united in the power of the Love of God.<sup>16</sup>

### The Historical Background

For Bahá'ís, evolutionary process is an essential feature of all the phenomena of life including the revelations of God. The series of stages through which their own Faith gradually made its appearance and established itself throughout the world is itself an expression of this principle.

The rise of the Bahá'í Faith has also been marked by a second feature that it shares in common with the formative period in the history of each of the earlier world religions. The implications of a new stage in the unfoldment of God's will are unwelcome to influential segments of existing society. The result has frequently been bitter persecution of followers of the new faith. During its first century and a half of life the Bahá'í Faith has passed through several periods of such oppression.

### Central Figures and Institutions

#### The Báb (1819-1850)

On May 23, 1844, in Shiraz, Persia, a young man known as the Báb announced the imminent appearance of the Messenger of God awaited by all the peoples of the world. The title Báb means "the Gate." Although Himself the bearer of an independent revelation from God, the Báb declared that His purpose was to prepare mankind for this advent.

Swift and savage persecution at the hands of the dominant Muslim clergy followed this announcement. The Báb was arrested, beaten, imprisoned, and finally on July 9, 1850 was executed in the public square of the city of Tabriz. Some 20,000 of His followers perished in a series of massacres throughout Persia. Today, the majestic building with the golden dome, overlooking the Bay of Haifa, Israel, and set amidst beautiful gardens, is the Shrine where the Báb's earthly remains are entombed.

#### The Báb, Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh

"His life is one of the most magnificent examples of courage which it has been the privilege of mankind to behold..."<sup>17</sup> The object of this tribute by the prominent French writer A.L.M. Nicolas was the nineteenth century prophetic figure known to history as the Báb.

Millennial fervor gripped many peoples throughout the world during the first

half of the nineteenth century; while Christians expected the return of Christ, a wave of expectation swept through Islam that the "Lord of the Age" would appear. Both Christians and Muslims envisioned that, with fulfillment of the prophecies in their scriptures, a new spiritual age was about to begin.

In Persia, this messianic ferment reached a dramatic climax on May 23, 1844, when a young merchant--the Báb--announced that He was the Bearer of a long-promised Divine Revelation destined to transform the spiritual life of the human race. "O peoples of the earth," the Báb declared, "Give ear unto God's holy Voice... Verily the resplendent Light of God hath appeared in your midst, invested with this unerring Book, that ye may be guided aright to the ways of peace..."<sup>18</sup> Against a backdrop of widescale moral breakdown in Persian society, the Báb's declaration that spiritual renewal and social advancement rested on "love and compassion" rather "than force and coercion," aroused hope and excitement among all classes, and He quickly attracted thousands of followers.<sup>19</sup>

Although the young merchant's given name was Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, He took the name "Báb," a title that means "Gate" or "Door" in Arabic. His coming, the Báb explained, represented the portal through which the universally anticipated Revelation of God to all humanity would soon appear. The central theme of His major work--the Bayan--was the imminent appearance of a second Messenger from God, one Who would be far greater than the Báb, and Whose mission would be to usher in the age of peace and justice promised in Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and all the other world religions.

The Báb referred to this coming Divine Teacher as "Him Whom God shall make manifest" and stated that "no words of Mine can adequately describe Him, nor can any reference in My Book, the Bayan, do justice to His Cause."<sup>20</sup> He clarified the central aim of His mission by explaining that "the purpose underlying this Revelation, as well as those that preceded it, has, in like manner, been to announce the advent of the Faith of Him Whom God will make manifest."<sup>21</sup> The basis for all human accomplishment is to be found in the teachings of this promised universal Manifestation of God, and "the sum total of the religion of God is but to help Him."<sup>22</sup> For the Báb, a climacteric in human history had been reached, and He was the "Voice of the Crier, calling aloud in the wilderness of the Bayan" announcing to humanity that it was entering the period of its collective maturity.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout His writings, the Báb warned His followers to be watchful, and as soon as the promised Teacher revealed Himself, to recognize and follow Him. The Báb exhorted them to see with the "eye of the spirit" rather than through their "fanciful imaginations."<sup>24</sup> To be worthy of "Him Whom God shall make manifest" required entirely new standards of conduct, a nobility of character that human beings had theretofore not achieved: "Purge your hearts of worldly desires," the Báb urged His first group of disciples, "and let angelic virtues be your adorning... The time is come when naught but the purest motive, supported by deeds of stainless purity, can ascend to the

throne of the Most High and be acceptable unto Him..."<sup>25</sup>

In several instances the Báb alluded to the identity of the Promised One: "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord. For He will assuredly be made manifest."<sup>26</sup> And: "When the Day-Star of Baha will shine resplendent above the horizon of eternity it is incumbent upon you to present yourselves before His Throne."<sup>27</sup> Husayn-'Ali, a leading disciple of the Báb known to history as Bahá'u'lláh, assumed the title of "Baha" (Arabic for "glory" or "splendor") at a gathering of the Báb's followers in 1848, a title that was later confirmed by the Báb Himself.

In some respects, the Báb's role can be compared to that of John the Baptist in the founding of Christianity. The Báb was Bahá'u'lláh's herald: His principal mission was to prepare the way for Bahá'u'lláh's coming. Accordingly, the founding of the Bábi Faith is viewed by Bahá'ís as synonymous with the founding of the Bahá'í Faith--and its purpose was fulfilled when Bahá'u'lláh announced in 1863 that He was the Promised One foretold by the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh later affirmed that the Báb was "the Herald of His Name and the Harbinger of His Great Revelation which hath caused... the splendour of His light to shine forth above the horizon of the world."<sup>28</sup> The Báb's appearance marked the end of the "Prophetic Cycle" of religious history, and ushered in the "Cycle of Fulfillment."

At the same time, however, the Báb founded a distinctive, independent religion of His own. Known as the Bábi Faith, that religious dispensation produced its own vigorous community, its own scriptures, and left its own indelible mark on history. The Bahá'í writings attest that "the greatness of the Báb consists primarily, not in His being the divinely-appointed Forerunner of so transcendent a Revelation, but rather in His having been invested with the powers inherent in the inaugurator of a separate religious Dispensation, and in His wielding, to a degree unrivaled by the Messengers gone before Him, the scepter of independent Prophethood."<sup>29</sup> With His call for the spiritual and moral reformation of Persian society, and His insistence upon the upliftment of the station of women and the poor, the Báb indeed assumed a position reminiscent of the Prophets of the past. But unlike those Seers of old who could but look to the far future for the time when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,"<sup>30</sup> the Báb by His very appearance signified that the dawn of the "Day of God" had at last arrived.

The hearts and minds of those who heard the message of the Báb were locked in a mental world that had changed little from medieval times. Along with His prescription for spiritual renewal, His promotion of education and the useful sciences was by any measure revolutionary. Thus, by proclaiming an entirely new religion, the Báb was able to help His followers break free from the Islamic frame of reference and to mobilize them in preparation for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.

Mulla Husayn-i-Bushrú'i, a member of Persia's religious class, described the effect on him of his first meeting with the Báb: "I felt possessed of such courage and power that were the world, all its peoples and its potentates, to rise against me, I would alone and undaunted, withstand their onslaught. The universe seemed but a handful of dust in my grasp. I seemed to be the Voice of Gabriel personified, calling unto all mankind: 'Awake, for, lo! the morning Light has broken.' "31

The transformative impact of the Báb's message was primarily achieved through the dissemination of His epistles, commentaries, and doctrinal and mystical works. Some, though, like Mulla Husayn, were able to hear Him directly. The effect of the Báb's voice was described by one of His followers: "The melody of His chanting, the rhythmic flow of the verses which streamed from His lips caught our ears and penetrated into our very souls. Mountain and valley re-echoed the majesty of His voice. Our hearts vibrated in their depths to the appeal of His utterance."32

The boldness of the Báb's proclamation--which put forth the vision of an entirely new society--stirred intense fear within the religious and secular establishments. Accordingly, persecution of the Bábis quickly developed. Thousands of the Báb's followers were put to death in a horrific series of massacres. The extraordinary moral courage evinced by the Bábis in the face of this onslaught was recorded by a number of Western observers. European intellectuals such as Ernest Renan, Leo Tolstoy, Sarah Bernhardt and the Comte de Gobineau were deeply affected by this spiritual drama that had unfolded in what was regarded as a darkened land. The nobility of the Báb's life and teachings and the heroism of His followers became a frequent topic of conversation in the salons of Europe. The story of Tahirih, the great poet and Bábí heroine, who declared to her persecutors, "You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women," traveled as far and as quickly as that of the Báb Himself.<sup>33</sup>

Ultimately, those opposed to the Báb argued that He was not only a heretic, but a dangerous rebel. The authorities decided to have Him executed. On 9 July 1850, this sentence was carried out, in the courtyard of the Tabriz army barracks. Some 10,000 people crowded the rooftops of the barracks and houses that overlooked the square. The Báb and a young follower were suspended by two ropes against a wall. A regiment of 750 Armenian soldiers, arranged in three files of 250 each, opened fire in three successive volleys. So dense was the smoke raised by the gunpowder and dust that the entire yard was obscured.

The report of the execution, written to Lord Palmerston, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, by Sir Justin Shiel, Queen Victoria's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Tehran on July 22, 1850, records: "When the smoke and dust cleared away after the volley, Báb was not to be seen, and the populace proclaimed that he had ascended to the skies. The balls had broken the ropes by which he was bound but he was dragged

from the recess where, after some search he was discovered and shot."34

After the first attempt at execution, the Báb was found back in His cell, giving final instructions to one of His followers. Earlier in the day, when the guards had come to take Him to the courtyard, the Báb had warned that no "earthly power" could silence Him until He had finished all that He had to say. When the guards arrived this second time, the Báb calmly announced: "Now you may proceed to fulfill your intention."35

Again, the Báb and His young companion were brought out for execution. The Armenian troops refused to fire, and a Muslim firing squad was assembled and ordered to shoot. This time the bodies of the pair were shattered, their bones and flesh mingled into one mass. Surprisingly, their faces were untouched. The light of the "Mystic Fane," as the Báb referred to Himself, had been quenched under a dramatic set of circumstances.<sup>36</sup> The last words of the Báb to the crowd were: "O wayward generation! Had you believed in Me every one of you would have followed the example of this youth, who stood in rank above most of you, and would have willingly sacrificed himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognized Me; that day I shall have ceased to be with you."37

Bahá'u'lláh paid this tribute to the Báb: "Behold what steadfastness that Beauty of God hath revealed. The whole world rose to hinder Him, yet it utterly failed. The more severe the persecution they inflicted on that Sadrih [Branch] of Blessedness, the more His fervour increased, and the brighter burned the flame of His love. All this is evident, and none disputeth its truth.

Finally, He surrendered His soul, and winged His flight unto the realms above."38

A.L.M. Nicolas, who chronicled the episode of the Báb, wrote: "He sacrificed himself for humanity; for it he gave his body and his soul, for it he endured privations, insults, torture and martyrdom. He sealed, with his very lifeblood, the covenant of universal brotherhood. Like Jesus he paid with his life for the proclamation of a reign of concord, equity, and brotherly love."39

The short six-year duration of the Báb's mission in some respects symbolized the abrupt and startling transition to global consciousness that the Báb had called humanity to undertake. Since His bold proclamation in the middle of the last century, unparalleled scientific and technological advances have indeed provided the first glimmerings of a global society. In His role as the "Primal Point from which have been generated all created things," the Báb set in motion a dramatic new cycle of human creativity and discovery.<sup>40</sup> The "breezes" of God's "knowledge" had "stirred" the "minds of men" and caused "the spirits to soar."

The nearly simultaneous appearance of two Manifestations of God, Bahá'u'lláh Himself states, "is a mystery such as no mind can fathom."41 For Bahá'ís, it is both an affirmation that the establishment of universal peace--

the "Kingdom of God"--is not too far distant, and a testimony to the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's appointed successor, explains:

The Báb, the Exalted One, is the Morn of Truth, the splendor of Whose light shineth throughout all regions. He is also the Harbinger of the Most Great Light, the Abha Luminary (Bahá'u'lláh). The Blessed Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh) is the One promised by the sacred books of the past, the revelation of the Source of light that shone upon Mount Sinai, Whose fire glowed in the midst of the Burning Bush. We are, one and all, servants of their threshold, and stand each as a lowly keeper at their door.<sup>42</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh: Manifestation of God

"The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow.... No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!"

Bahá'u'lláh was thus described by the well-known Cambridge University Orientalist Edward Granville Browne in 1890. Bahá'u'lláh had, at that time, been a prisoner and an exile for almost 40 years and His teachings were shrouded in obscurity; today He is recognized by millions of followers around the world as the Manifestation of God or Divine Teacher for this age. According to Bahá'í belief, Manifestations of God, including Moses, Abraham, Christ, Muhammad, Krishna, and Buddha, have appeared at intervals throughout history to found the world's great religious systems. They have been sent by a loving Creator to enable us to know and to worship Him and to bring human civilization to ever higher levels of achievement.

The station of these Manifestations is unique in creation. Their essential nature is twofold: they are at once human and divine. But they are not identical with God, the Creator, Who is Unknowable. Of God, Bahá'u'lláh has written,

He, in truth, hath, throughout eternity, been one in His Essence, one in His attributes, one in His works. Any and every comparison is applicable only to His creatures, and all conceptions of association are conceptions that belong solely to those that serve Him. Immeasurably exalted is His Essence above the descriptions of His creatures. He, alone, occupieth the Seat of transcendent majesty, of supreme and inaccessible glory. The birds of men's hearts, however high they soar, can never hope to attain the heights of His unknowable Essence. It is He Who hath called into being the whole of creation, Who hath caused every created thing to spring forth at His behest.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh, addressing God in a prayer, says:

Exalted, immeasurably exalted art Thou above any attempt to measure the greatness of Thy Cause, above any comparison that one may seek to make,

above the efforts of the human tongue to utter its import! From everlasting Thou hast existed, alone with no one else beside Thee, and wilt, to everlasting, continue to remain the same, in the sublimity of Thine essence and the inaccessible heights of Thy glory.

And when Thou didst purpose to make Thyself known unto men, Thou didst successively reveal the Manifestations of Thy Cause, and ordained each to be a sign of Thy Revelation among Thy people, and the Day-Spring of Thine invisible Self amidst Thy creatures...44

Describing the relationship between the Manifestations of God and Their Creator, Bahá'u'lláh used the analogy of the mirror: God is as the Sun, and the Manifestations are as Mirrors that reflect that divine light -- but they are in no way to be considered as identical to that Sun:

These sanctified Mirrors...are, one and all, the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory.45

Bahá'u'lláh's central message for humanity in this day is one of unity and justice. "The best beloved of all things in My sight is justice,"46 He wrote, and "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens"47 in two oftenquoted passages. He also stated, "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."48 This is the prescription of God, the divine and all-knowing Physician, for our ailing world.

While such statements have become part of mainstream thinking in the contemporary world, we can only imagine the startling effect they would have had on someone like E.G. Browne, to whom Bahá'u'lláh uttered the following remarkable statement:

Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile.... We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer-up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment.... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled -- what harm is there in this?...Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come...

Born into a noble family in nineteenth century Persia, Bahá'u'lláh's destiny would seem to have been one of wealth and ease. Yet, from an early age He showed little interest in following in His father's footsteps at the Shah's court, preferring to spend His time and resources in ministering to the poor. Later,

His recognition of the religion of the Báb, which arose in 1844 in Persia and was destined to fulfil the prophecies of Islam, caused Him to be cast into prison and subsequently exiled.

In His writings, the Báb alluded to the imminent coming of the Promised One foretold in all the world's religions -- a role claimed by Bahá'u'lláh. "This is

the King of Days," Bahá'u'lláh thus extols the age that has witnessed the advent of His Revelation, "the Day that hath seen the coming of the Bestbeloved, Him Who through all eternity hath been acclaimed the Desire of the World."<sup>49</sup> "I am the One," He in another connection affirms, "Whom the tongue of Isaiah hath extolled, the One with Whose name both the Torah and the Evangel were adorned."<sup>50</sup> Of Himself, He wrote: "Naught is seen in My temple but the Temple of God, and in My beauty but His Beauty, and in My being but His Being, and in My self but His Self, and in My movement but His Movement, and in My acquiescence but His Acquiescence, and in My pen but His Pen, the Mighty, the All-Praised. There hath not been in My soul but the Truth, and in Myself naught could be seen but God."<sup>51</sup> And of His mission, He said:

And when the entire creation was stirred up, and the whole earth was convulsed, and the sweet savors of Thy name, the All-Praised, had almost ceased to breathe over Thy realms, and the winds of Thy mercy had well-nigh been stilled throughout Thy dominions, Thou didst, through the power of Thy might, raise me up among Thy servants, and bid me to show forth Thy sovereignty amidst Thy people. Thereupon I arose before all Thy creatures, strengthened by Thy help and Thy power, and summoned all the multitudes unto Thee, and announced unto all Thy servants Thy favors and Thy gifts, and invited them to turn towards this Ocean, every drop of the waters of which crieth out, proclaiming unto all that are in heaven and on earth that He is, in truth, the Fountain of all life, and the Quickener of the entire creation, and the Object of the adoration of all worlds, and the Best-Beloved of every understanding heart, and the Desire of all them that are nigh unto Thee.<sup>52</sup>

It was during His initial imprisonment that Bahá'u'lláh first experienced divine revelation. Of it, He wrote:

During the days I lay in the prison of Tihiran, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout the long years of exile He endured, Bahá'u'lláh revealed divinely inspired passages equivalent to over 100 volumes. This revelation comprises mystical writings<sup>54</sup>, social and ethical teachings<sup>55</sup>, laws and ordinances, and

a fearless proclamation of His message to the kings and rulers of the world, including Napoleon III, Queen Victoria, Pope Pius IX, the Shah of Persia, Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany, the Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria, and others.

The conception of human nature found in Bahá'u'lláh's revelation is one of dignity and essential nobility. In one passage, He writes, with the voice of God, "O Son of Spirit! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created."<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere, He states, "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom."<sup>57</sup> Every person, He asserts, is capable of recognizing God; all that is needed is a degree of detachment:

When the channel of the human soul is cleansed of all worldly and impeding attachments, it will unfailingly perceive the breath of the Beloved across immeasurable distances, and will, led by its perfume, attain and enter the City of Certitude.

... That city is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation.... All the guidance, the blessings, the learning, the understanding, the faith, and certitude, conferred upon all that is in heaven and on earth, are hidden and treasured within these Cities.<sup>58</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh's Son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who was appointed by Him as His successor, described the mission of His Father in these words:

He bore these ordeals, suffered these calamities and difficulties in order that a manifestation of selflessness and service might become apparent in the world of humanity; that the Most Great Peace should become a reality; that human souls might appear as the angels of heaven; that heavenly miracles would be wrought among men; that human faith should be strengthened and perfected; that the precious, priceless bestowal of God, the human mind, might be developed to its fullest capacity in the temple of the body; and man become the reflection and likeness of God, even as it hath been revealed in the Bible: 'We shall create man in Our own image.'

Briefly, the Blessed Perfection [Bahá'u'lláh] bore all these ordeals and calamities in order that our hearts might become enkindled and radiant, our spirits be glorified, our faults become virtues, our ignorance transformed into knowledge; in order that we might attain the real fruits of humanity and acquire heavenly graces; although pilgrims upon earth we should travel the road of the heavenly kingdom; although needy and poor we might receive the treasures of life eternal. For this has He borne these difficulties and sorrows.<sup>59</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh passed from this earthly world in 1892, still nominally a prisoner in Palestine. One hundred years later, in 1992, the Bahá'í international community observed a Holy Year to commemorate the centenary of His

ascension. In May of that year, a delegation of several thousand Bahá'ís from over 200 countries and territories gathered at His shrine in the Holy Land to pay homage to Him. And the following November a congress of some 27,000 followers assembled in New York City in an atmosphere of reverence and joy to celebrate the inauguration of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant which has preserved the unity of His Faith since its inception. A statement<sup>60</sup> written to acquaint people everywhere with the details of Bahá'u'lláh's life and mission was also released during this special year.

We invite you to learn more about Bahá'u'lláh's life and mission; to study the prayers and sacred writings revealed by Him; and to investigate His astounding claim to be "the Promised One of All Ages" and His promise of a future when "these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come."

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh

"So powerful is the light of unity," Bahá'u'lláh declared, "that it can illuminate the whole earth."<sup>61</sup> "We, verily," He further stated, "have come to unite and weld together all that dwell on earth."<sup>62</sup> Bahá'u'lláh made the oneness of humankind the central principle and goal of His Faith, an emphasis that implies the organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations and signalizes the "coming of age of the entire human race."<sup>63</sup>

Humanity's evolution has been marked by such progressive stages of social organization as family, tribe, city-state and nation. Bahá'u'lláh's express purpose was to usher in the next and ultimate stage, namely, world unity -- the harbinger of the Great Peace foretold in the world's religions. As the Word of God as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh is the source and impetus of the oneness of humankind, so the Covenant He has established is the organizing principle for its realization.

Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant guarantees both unity of understanding of His Faith's fundamental doctrines and actualization of that unity in the Bahá'í community's spiritual and social development. It is distinguished by its provision for authentic interpretation of the sacred texts and for an authorized system of administration, at the apex of which is an elected legislative body empowered to supplement the laws revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

This Covenant is the most remarkable feature of His Revelation, for it is designed, unlike any religious system of the past, to preserve the unity of all humanity through the organic workings of a social order based on spiritual principles. "So firm and mighty" is this Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh's son 'Abdu'l-Bahá has affirmed, "that from the beginning of time until the present day, no religious Dispensation hath produced its like."<sup>64</sup>

The Bahá'í Faith is thus the first religion in history that has survived its

critical first century with its unity firmly established. "Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God," said 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "there would arise among the Bahá'ís, in one day, a thousand different sects as was the case in former ages." 65 But in this Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant is the magnet that draws the hearts of its followers together.

While issues of succession and leadership within the Bahá'í Faith are addressed by Bahá'u'lláh in His Covenant, its significance is far more encompassing. As He wrote, "The aim of this Wronged One in sustaining woes and tribulations, in revealing the Holy Verses and in demonstrating proofs hath been naught but to quench the flame of hate and enmity, that the horizon of the hearts of men may be illumined with the light of concord and attain real peace and tranquillity."66

Elaborating this theme, Bahá'u'lláh exhorted the people of the world to behave in a manner that will elevate their station; to "hold fast to the fear of God and firmly adhere to what is right"; to refrain from engaging in "slander, abuse and whatever causeth sadness"; to "hold fast to righteousness and truth"; to recognize that the "religion of God is for love and unity" and not to be made the "cause of enmity or dissension"; to respect those who have been invested with the power to rule or govern, and to "aid those daysprings of authority and sources of command who are adorned with the ornament of equity and justice"; "to serve all nations and to strive for the betterment of the world." 67

"Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book," Bahá'u'lláh asserted, emphasizing the importance of harmony in human relationships. And again He addressed these words to His followers: "O Servants! Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord." 68

#### The Center of the Covenant

It is in the pursuit of such aims and injunctions that Bahá'u'lláh appointed His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His successor: "When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended," He wrote in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, His Book of Laws, "turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root." 69 In His Will and Testament, known as The Book of the Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh explained further that, "The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch ['Abdu'l-Bahá]." 70

This appointment invested 'Abdu'l-Bahá with authority as the sole interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's writings and the executor of Bahá'u'lláh's purpose in the establishment of the Bahá'í administrative order; moreover, in His personal

life, His words and deeds, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the perfect exemplar of the qualities and ideals of Bahá'í living. The combination of these functions in one person gave rise to a unique office in religious history -- Center of the Covenant -- and makes 'Abdu'l-Bahá an unparalleled figure in all history.

The uniqueness of Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for 'Abdu'l-Bahá is indicated in various statements. For example, in a work known as Tablet of the Branch, Bahá'u'lláh, referring to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as "this sacred and glorious Being, this

Branch of Holiness," said, "well is it with him that hath sought His shelter and abideth beneath His shadow. Verily the Limb of the Law of God hath sprung forth from this Root which God hath firmly implanted in the Ground of His Will and Whose Branch hath been uplifted as to encompass the whole of creation....Render thanks unto God, O people, for His appearance; for verily He is the most great Favor unto you, the most perfect bounty upon you; and through Him every mouldering bone is quickened. Whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God, and whoso turneth away from Him hath turned away from My Beauty, hath repudiated My Proof, and transgressed against Me. He is the Trust of God amongst you, His charge within you, His manifestation unto you and His appearance among His favored servants."71

The explicitness of Bahá'u'lláh's written appointment of His Son and the elaborations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station were meant to prevent any misunderstanding among the faithful as to the leadership of the community following Bahá'u'lláh's passing. These provisions by the Manifestation of God Himself, in and of themselves, demonstrate an exceptional aspect of the Bahá'í Revelation.

As the successor of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became the tangible center of unity round which the development of the Bahá'í world community would revolve. As Bahá'u'lláh's chosen interpreter and expounder of His teachings, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the "incorruptible medium for applying the Word to practical measures for the raising up of a new civilization." Each of the institutions created in Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant was more clearly explained, sometimes elaborated and in several cases erected by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself.

The whole range of Bahá'u'lláh's moral teachings was perfectly manifested in the life lived by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the great diversity of the Bahá'í community owes its major impulse to the indiscriminating love with which 'Abdu'l-Bahá welcomed persons of every background, interest and personality, and the manner in which He patiently nurtured those who responded. Bahá'u'lláh "vested in Him the virtues of perfection in personal and social behavior, that humanity may have an enduring model to emulate." To counteract the destructive forces at work in society everywhere, it was necessary to establish a center of unity which could correlate within itself the

Bahá'í principles and their expression in deeds and provide an example of Bahá'í ideals in personal behavior that could inspire and be followed by all

people. In 'Abdu'l-Bahá can be found that perfect coherence of mind, heart, deeds and relationships which expressed itself in the fullness of His functions as the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant.

"He is, above and beyond these appellations," His grandson and the appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith wrote after citing the many designations conferred by Bahá'u'lláh upon Him, "the 'Mystery of God' -- an expression which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized." 72

### The Administrative Order

The idea of the existence of a divine pattern for the continuous administration and development of the Bahá'í Faith is as important to the definition of Bahá'í

belief as are the spiritual and social doctrines of Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'í administrative order is a tangible expression of the covenantal arrangement made between Bahá'u'lláh and His followers. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave significant attention to delineating the administrative system conceived by Bahá'u'lláh, and in His Will and Testament specified the responsibilities and functions, powers and authority particularly of the two institutions that would succeed Him, thus providing for continuity in the unity of the Bahá'í Faith. The twin institutions at the apex of the administrative order are the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.

In the same manner as He had been Himself appointed Center of the Covenant by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá designated His grandson Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. "For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the guardian of the Cause of God... and the beloved of the Lord must obey him and turn unto him" is the explicit language of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. 73 To the Guardian was given the role of authoritative interpreter, and he was charged with the further expansion of the Bahá'í world

community along the lines previously revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and elaborated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. As one writer has said, "By the appointment of a Guardian of the Bahá'í Cause, 'Abdu'l-Bahá created an executive head and center possessing unquestioned consecration and capacity for the tremendous task of inspiring the worldwide Bahá'í community to develop along the path of human service marked out for it...." 74

The Will and Testament also authorized Shoghi Effendi to appoint, as an auxiliary institution to the Guardianship, Hands of the Cause of God, who would give particular attention to the propagation and protection of the Faith. "This body of the Hands of the Cause of God," 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "is under the direction of the guardian of the Cause of God. He must continually urge them to strive and endeavor to the utmost of their ability to diffuse the sweet

savors of God, and to guide all the peoples of the world, for it is the light of  
Divine Guidance that causeth all the universe to be illumined." 75

One of Shoghi Effendi's chief goals was the development of the community to the point where it could sustain the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, the elected international council ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. Later, 'Abdu'l-Bahá through the provisions of His Will and Testament, had shown how its aims and purposes were to be complementary to those of the Guardianship.

Alluding to the complementary functions and authority of His twin successors, 'Abdu'l-Bahá further wrote, "The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abha Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh), under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (the Báb). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God." 76

Through the thirty-six years of the Guardian's ministry, the Bahá'í community remained unified, grew rapidly, and spread over vast regions of the globe, gradually erecting the local, national and international institutions that constitute the Bahá'í administrative order. Eventually conditions necessary for the establishment of the Universal House of Justice were fulfilled, five and a half years after the passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957.

'Abdu'l-Bahá defined the work of the Universal House of Justice in His Will and Testament, specifying that secondary Houses of Justices (temporarily known as National Spiritual Assemblies) must be instituted in all countries, and their members are to elect the Universal House of Justice. The first election of this institution in 1963 by the members of 56 National Spiritual Assemblies not only initiated a new stage in the evolution of the administrative order; it also marked the first time in history that an international governing body of this character had been brought into being by a democratic election devoid of campaigning or nominations, in the manner of all Bahá'í elections. Since then the number of National Spiritual Assemblies has increased more than threefold.

Regarding the duties of members of the Universal House of Justice, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "It is incumbent upon these members to gather in a certain place and deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself. And inasmuch as this House of Justice hath power to enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions, so also it hath power to repeal the same."77

The Universal House of Justice arrives at decisions through consultation, a process uniquely defined by Bahá'u'lláh and which is essential to the existence of the administrative order. Consultation is the method by which unity is maintained in the conduct of Bahá'í community affairs throughout the world. As a procedure for building consensus and investigating truth, they have the potential for wide application. Indeed, Bahá'ís have found them to be useful in virtually any arena where group decision-making and cooperation is required. These principles are used not only by the Faith's own institutions, but in Bahá'í-owned businesses, in Bahá'í-operated schools, and in day-to-day decision-making of Bahá'í families. In essence, consultation seeks to build consensus in a manner that unites various constituencies instead of dividing them. It encourages diversity of opinion and acts to control the struggle for power that is otherwise so common in traditional decision-making systems.

Bahá'í consultation is based on the following principles:

- \* Information should be gathered from the widest possible range of sources, seeking a diversity of points of view. This may mean making special efforts to seek the views of specialists--such as lawyers, doctors, or scientists. It may

also mean looking for information outside traditional specialties or making a special effort to consider the views of community members from diverse backgrounds.

- \* During discussion, participants must make every effort to be as frank and candid as possible, while maintaining a courteous interest in the views of others. Personal attacks, blanket ultimatums and prejudicial statements are to be avoided.

- \* When an idea is put forth it becomes at once the property of the group. Although this notion sounds simple, it is perhaps the most profound principle of consultation. For in this rule, all ideas cease to be the property of any individual, sub-group, or constituency. When followed, this principle encourages those ideas that spring forth from a sincere desire to serve, as opposed to ideas that emanate from a desire for personal aggrandizement or constituency-building.

- \* The group strives for unanimity, but a majority vote can be taken to bring about a conclusion and make the decision. An important aspect to this principle is the understanding that once a decision is made, it is incumbent on the entire group to act on it with unity--regardless of how many supported the measure.

In this sense, there can be no "minority" report or "position of the opposition"

in consultation. Rather, Bahá'ís believe that if a decision is a wrong one, it

will become evident in its implementation--but only if the decision-making

group and, indeed, the community at large, support it wholeheartedly.

This commitment to unity ensures that if a decision or a project fails, the problem lies in the idea itself, and not in lack of support from the community or the obstinate actions of opponents.

The principle, again, harks back to an understanding of the power of unity. Bahá'u'lláh's Son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, said that Bahá'ís should strive always to seek agreement on an issue:

If they agree on a subject, even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation. Though one of the parties may be in the right and they disagree that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right.

Thus, through the definite arrangements made by Bahá'u'lláh and amplified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Covenant has remained and remains inviolate; the channel of divine guidance, which provides flexibility in all the affairs of mankind, has stayed open through the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that of Shoghi Effendi, and subsequently through the years since the election of the Universal House of Justice which was founded by Bahá'u'lláh and endowed by Him with supreme authority and unfailing guidance and of which 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "Unto this body all things must be referred."

The completeness of the Covenant is evident through these arrangements, as the international, national and local institutions of the administrative order provide points of unity around which the Bahá'í community revolves. Illustrative of this characteristic is the following statement of Shoghi Effendi:

And now as I look into the future, I hope to see the [Bahá'ís] at all times, in every land, and of every shade of thought and character, voluntarily and joyously rallying round their local and in particular their national centers of activity, upholding and promoting their interests with complete unanimity and contentment, with perfect understanding, genuine enthusiasm, and sustained vigor. This indeed is the one joy and yearning of my life, for it is the fountain-head from which all future blessings will flow, the broad foundation upon which the security of the Divine Edifice must ultimately rest.<sup>78</sup>

Such rallying points for the Bahá'í community, whatever their rank, are mutually interactive and reinforcing; operating in a relationship similar to that of concentric circles, all of which focus on the indispensable Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant.

Shoghi Effendi expressed this view about the Covenant in a letter written on his behalf by his secretary:

As regards the meaning of the Bahá'í Covenant, the Guardian considers the existence of two forms of Covenant, both of which are explicitly mentioned in the literature of the Cause. First is the Covenant that every Prophet makes with humanity or, more definitely, with His people that they will accept and follow the coming Manifestation Who will be the reappearance of His reality. [Bahá'u'lláh states that a Manifestation will come not less than a thousand years after Him.] The second form of Covenant is such as the one Bahá'u'lláh made with His people that they should accept the Master ['Abdu'l-Bahá]. This is merely to establish and strengthen the succession of the series of Lights that appear after every Manifestation. Under the same category falls the Covenant the Master made with the Bahá'ís that they should accept His administration after Him...79

Throughout the past century, the sphere of unity encompassed by the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh has steadily widened as the Bahá'í community has grown and spread around the world. Today, over 150 years after the birth of the Bahá'í Revelation, millions of followers in hundreds of countries and territories all over the world remain united through the provisions of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant.

#### Our Covenant with Bahá'u'lláh

A Covenant implies a solemn agreement between two parties. As already noted, Bahá'u'lláh's part of His Covenant is to bring us teachings that transform both the inner and outer conditions of life on earth, to provide us with an authoritative interpreter to keep us from misunderstanding God's will for us, and to give us guidance to establish institutions that will pursue the goals of the achievement of unity. Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant affects us at all levels of existence, from our social organizations to our individual lives.

As individuals, we in turn have the responsibility to observe the laws God has given to us to safeguard our dignity and to enable us to become the noble beings He created us to be -- to pray, to meditate, to read the Sacred Writings, to fast, to live a chaste life, to be trustworthy. It is our responsibility to show love towards each other, as imperfect as we may be; it is our obligation to love and to obey the institutions Bahá'u'lláh brought into being. Unless we do these things, we do not open ourselves to the benefits of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant with us.

In an appealing collection of ethical writings called *The Hidden Words*, Bahá'u'lláh wrote, in the voice of the Divine: "Love Me, that I may love thee.

If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant." This brief passage encapsulates the essence of the Covenant and our

responsibility. It shows the Creator's abiding love for us as well as our freedom to choose whether to love Him in return -- and the consequences of that choice.

#### A Universally Transformative Power

The Bahá'í community is currently traversing the first stage in the flowering of the divine authority which Bahá'u'lláh planted in human affairs through the establishment of His Covenant and His appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as its Center. This authority, which is an expression of the love of God, has the power, at the individual level, to captivate hearts and transform character. It provides us with a code of conduct that leads towards social progress. At the community level, the loving authority at the heart of the Faith moulds our social relationships. It guides us to manifest a quality of love and to maintain unity in our dealings with each other. At an institutional level, the Covenant gives us administrative channels through which love flows, and it defines our relationship with those institutions. The transformative power of the Covenant expresses the essential feature of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order, cherished by Him above anything else: "The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice."

As humanity comes of age, the peoples of the world are awakening to the fact of their oneness and to the vision of the earth as a single homeland. The spiritual authority of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant provides us with a framework for healing past differences, whether of race, class or creed, and establishes a new kind of relationship between us and our Creator. The moral empowerment that comes to us through this divine bestowal will enable us, for the first time in human history, to build a unified global society.

#### 'Abdu'l-Bahá: the Center of the Covenant

On November 29, 1921, ten thousand people--Jews, Christians, and Muslims from all persuasions and denominations--gathered on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land to mourn the passing of One who was eulogized as the essence of "Virtue and Wisdom, of Knowledge and Generosity."<sup>80</sup> On that occasion, 'Abdu'l-Bahá--Bahá'u'lláh's Son and chosen successor--was described by a Jewish leader as a "living example of self-sacrifice," by a Christian orator as One who led humanity to the "Way of Truth," and by a prominent Muslim leader as a "pillar of peace" and the embodiment of "glory and greatness." His funeral, according to a Western observer, brought together a great throng "sorrowing for His death, but rejoicing also for His life." 81

Throughout the Occident and the Orient, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was known as an ambassador of peace, a champion of justice, and the leading exponent of a new Faith. Through a series of epoch-making travels across North America and Europe, 'Abdu'l-Bahá--by word and example--proclaimed with persuasiveness and force the essential principles of His Father's religion.

Affirming that "Love is the most great law" that is the foundation of "true civilization," and that the "supreme need of humanity is cooperation and reciprocity" among all its peoples, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reached out to leaders and the meek alike, to every soul who crossed His path.

An American commentator wrote,

He found a large and sympathetic audience waiting to greet Him personally and to receive from His own lips His loving and spiritual message.... Beyond the words spoken there was something indescribable in His personality that impressed profoundly all who came into His presence. The dome-like head, the patriarchal beard, the eyes that seemed to have looked beyond the reach of time and sense, the soft yet clearly penetrating voice, the translucent humility, the never failing love,--but above all, the sense of power mingled with gentleness that invested His whole being with a rare majesty of spiritual exaltation that both set Him apart, and yet brought Him near to the lowliest soul,--it was all this, and much more that can never be defined, that have left with His many... friends, memories that are ineffaceable and unspeakably precious.

Yet, however magnetic His personality or penetrating His insights into the human condition, such characteristics cannot adequately capture 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unique station in religious history. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the "Trust of God," "a shelter for all mankind," "the most great Favor," and God's "ancient and immutable Mystery." The Bahá'í writings further affirm that "in the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized."

The question of religious succession has been crucial to all faiths. Failure to resolve this question has inevitably led to acrimony and division. The ambiguity surrounding the true successors of Jesus and Muhammad, for example, led to differing interpretations of sacred scripture and deep discord within both Christianity and Islam. However, Bahá'u'lláh prevented schism and established an unassailable foundation for His Faith through the provision of His will and testament, entitled "The Book of My Covenant." He wrote: "When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root. The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch ['Abdu'l-Bahá]."

Bahá'u'lláh's appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His successor was the means for diffusing His message of hope and universal peace to all corners of the world, for realizing the essential unity of all peoples. In referring to 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "The glory of God rest upon Thee, and upon whosoever serveth Thee and circleth around Thee. Woe, great woe, betide him that opposeth and injureth Thee. Well is it with him that sweareth fealty to Thee." 'Abdu'l-Bahá was, in short, the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant --the instrument for ensuring the unity of the Bahá'í community and preserving the

integrity of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.

As the authorized interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became the "living mouth of the Book, the expounder of the Word." Without 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the enormous creative power of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation could not have been transmitted to humanity, nor its import fully comprehended. He elucidated the teachings of His Father's Faith, amplified its doctrines, and delineated the central features of its administrative institutions. He was the unerring guide and architect of a rapidly expanding Bahá'í community. In addition, Bahá'u'lláh vested in 'Abdu'l-Bahá "the virtues of perfection in personal and social behavior, that humanity may have an enduring model to emulate." As the perfect Exemplar of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and the Pivot of His Covenant, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became "the incorruptible medium for applying the Word to practical measures for the raising up of a new civilization."

In retrospect, it became clear that Bahá'u'lláh had carefully prepared 'Abdu'l-Bahá to succeed Him. He was born on May 23, 1844, the very night that the Báb had declared the beginning of a new religious cycle in history. As a child, He suffered along with His Father during the persecutions against the Bábis. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was eight years old when Bahá'u'lláh was first imprisoned for His role as a leading exponent and defender of the Bábi Faith. He accompanied Bahá'u'lláh throughout His long exile from Persia to the capital of the Ottoman empire, and ultimately, to Palestine. As He grew older, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became His Father's closest companion and emerged as His deputy, shield, and principal representative to the political and religious leaders of the day. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's extraordinary demonstration of leadership, knowledge, and service brought great prestige to the exiled Bahá'í community. He assumed His role as the Head of the Bahá'í Faith following Bahá'u'lláh's passing in May 1892.

In 1911, after more than four decades of imprisonment and suffering, 'Abdu'l-Bahá journeyed to the West and presented with brilliant simplicity, to high and low alike, Bahá'u'lláh's prescription for the moral and spiritual renewal of society. This "Call of God," 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated, "...breathed a new life into the body of mankind, and infused a new spirit into the whole creation. It is for this reason that the world hath been moved to its depths, and the hearts and consciences of men been quickened. Erelong the evidences of this regeneration will be revealed, and the fast asleep will be awakened."

Among the vital truths that 'Abdu'l-Bahá tirelessly proclaimed to leaders of thought as well as countless groups and masses at large were: "The independent search after truth, unfettered by superstition or tradition; the oneness of the entire human race, the pivotal principle and fundamental doctrine of the Faith; the basic unity of all religions; the condemnation of all

forms of prejudice, whether religious, racial, class or national; the harmony which must exist between religion and science; the equality of men and women, the two wings on which the bird of humankind is able to soar; the introduction of compulsory education; the adoption of a universal auxiliary language; the abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty; the institution of a world tribunal for the adjudication of disputes between nations; the exaltation of work, performed in the spirit of service, to the rank of worship; the glorification of justice as the ruling principle in human society, and of religion as a bulwark for the protection of all peoples and nations; and the establishment of a permanent and universal peace as the supreme goal of all mankind."

He affirmed time and again that He was a "herald of peace and reconciliation," "an advocate of the oneness of humanity," and an agent calling humanity to the "Kingdom of God." Despite the receptivity and acclaim given Him, 'Abdu'l-Bahá made clear the Source of His thought and His true station. In a letter to His followers in America He wrote:

My name is 'Abdu'l-Bahá [literally, Servant of Baha]. My qualification is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My reality is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My praise is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection [Bahá'u'lláh] is my glorious and refulgent diadem, and servitude to all the human race my perpetual religion... No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will ever have, except 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory.

The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith

After the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921, the leadership of the Bahá'í community entered a new phase, evolving from that of a single individual to an administrative order founded on the "twin pillars" of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.

This administrative order was originally envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh in his Book of Laws and was given further shape by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, particularly in His Will and Testament. In that document He appointed His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and also referred to the future election of the Universal House of Justice, a legislative body of which the Guardian would be the "sacred head and the distinguished member for life."<sup>82</sup>

The Universal House of Justice was not established in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's lifetime; it fell to the Guardian to lay the base for its foundation throughout the thirty-six years of his tenure as head of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Throughout those years, Shoghi Effendi educated the Bahá'í community about the administrative order of the Faith and prepared it for the eventual establishment of that order's other central institution by writing consistently about the interconnection of the Guardianship and the Universal House of

Justice, both of which he described as "divine in origin, essential in their functions and complementary in their aim and purpose."<sup>83</sup> He continued on to state that their common purpose is "to insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings."<sup>84</sup> The institution of the Guardianship is Bahá'u'lláh's means for providing for the continuation of the unerring interpretation of His word. The function of the Universal House of Justice, on the other hand, is to legislate upon matters "not expressly revealed in the Sacred Texts."<sup>85</sup> As Shoghi Effendi said, "Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions administer [the Bahá'í Faith's] affairs, coordinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions."<sup>86</sup>

The interconnection of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice is further evidenced by the Guardian's ceaseless labor to foster the expansion of the Bahá'í community around the world in order to establish and develop the national legislative bodies of the administrative order; the goal of this work was the election of the Universal House of Justice and the full development in all aspects of the order ordained by Bahá'u'lláh.

While the Guardianship was outlined as a hereditary institution and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament provided for the possibility of a line of succession to His appointee as Guardian, Shoghi Effendi died without any heirs and without being able to appoint a successor, as no other members of his family met the stipulations that had been outlined by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The vitality of the Guardianship continues, however, through the voluminous writings, the extensive guidance, and other legacies left to the Bahá'í community from Shoghi Effendi's ministry between 1921 and 1957. To appreciate fully the scope of these legacies, it is helpful for us to take a more detailed look at the many facets of the Guardian's work to develop the Bahá'í community.

#### The Work of Shoghi Effendi

In His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote in these touching words of the one who would succeed Him after His death:

O ye the faithful loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! It is incumbent upon you to take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi....

For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the guardian of the Cause of God.... He that obeyeth him not, hath not obeyed God; he that turneth away from him, hath turned away from God and he that denieth him, hath denied the True One. Beware lest anyone falsely interpret these words....<sup>87</sup>

Thus, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's choice of a successor to the leadership of the Bahá'í community after His passing was explicitly stated. The Guardianship

protected the unity of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh by continuing the line of authority, which had passed from Bahá'u'lláh to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and now rested on the shoulders of Shoghi Effendi, who was also called by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament 'the Sign of God'.<sup>88</sup>

When he was appointed Guardian, Shoghi Effendi was in his early twenties, studying at Balliol College, Oxford. The grief he felt upon the death of his dearly-loved Grandfather, added to the weight of the responsibility he had been given in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will, was initially crushing, since he had had no intimation that he was to be appointed to any such position.

To deal with his grief and to prepare himself to assume the burden of authority placed upon his shoulders, he left the Holy Land and entered a several-month period of seclusion. During this time, he left the affairs of the Faith under the leadership of his great aunt, Bahiyih Khanum -- Bahá'u'lláh's

daughter and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister. Shoghi Effendi and his great aunt were very close; she, of all the members of his family, understood his crushing grief at the loss of his beloved Grandfather, and she was a wise and loyal support to him during the early years of the Guardianship until her passing in 1932. The depth of his regard for her is evident in the tender tribute he penned immediately following her death, a small portion of which is excerpted here:

Dearly-beloved Greatest Holy Leaf!...The memory of the ineffable beauty of thy smile shall ever continue to cheer and hearten me in the thorny path I am destined to pursue. The remembrance of the touch of thine hand shall spur me on to follow steadfastly in thy way. The sweet magic of thy voice shall remind me, when the hour of adversity is at its darkest, to hold fast to the rope thou didst seize so firmly all the days of thy life.<sup>89</sup>

The "thorny path" to which the Guardian alludes in this passage perhaps refers to one of the crucial and difficult tasks he was called upon to perform: the protection of the young Faith from enemies from both outside and within its ranks. He also served as the sole authoritative interpreter and expounder of its teachings; he erected the administrative order of the Faith; he prosecuted global plans for the worldwide expansion of the Bahá'í Faith, as outlined in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; he translated volumes of the Faith's sacred writings from their original Persian and Arabic into English, which subsequently served as the standard for further translations into other languages; he wrote a history of the first century of the Faith; and he developed and beautified the properties at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa and Acre. Those are the major tangible legacies of the Guardianship, but perhaps as important as any of these was the way Shoghi Effendi inspired ordinary people to arise and do extraordinary things. In much the same way that a general marshals his troops to battle, he wrote numerous letters to the Bahá'í communities, large and small, all over the world and called them to greater service to their Faith and to humanity. For example, in a letter to the

American Bahá'ís in 1948, he referred to them as "the champion builders of Bahá'u'lláh's rising World Order" and urged them to "scale nobler heights of heroism as humanity plunges into greater depths of despair, degradation, dissension and distress."<sup>90</sup>

He safeguarded the unity of the Faith by acting, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá before him had acted, as the authoritative interpreter and expounder of the Bahá'í sacred

writings. All questions regarding interpretation were to be directed to him. Although he did not have the authority to alter in any way what Bahá'u'lláh or

'Abdu'l-Bahá had revealed, he performed the crucial tasks of clarifying points which may not have been clearly understood and of elaborating upon previously revealed teachings. To this end, he wrote thousands of letters to individual believers and to Bahá'í communities around the world. Through such guidance, the Bahá'ís remained unified in their clear understanding of the Faith's sacred writings.

Shoghi Effendi translated the Bahá'í writings from the language in which they were revealed -- either Persian or Arabic -- into a majestic style of English.

In

1921, relatively few of Bahá'u'lláh's extensive writings were available in English. The Guardian translated Bahá'u'lláh's central works and compiled them so the Bahá'ís would have access to authoritative translations, and he published, under the title of *The Dawn-Breakers*, his annotated and edited translation of the main historical account of the early years of the Bahá'í Faith

by Nabil-i-A'zam so the English-speaking Bahá'ís would be able to gain inspiration from the examples of their spiritual forebears and to read eyewitness accounts of those who met the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi also penned his own historical account of the first century of the Bahá'í Faith called *God Passes By*.

As builder of the administrative order, Shoghi Effendi took the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning the establishment of Bahá'í institutions that would administer the affairs of the community, and he developed a plan to bring them into being. Taking as his guide Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements about the administrative order of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi developed the fledgling communities around the world to the point where they could support the institutions envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. When he was first appointed Guardian, there were no national administrative bodies in the Bahá'í Faith; at the time of his passing, there were 26; at the time of the completion of the Ten Year Plan he had initiated for the global expansion and consolidation of the Faith between 1953 and 1963, there were 56.

Shoghi Effendi carried on an extensive correspondence with Bahá'í communities all over the world concerning the development of the Bahá'í administrative order. As early as March 1923, for example, he wrote a letter

to the Bahá'ís in America, Great Britain, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, Japan, and Australasia, in which he outlined the conditions necessary for establishment of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, guidelines for Assembly elections, and the parameters of Assembly functioning. He also offered the Bahá'ís the long view of such elections: "With these Assemblies, local as well as national, harmoniously, vigorously, and efficiently functioning throughout the Bahá'í world, the only means for the establishment of the Supreme House of Justice will have been secured."<sup>91</sup> The development of the administrative order was obviously not brought about in isolation. Coordinated with this was a series of plans designed to effect the systematic expansion of the Bahá'í community around the globe. Volunteers known as "pioneers" dispersed to remote areas to teach their Faith and found Bahá'í communities. In the Ten Year Plan which ran from 1953 to 1963, hundreds of pioneers settled in countries and territories throughout the world, establishing 44 new National and Regional Assemblies to add to the existing twelve, and the Bahá'í population swelled.

As well as coordinating the dispersal of Bahá'í pioneers to all parts of the globe, Shoghi Effendi greatly advanced the development of the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa. He arranged for the construction of a superstructure over the tomb 'Abdu'l-Bahá had erected where the remains of the Báb had been laid to rest; he beautified and expanded the gardens surrounding the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh outside Acre; he constructed the International Bahá'í Archives building on the slopes of Mount Carmel, where the tablets and relics of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh were to be appropriately housed and displayed for Bahá'í pilgrims; he had the remains of Navvab, the wife of Bahá'u'lláh who had accompanied Him through all His exiles, and His son Mirza Mihdi, who had died in the prison in Acre, transferred to their final resting places in the shadow of the Shrine of the Báb and near the grave of the Greatest Holy Leaf. All of this work was undertaken to create an atmosphere appropriate to the spiritual and administrative center of a world religion. As head of this religion, the Guardian also conducted activities related to the external affairs of the Faith and its World Centre.

Addressing even one of the various facets of the work undertaken by the Guardian was a herculean task; that the Guardian accomplished the vast number of objectives he set in so many different areas over a thirty-six year period is astounding, in retrospect. For this reason, and particularly for his accomplishment in bringing into tangible existence the new social order given by God to the world through the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, he has been extolled by one writer as "the one human being in all history, past, present or future, to exercise the greatest influence on the ultimate shape and modus operandi of the social order of the world."<sup>92</sup> His widow, Amatu'l-Bahá Ruhyyih Khanum, expressed it this way: The Guardian had fused in the alembic of his creative mind all the elements

of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh into one great indivisible whole; he had created an organized community of His followers which was the receptacle of His teachings, His laws and His Administrative Order; the teachings of the twin Manifestations of God and the Perfect Exemplar had been woven into a shining cloak that would clothe and protect man for a thousand years, a cloak on which the fingers of Shoghi Effendi had picked out the patterns, knitted the seams, fashioned the brilliant protective clasps of his interpretations of the Sacred Texts, never to be sundered, never to be torn away until that day when a new Law-giver comes to the world and once again wraps His creature man in yet another divine garment.<sup>93</sup>

#### The Universal House of Justice

"The essence of all that We have revealed for thee," Bahá'u'lláh declares, "is Justice."<sup>94</sup> The chief instrument for the transformation of society and the achievement of lasting peace, He asserts, is the establishment of justice in every aspect of life. Bahá'u'lláh explains that the "purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men."<sup>95</sup> A conviction of the practicality of world unity, coupled with a dedication and willingness to work toward this goal, is the single most distinguishing characteristic of the Bahá'í community. The efforts of Bahá'ís around the world to build communities founded on cooperation and justice are guided by a unique system of administration established by Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

The practical expression of the religious impulse in the modern age, Bahá'u'lláh says, is collective decision-making and collective action based on spiritual principles. To ensure that power is used as an instrument of justice, and that governance serves humanity's true needs, decision-making authority, He insists, must rest with corporate bodies and not be left in the hands of individuals. "In all things it is necessary to consult," is His advice<sup>96</sup>. "The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation."<sup>97</sup> Thus, although Bahá'u'lláh, like all Manifestations of God before Him, enunciated and reiterated certain fundamental spiritual truths, and through His appearance imbued humankind with a "new and regenerating Spirit," He also established laws and institutional mechanisms to ensure the realization of justice in human affairs.

Bahá'ís believe that the "Administrative Order" created by Bahá'u'lláh, and built up by His successors 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, defines a pattern of cooperative decision-making and social interaction that cultivates the moral and creative capacities latent in human nature. It provides a model of the institutional structures necessary for global community life--a pattern of living that embraces diversity and fosters mutuality of purpose, compassion, and rectitude of conduct. A singular feature of this administrative system is

the balance it strikes between preserving individual freedom and promoting the collective good. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote:

...this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word, and conferred the necessary authority on the body [the Universal House of Justice] designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances.<sup>98</sup>

Founded on a set of unique electoral and consultative principles that are democratic in spirit and method, the Bahá'í administrative order is organized around freely elected governing councils which operate at the local, national, and international levels. This hierarchy devolves decision-making to the lowest practicable level--thereby instituting a unique vehicle for grassroots participation in governance--while at the same time providing a level of coordination and authority that makes possible cooperation on a global scale. Bahá'u'lláh called these governing councils "Houses of Justice."

The Universal House of Justice today guides the activities of the global Bahá'í community. This body was instituted by Bahá'u'lláh Himself as the supreme legislative organ of the Bahá'í administrative order. Its members, Bahá'u'lláh wrote, are "the Trustees of God among His servants."<sup>99</sup> The Universal House of Justice itself states that "The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and of the Guardian of the Cause -- who, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is the sole authority in the interpretation of Bahá'í Scripture -- constitute the binding terms of reference

of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation."<sup>100</sup>

According to the explicit texts of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the legislative

enactments of the Universal House of Justice have the same authority for Bahá'ís as do the sacred texts themselves. The difference is that the House of

Justice has the right to repeal and alter any of its enactments as the Bahá'í community evolves and new conditions emerge, whereas the laws enshrined in the Bahá'í texts will remain unchanged. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that all questions and issues not explicitly addressed in the Bahá'í sacred writings "must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the truth and the purpose of God Himself."<sup>101</sup>

The administration of the Bahá'í Faith on the national and local levels is presently carried out by national and local "Spiritual Assemblies." These elected institutions function in accordance with the same consultative principles as the Universal House of Justice and will eventually be called "Houses of Justice." Bahá'ís believe that, while local and national Houses of

Justice will be the instruments for ensuring human well-being, the decisions of the Universal House of Justice are uniquely inspired and authoritative. Bahá'u'lláh stated that God Himself has made this possible and will preserve the enactments of the Universal House of Justice from error: "It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily, is the Provider, the Omniscient."<sup>102</sup> Bahá'u'lláh wrote that since for "each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time. They...are the recipients of divine inspiration from the unseen kingdom."<sup>103</sup>

Thus, the Universal House of Justice has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh as an instrument of divine guidance and is not to be considered as merely the international administrative body of the Bahá'í Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms that the Universal House of Justice is "under the protection and the unerring guidance of God."<sup>104</sup> However, it is only the corporate body itself that has been endowed with such guidance and not the individual members.

With the coming into being of the Universal House of Justice a new era opened in the history of the Bahá'í Faith. Authoritative direction flowed to the

Bahá'í community first through the Manifestation of God (Bahá'u'lláh), then through the chosen Center of the Faith ('Abdu'l-Bahá) and the Guardian of the Faith (Shoghi Effendi). But with the passing of Shoghi Effendi and the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, guidance for the Bahá'í community no longer came from a personal channel, organically linked to the Manifestation of God, but from an elected body chosen by the Bahá'í membership itself.

The relationship between the Universal House of Justice and the national and local governing bodies that support it has an extremely important feature. Having arrived at a period in which humanity is awakening to new powers of reason and perception, Bahá'u'lláh pays particular attention to the development of decision-making skills at the grassroots of human society. Thus, the Bahá'í administrative order devolves authority to national and local

levels to engender new patterns of interaction and participation, especially among individuals and groups that have been historically excluded from decision-making. Consequently, responsibility for the implementation of Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual and social principles essentially resides with National

and Local Spiritual Assemblies. It is these bodies that are charged with ensuring that Bahá'u'lláh's prescription of moral renewal and harmonious community life is realized. In addition, national and local Bahá'í administrative institutions are enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh to ensure that Bahá'í

communities promote the interests and abide by the laws of localities, regions, and nations. He emphatically declares that He has only "singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain."<sup>105</sup> Loyalty and obedience to the governments under which Bahá'ís reside obtain whether or not Bahá'ís constitute numerical majorities. In any particular nation, the National Spiritual Assembly has specific responsibility for effecting conformity with this vital principle. In this regard, the Universal House of Justice serves as the ultimate guarantor of the Bahá'í community's adherence to the laws and ordinances of Bahá'u'lláh in all parts of the world.

The Universal House of Justice was instituted when, in 1963, members of National Spiritual Assemblies from around the globe, in an atmosphere of deep reflection and profound devotion, elected nine individuals from among the Bahá'ís of the world as members of this institution. The occasion is considered by Bahá'ís to be, next to the appointment of Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Faith, the most momentous event in the history of what is known as the "Formative Age" of the Bahá'í Faith. Even the manner of the election itself was befitting that institution described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the

"source of all good."<sup>106</sup> Conducted by secret ballot, the Bahá'í electoral process prohibits the nomination and presentation of candidates, thereby giving maximum freedom of choice to each elector and avoiding the partisanship and power-seeking behavior so characteristic of conventional political elections. The election of the Universal House of Justice takes place every five years in the same atmosphere of spirituality and dedication. At the most recent international convention in April 1998, delegates from more than 160 national communities participated in the election.

Beyond its institutional importance, the establishment of the Universal House of Justice symbolized the distinguishing characteristic which Bahá'ís regard as the essence of their Faith: unity. No matter how wholehearted and sincere, faith alone cannot ensure that the unity of a religious community will endure. The emergence of the Universal House of Justice as the guiding authority in all the affairs of the community meant that the Bahá'í Faith had remained united through the most critical period of a religion's history, the vulnerable first century during which schism almost invariably takes root. Shortly after its formation in 1963, the Universal House of Justice wrote: "The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is unbroken, its all-encompassing power inviolate...The channel of Divine guidance, providing flexibility in all the affairs of mankind, remains open through that institution which was founded by Bahá'u'lláh and endowed by Him with supreme authority and unfailing guidance..."<sup>107</sup> For Bahá'ís, the emphatic promise of Bahá'u'lláh had been realized: "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."<sup>108</sup>

In its position at the apex of the Bahá'í administrative order, the Universal

House of Justice protects the spiritual inheritance bequeathed to it by promoting "the attainment of those spiritual qualities which should characterize Bahá'í life individually and collectively"; preserving the Bahá'í

Sacred Texts and safeguarding their "inviolability"; defending and protecting the Bahá'í community and emancipating it from the "fetters of repression and persecution"; preserving and developing the world spiritual and administrative centre of the Bahá'í Faith; and safeguarding "the personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals."<sup>109</sup> It is also given the charge of

adapting the Bahá'í Faith to the "requirements of progressive society," and thus is empowered to legislate on matters not explicitly covered in the Bahá'í

sacred texts.<sup>110</sup> The approach to legislation in the Bahá'í Faith is explained in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice: "The human tendency in past [religious] Dispensations has been to want every question answered and to arrive at a binding decision affecting every small detail of belief or practice. The tendency in the Bahá'í Dispensation, from the time of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, has been to clarify the governing principles, to make binding pronouncements on details that are considered essential, but to leave a wide area to the conscience of the individual. The same tendency appears also in administrative matters."<sup>111</sup>

In addition to its responsibility for guiding the growth and development of the global Bahá'í community, the Universal House of Justice is counselled by Bahá'u'lláh to exert a positive influence on the general welfare of humankind.

It is called upon by Him to promote a permanent peace among the nations of the world so that "the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures," and freed from the "affliction" of "conflict."<sup>112</sup> It is

also exhorted to take steps to ensure the "training of peoples, the upbuilding of nations, the protection of man and the safeguarding of his honor."<sup>113</sup> In accordance with these injunctions of Bahá'u'lláh, the Universal House of Justice has vigorously pursued a campaign promoting international peace and stability, and has set in motion a variety of initiatives in the areas of human rights, the advancement of women, and social and economic development. In 1985, in a message entitled "The Promise of World Peace," addressed to "the peoples of the world" and presented to nearly all heads of state around the world, the Universal House of Justice outlined the essential prerequisites for the establishment of global peace and prosperity.

As stipulated by Bahá'u'lláh, the Seat of the Universal House of Justice is located on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, in close proximity to the resting places of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

Spiritual Truths

God, Faith, and Immortality

In the Bahá'í view, the purpose of this life on earth is for each individual to develop the spiritual and moral qualities that lie at the core of his or her nature. Bahá'u'lláh referred to the human being as a "mine rich in gems of inestimable value." These "gems" or qualities can be "mined" or developed only when a person turns to God. But while this awesome task must remain the responsibility of the individual, humanity has received continual guidance from a loving Creator on how to accomplish it. The Bahá'í conceptions of human nature and the soul, then, are essentially positive, as are Bahá'í views on the purpose of life and life after death.

Bahá'ís believe that there is only one God, the Creator of the universe. Throughout history, God has revealed Himself to humanity through a series of divine Messengers, each of Whom has founded a great religion. The Messengers have included Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad. This succession of divine Teachers reflects a single historic "plan of God" for educating humanity about the Creator and for cultivating the spiritual, intellectual, and moral capacities of the race. The goal has been to develop the innate noble characteristics of every human being, and to prepare the way for an advancing global civilization. Knowledge of God's will for humanity in the modern age, Bahá'ís believe, was revealed just over one hundred years ago by Bahá'u'lláh, Who is the latest of these divine Messengers.

#### The Bahá'í Concept of God

The Bahá'í belief in one God<sup>14</sup> means that the universe and all creatures and forces within it have been created by a single supernatural Being. This Being, Whom we call God, has absolute control over His creation (omnipotence) as well as perfect and complete knowledge of it (omniscience). Although we may have different concepts of God's nature, although we may pray to Him in different languages and call Him by different names--Allah or Yahweh, God or Brahma--nevertheless, we are speaking about the same unique Being.

Extolling God's act of creation, Bahá'u'lláh said:

All-praise to the unity of God, and all-honor to Him, the sovereign Lord, the incomparable and all-glorious Ruler of the universe, Who, out of utter nothingness, hath created the reality of all things, Who, from naught, hath brought into being the most refined and subtle elements of His creation, and Who, rescuing His creatures from the abasement of remoteness and the perils of ultimate extinction, hath received them into His kingdom of incorruptible glory. Nothing short of His all-encompassing grace, His all-pervading mercy, could have possibly achieved it<sup>15</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh taught that God is too great and too subtle a Being for the finite human mind ever to understand Him adequately or to construct an accurate image of Him:

How wondrous is the unity of the Living, the Ever-Abiding God--a unity which is exalted above all limitations, that transcendeth the comprehension of all created things.... How lofty hath been His incorruptible Essence, how completely independent of the knowledge of all created things, and how immensely exalted will it remain above the praise of all the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth!116

According to Bahá'í teachings, God is so far beyond His creation that, throughout all eternity, human beings will never be able to formulate any clear image of Him or attain to anything but the most remote appreciation of His superior nature. Even if we say that God is the All-Powerful, the All-Loving, the Infinitely Just, such terms are derived from a very limited human experience of power, love, or justice. Indeed, our knowledge of anything is limited to our knowledge of those attributes or qualities perceptible to us:

Know that there are two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge of the essence of a thing and the knowledge of its qualities. The essence of a thing is known through its qualities; otherwise, it is unknown and hidden.

As our knowledge of things, even of created and limited things, is knowledge of their qualities and not of their essence, how is it possible to comprehend in its essence the Divine Reality, which is unlimited?... Knowing God, therefore, means the comprehension and the knowledge of His attributes, and not of His Reality. This knowledge of the attributes is also proportioned to the capacity and power of man; it is not absolute.117

Thus for human beings the knowledge of God means the knowledge of the attributes and qualities of God, not a direct knowledge of His essence. But how are we to attain the knowledge of the attributes of God? Bahá'u'lláh wrote that everything in creation is God's handiwork and therefore reflects something of His attributes. For example, even in the intimate structure of a rock or a crystal can be seen the order of God's creation. However, the more refined the object, the more completely is it capable of reflecting God's attributes. Since the Messenger of God or Manifestation of God is the highest form of creation known to us, the Manifestation affords the most complete knowledge of God available to us:

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light.... To a supreme degree is this true of man.... For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed.... And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished, and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth. Nay, all else besides these Manifestations, live by the operation of their Will, and move and have their being through the outpourings of their grace.118

Although a rock or a tree reveals something of the subtlety of its Creator,

only a conscious being such as man can dramatize God's attributes in his life and actions. Since the Manifestations are already in a perfected state, it is in

their lives that the deeper meaning of God's attributes can be most perfectly understood. God is not limited by a physical body, and so we cannot see Him directly or observe His personality. Hence our knowledge of the Manifestation is, in fact, the closest we can come to the knowledge of God.

Know thou of a certainty that the Unseen can in no wise incarnate His essence and reveal it unto men. He is, and hath ever been, immensely exalted beyond all that can either be recounted or perceived.... He Who is everlastingly hidden from the eyes of men can never be known except through His Manifestation, and His Manifestation can adduce no greater proof of the truth of His mission than the proof of His Own Person.<sup>119</sup>

And in another similar passage:

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being [God] hath ever been, and will continue to be, closed in the face of men. No man's understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court. As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Day Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self.<sup>120</sup>

Of course, only those who live during the time of a Manifestation have the opportunity of observing Him directly. It is for this reason, Bahá'u'lláh explained, that the essential connection between the individual and God is maintained through the writings and words of each Manifestation. For Bahá'ís, the word of the Manifestation is the Word of God, and it is to this Word that the individual can turn in his or her daily life in order to grow closer to God and to acquire a deeper knowledge of Him. The written Word of God is the instrument that creates a consciousness of God's presence in one's daily life:

Say: The first and foremost testimony establishing His truth is His own Self. Next to this testimony is His Revelation. For whoso faileth to recognize either the one or the other He hath established the words He hath revealed as proof of His reality and truth.... He hath endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God.<sup>121</sup>

It is for this reason that the discipline of daily prayer, meditation, and study of the holy writings constitutes an important part of the individual spiritual practice of Bahá'ís. They feel that this discipline is one of the most important ways of growing closer to their Creator.

To summarize: the Bahá'í view of God is that His essence is eternally transcendent, but that His attributes and qualities are completely immanent in

the Manifestations.<sup>122</sup> Since our knowledge of anything is limited to our knowledge of the perceptible attributes of that thing, knowledge of the Manifestations is (for ordinary humans) equivalent to knowledge of God.<sup>123</sup> In practical terms, this knowledge is gained through study, prayer, meditation, and practical application based on the revealed Word of God (i.e., the sacred scriptures of the Manifestations).

Who are the Prophets?

The Bahá'í teachings hold that the motive force in all human development is the coming of the Manifestations or Prophets of God<sup>124</sup>. There can be little disagreement that human history is strongly influenced by the Founders of the world's great religions. The powerful impact on civilization of Jesus Christ, Buddha, Moses, or Muhammad is seen not only in the cultural forms and value systems which arise from Their works and teachings, but is also reflected in the effects that the example of Their lives has on humankind. Even those who have not been believers or followers have nevertheless acknowledged the profound influence of these figures on individuals and on humanity's collective life.

The realization of the extraordinary impact on human history of the Founders of the major religions naturally leads to the philosophical question of their exact nature. This is one of the most controversial of all questions in the philosophy of religion, and many different answers have been given. On the one hand, the religious Founders have been viewed as human philosophers or great thinkers who have perhaps gone further or studied more profoundly than other philosophers of their age. On the other hand, They have been declared to be God or the incarnation of God. There have also been a multitude of theories that fall somewhere between these two extremes.<sup>125</sup>

It is thus not surprising that the Bahá'í writings deal extensively with this subject, which lies so close to the heart of religion. One of Bahá'u'lláh's major works, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, (Book of Certitude), sets out in some detail the Bahá'í concept of the nature of the Manifestations of God.

According to Bahá'u'lláh, all of the Manifestations of God have the same metaphysical nature and the same spiritual stature. There is absolute equality among Them. No one of Them is superior to another. Speaking of the Manifestations, He wrote:

These sanctified Mirrors, these Day Springs of ancient glory, are, one and all, the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty.... By the revelation of these Gems of Divine virtue all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty, and grace, are made manifest.

These attributes of God are not, and have never been, vouchsafed specially

unto certain Prophets, and withheld from others.... That a certain attribute of God hath not been outwardly manifested by these Essences of Detachment doth in no wise imply that they who are the Day Springs of God's attributes and the Treasuries of His holy names did not actually possess it.126

Bahá'u'lláh explained that the differences which exist between the teachings of the various Manifestations of God are not due to any differences in stature or level of importance, but only to the varying needs and capacities of the civilizations to which They appeared:

These... mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated.127

In the strongest terms, he warned people not to take the variations in the teachings and personalities of the Manifestations to imply a difference in their statures:

Beware, O believers in the Unity of God, lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation. This indeed is the true meaning of Divine unity.... Be ye assured, moreover, that the works and acts of each and every one of these Manifestations of God... are all ordained by God, and are a reflection of His will and Purpose. Whoso maketh the slightest possible difference between their persons, their words, their messages, their acts and manners, hath indeed disbelieved in God, hath repudiated His signs and betrayed the Cause of His Messengers.128

However, the Bahá'í doctrine of the oneness of the Manifestations does not mean that the same individual soul is born again in different physical bodies. Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and Bahá'u'lláh were all different personalities, separate individual realities. Their oneness lies in the fact that

Each manifested and revealed the qualities and attributes of God to the same degree: the spirit of God which dwelled within any one of Them was identical to that which dwelled in the others.

Bahá'u'lláh offered an analogy to explain the relationship between the different Manifestations, and the relationship between each Manifestation and God. In this analogy, God is likened to the sun because He is the unique source of life in the universe in the same way that the physical sun is the unique source of all physical life on earth. The spirit and attributes of God are

the rays of this sun and the individual Manifestation is like a perfect mirror. If

there are several mirrors all turned toward the same sun, that unique sun is reflected in each mirror. Yet the individual mirrors are different, each having been made in its own form and distinct from any other.

In the same way, each Manifestation is a distinct individual being, but the spirit and attributes of God reflected in Each are the same. The analogy of the sun and the mirrors enables us to understand the Bahá'í interpretation of the traditional notion of the "return" or "reappearance" of former Manifestations. The theme of return is found in the sacred scriptures all the major religions, often couched in highly symbolic language. Western readers will be most familiar with the Christian expectation of the return or "Second Coming" of Christ, based on certain passages of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Bahá'u'lláh explains that the return alluded to in former scriptures is

the return of the attributes and spirit of God in the mirror of another Manifestation, not the return of the same human personality: "It is clear and evident... that all the Prophets are the Temples of the Cause of God, Who have appeared clothed in divers attire. If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold Them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith.... Wherefore, should one of these Manifestations of Holiness proclaim saying: 'I am the return of all the Prophets,' He, verily, speaketh the truth. In like manner, in every subsequent Revelation, the return of the former Revelation is a fact, the truth of which is firmly established...." 129

In this way, Bahá'ís consider that the Manifestation Bahá'u'lláh fulfills the

promise of the return of Christ even though Bahá'u'lláh and Jesus have distinct individual souls and therefore distinct human personalities.

The Manifestations represent a level of existence intermediate between God and humanity. Just as humans are superior to the animal because they possess capacities that the animal does not (i.e., the rational and intuitive capacities of

the nonmaterial soul), so the Manifestations possess capacities which ordinary humans lack. It is not a difference in degree, but rather a difference in kind which distinguishes Them from other. The Manifestations are not simply great human thinkers, or philosophers, with a greater understanding or knowledge than others. They are, by their very nature, superior to those who do not possess a similar capacity.

The Bahá'í teachings emphasize that human beings have a dual nature: the physical body, which is composed of elements and which functions according to the same principles as an animal's body; and the nonmaterial rational and immortal human soul. The Manifestations, Bahá'u'lláh taught, also have these two natures, but in addition They possess a third nature unique to Their station: the capacity to receive divine revelation and to transmit it infallibly to humanity:

Know that the Holy manifestations, though they have the degrees of endless perfections, yet, speaking generally, have only three stations. The first

station

is the physical; the second station is the human, which is that of the rational soul; the third is that of the divine appearance and the heavenly splendor.

The physical station is phenomenal; it is composed of elements, and necessarily everything that is composed is subject to decomposition.... The second is the station of the rational soul, which is the human reality. This also is phenomenal, and the Holy Manifestations share it with all mankind.... The spirit of man has a beginning, but it has no end; it continues eternally.... The third station is that of the divine appearance and heavenly splendor: it is the Word of God, the Eternal Bounty, the Holy Spirit. It has neither beginning nor end.... the reality of prophethood, which is the Word of God and the perfect state of manifestation, did not have any beginning and will not have any end; its rising is different from all others and is like that of the sun.<sup>130</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that even the individual soul of the Manifestation is different from that of ordinary people:

But the individual reality of the Manifestations of God is a holy reality, and for that reason, it is sanctified, and in that which concerns its nature and quality, is distinguished from all other things. It is like the sun, which by its essential nature produces light and cannot be compared to the moon.... So other human realities are those souls who, like the moon, take light from the sun; but that holy reality is luminous in Himself.<sup>131</sup>

The Manifestation then, is not simply an ordinary person whom God chooses at some point in His natural lifetime to be His messenger. Rather, the Manifestation is a special Being, having a unique relationship to God and sent by Him from the spiritual world as an instrument of divine revelation. Even though the individual soul of the Manifestation had a phenomenal beginning, it nevertheless existed in the spiritual world prior to physical birth in this life. The immortal souls of ordinary men, on the other hand, have no such preexistence, but come into existence at the moment of human conception. Of the preexistence of the souls of the Manifestations, Shoghi Effendi said:

The Prophets, unlike us, are pre-existent. The soul of Christ existed in the spiritual world before His birth in this world. We cannot imagine what that world is like, so words are inadequate to picture His state of being.<sup>132</sup>

The Manifestation has the awareness of His reality and identity even from childhood, though He may not begin His mission of openly teaching and instructing others until later in life. Because They are the direct recipients of revelation from God, the Manifestations possess absolute knowledge of the realities of life. This innate, divinely revealed knowledge alone enables Them

to formulate teachings and laws that correspond to human needs and conditions at a given time in history:

Since the Sanctified Realities, the supreme Manifestations of God, surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things, therefore Their knowledge is divine knowledge, and not acquired--that is to say, it is a holy bounty, it is a divine

revelation.... the supreme Manifestations of God are aware of the reality of the mysteries of beings. Therefore They establish laws which are suitable and adapted to the state of the world of man, for religion is the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things.... [T]he supreme Manifestations of God... understand this essential connection, and by this knowledge establish the Law of God.<sup>133</sup>

The preceding passage makes clear that God's laws are inherent in the structure of reality: the Manifestation understands these laws, but did not create them. Humans can therefore discover some of these laws on their own, but other statements in the Bahá'í writings indicate that humanity would destroy itself if left unaided (i.e., without Divine Revelation) to discover all of them.

No one can "become" a Manifestation of God. Each individual soul is capable of being touched by the spirit of God and may therefore make spiritual progress. But the Manifestation remains on an ideal level beyond that which even the most perfect person is capable of attaining.

Extending the mirror analogy, the souls of ordinary people may also be likened to mirrors--but, unlike the Manifestations, they are imperfect. In other words, each human being can reflect something of God's attributes, but only in an imperfect and limited way. For ordinary human beings, spiritual progress implies perfecting, cleansing, and polishing the mirror of the soul so that it may reflect ever more clearly the attributes of God. In several passages, Bahá'u'lláh explicitly used this example of "cleansing the mirror" as an analogy for spiritual progress. The analogy emphasizes the belief that humans are created imperfect, but with an endless potential for perfection; whereas the Manifestation is already in a perfected state of being.

Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá taught that there are no levels of being other than the three discussed above: human beings, the Manifestations, and God. There is no hierarchy of demons, angels, and archangels. Insofar as these terms have any significant meaning, they are seen as symbolic of varying stages of human development, imperfection being demonic and spirituality being angelic. The Manifestations are already in a state of perfection, while human beings are potentially perfect in that each soul has the potential to reflect the attributes of its Creator. The ultimate state of perfection for a person, as explained below by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is one of absolute servitude to

God:

Know that the conditions of existence are limited to the conditions of servitude, of prophethood, and of Deity, but the divine and the contingent perfections are unlimited.... As the divine bounties are endless, so human perfections are endless. If it were possible to reach a limit of perfection, then

one of the realities of the beings might reach the condition of being independent of God, and the contingent might attain to the condition of the absolute. But for every being there is a point which it cannot overpass... he who is in the condition of servitude, however far he may progress in gaining limitless perfections, will never reach the condition of Deity.... Peter cannot become Christ. All that he can do is, in the condition of servitude, to attain endless perfections....134

However, because a human being is capable of entering into communion with God and thereby becoming aware of the spirit of God, he or she is also capable of "inspiration." The Bahá'í writings distinguish between inspiration and revelation. Revelation is that infallible and direct perception of God's creative Word that is accessible only to the Manifestations, Who transmit it to humankind. Inspiration is the indirect and relative perception of spiritual truth

which is available to every human soul. It arises out of the context of the spiritual life of a culture influenced by a Manifestation of God. Any human is capable of being inspired by the spirit of God. But the experience of inspiration is available to us because the spirit of God is mediated to us through the Manifestations. In short: inspiration depends upon revelation.

Bahá'u'lláh explained that the Divine Will of God does sometimes choose ordinary people as "prophets" and inspires them to play certain roles in human affairs. Examples include the Hebrew prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. Still others have been inspired as "seers" or "saints." Not even the prophets, however, are anywhere close to the station of the Manifestations, Who provide humankind with God's infallible revelation. The prophets are still ordinary men and women whose powers of inspiration have been developed and used by God. They are referred to as "minor prophets" or "dependent prophets" in the Bahá'í writings. When this terminology is used, the Manifestations are called "universal" or "independent" Prophets:

Universally, the Prophets are of two kinds. One are the independent Prophets who are followed; the other kind are not independent, and are themselves followers.

The independent Prophets are the lawgivers and the founders of a new cycle.... Without an intermediary They receive bounty from the Reality of the Divinity, and Their illumination is an essential illumination. They are like the sun which is luminous in itself.... The other Prophets are followers and promoters, for they are branches and not independent; they receive the

Bounty of the independent Prophets, and they profit by the light of the Guidance of the universal Prophets. They are like the moon which is not luminous and radiant in itself, but receives its light from the sun.<sup>135</sup>

Consequently, Bahá'ís consider philosophers, reformers, saints, mystics, and founders of humanitarian movements as ordinary people. In many cases they may have been inspired by God. Revelation, however, is the endowment of the Manifestations alone, and it is the ultimate generating force of all human progress.

### The Oneness of Religion

The principle of the unity of religion<sup>136</sup> is at the center of Bahá'í teachings.

Bahá'u'lláh states that humanity is engaged in a collective growth process quite similar to the growth process of an individual: just as a person begins life as a helpless infant and attains maturity in successive stages, so humankind began its collective social life in a primitive state, gradually attaining maturity. In the case of the individual, it is clear that his or her development takes place as a result of the education he or she receives from parents, teachers, and society in general. But what is the motive force in humankind's collective evolution?

The answer the Bahá'í Faith provides to this question is "revealed religion." In one of His major works, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (the Book of Certitude), Bahá'u'lláh explained that God, the Creator, has intervened and will continue to intervene in human history by means of chosen Messengers. These Messengers, Whom Bahá'u'lláh called "Manifestations of God," are principally the Founders of the major revealed religions, such as Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammad, and so forth. It is the spirit released by the coming of these Manifestations, together with the influence of Their teachings and the social systems established by Their laws and precepts, that enable humankind to progress in its collective evolution. Simply put: the Manifestations of God are the chief educators of humanity. With regard to the various religious systems that have appeared in human history, Bahá'u'lláh has said:

These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated.<sup>137</sup>

Thus the principle of the unity of religion means that all of the great religious Founders--the Manifestations--have come from God, and that all of the religious systems established by Them are part of a single divine plan directed by God.

In reality, there is only one religion, the religion of God. This one religion is

continually evolving, and each particular religious system represents a stage in the evolution of the whole. The Bahá'í Faith represents the current stage in the evolution of religion. To emphasize the idea that all of the teachings and actions of the Manifestation are directed by God and do not originate from natural, human sources, Bahá'u'lláh used the term "revelation" to describe the phenomenon that occurs each time a Manifestation appears. In particular, the writings of the Manifestation represent the infallible Word of God. Because these writings remain long after the earthly life of the Manifestation is finished, they constitute an especially important part of the phenomenon of revelation. So much is this so, that the term "revelation" is sometimes used in a restricted sense to refer to the writings and words of the Manifestation.

Religious history is seen as a succession of revelations from God and the term "progressive revelation" is used to describe this process. Thus, according to Bahá'ís, progressive revelation is the motive force of human progress, and the Manifestation Bahá'u'lláh is the most recent instance of revelation.

Bahá'u'lláh taught that the time interval between two Manifestations may be about one thousand years. He also taught that the process of revelation will not stop with His revelation and that another Manifestation will come after Him, though not before the expiration of one thousand years from Bahá'u'lláh's coming. According to the Bahá'í writings, the process of revelation will continue indefinitely into the future and humankind will see the coming of a great many more Manifestations.

To put the Bahá'í concept of religion more clearly in focus, let us compare it with some other ways in which religion has been regarded. On one hand is the view that the various religious systems result from human striving after truth. In this conception, the Founders of the great religions do not reveal God to us, but are rather philosophers or thinkers, human beings who may have progressed farther than others in the discovery of truth. This notion excludes the idea of a basic unity of religion since the various religious systems are seen as representing different opinions and beliefs arrived at by fallible human beings rather than infallible revelations of truth from a single source.

Many orthodox adherents of various religious traditions, on the other hand, argue that the Prophet or Founder of their particular tradition represents a true revelation of God to humanity, but that the other religious Founders are false prophets, or at least essentially inferior to the Founder of the tradition in question. For example, many Jews believe that Moses was a true Messenger of God, but that Jesus was not. Similarly, many Christians believe in Jesus' revelation, but consider that Muhammad was a false prophet, and hold that Moses was inferior in status to Christ.

The Bahá'í principle of the oneness of religion differs fundamentally from both of these traditional concepts. Bahá'u'lláh attributed the differences in some teachings of the great religions not to any human fallibility of the Founders, but rather to the different requirements of the ages in which the revelations occurred. Moreover, Bahá'ís consider that no one of the Founders is superior to another. Shoghi Effendi has summarized this view in the following words:

The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, the followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that

Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.<sup>138</sup>

#### Life, Death, and the Soul

According to Bahá'í teachings human nature is fundamentally spiritual. Although human beings exist on earth in physical bodies, the essential identity of each person is defined by an invisible, rational, and everlasting soul:

"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."<sup>139</sup>

The soul animates the body and distinguishes human beings from the animals. It grows and develops only through the individual's relationship with God, as mediated by His Messengers. The relationship is fostered through prayer, knowledge of the scriptures revealed by these Teachers, love for God, moral self-discipline, and service to humanity. This process is what gives meaning to life.

Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments.... When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal... consider the sun which hath been obscured by the clouds. Observe how its splendor appeareth to have diminished, when in reality the source of that light hath remained unchanged. The soul of man should be likened unto this sun, and all things on earth should be regarded as his body. So long as no external impediment interveneth between them, the body will, in its entirety, continue to reflect the light of the soul, and to be sustained by its power. As soon as, however, a

veil

interposeth itself between them, the brightness of the light seemeth to lessen.... The soul of man is the sun by which his body is illumined, and from which it draweth its sustenance, and should be so regarded.<sup>140</sup>

In commenting on the immortality of the rational soul, 'Abdu'l- Baha explained that everything in creation which is composed of elements is subject to decomposition:

The soul is not a combination of elements, it is not composed of many atoms, it is of one indivisible substance and therefore eternal. It is entirely out of the order of the physical creation; it is immortal!<sup>141</sup>

Cultivation of life's spiritual side has several benefits. First, the individual

increasingly develops those innate qualities that lie at the foundation of human happiness and social progress. Such qualities include faith, courage, love, compassion, trustworthiness and humility. As these qualities are increasingly manifest, society as a whole advances.

Another effect of spiritual development is alignment with God's will. This growing closer to God prepares the individual for the afterlife. The soul lives on after the body's death, embarking on a spiritual journey towards God through many "worlds" or planes of existence. Progress on this journey, in traditional terms, is likened to "heaven." If the soul fails to develop, one remains distant from God. This condition of remoteness from God can in some sense be understood as "hell." Thus, heaven and hell are regarded not as literal places but descriptions of one's spiritual progress toward the light of God.

Bahá'u'lláh taught that individuals have no existence previous to their life here on earth. Neither is the soul reborn several times in different bodies. He explained, rather, that the soul's evolution is always towards God and away from the material world. A human being spends nine months in the womb in preparation for entry into this physical life. During that nine-month period, the fetus acquires the physical tools (e.g., eyes, limbs, and so forth) necessary

for existence in this world. Similarly, this physical world is like a womb for entry into the spiritual world. Our time here is thus a period of preparation during which we are to acquire the spiritual and intellectual tools necessary for life in the next world.

The crucial difference is that, whereas physical development in the mother's womb is involuntary, spiritual and intellectual development in this world depend strictly on conscious individual effort:

The incomparable Creator hath created all men from one same substance, and hath exalted their reality above the rest of His creatures. Success or failure, gain or loss, must, therefore, depend upon man's own exertions. The

more he striveth, the greater will be his progress.<sup>142</sup>

The Bahá'í writings often speak of the bounty or grace of God towards humanity, but explain that an appropriate human response is always necessary for God's grace and mercy to penetrate the human soul and bring about any genuine change within us: "No matter how strong the measure of Divine grace, unless supplemented by personal, sustained and intelligent effort, it cannot become fully effective and be of any real and abiding advantage."<sup>143</sup> Thus, in the Bahá'í conception, salvation is not simply a unidirectional gift from God to us, but is rather a dialogue, a collaborative venture initiated by God but requiring vigorous and intelligent human participation.

Since human nature is spiritual, the essential capacities of women and men are the capacities of the soul. In other words, one's personality, one's basic intellectual and spiritual faculties, reside in the soul, even though they are expressed through the instrumentality of the body for the short duration of earthly life. Some of the faculties that Bahá'u'lláh mentioned as capacities of the soul are

1. the mind, which represents the capacity for rational thought and intellectual investigation;
2. the will, which represents the capacity for self- initiated action; and
3. the "heart," or the capacity for conscious, deliberate, self-sacrificing love (sometimes called altruism).

The Bahá'í teachings confirm that the soul retains its individuality and consciousness after death, and is able to associate with other souls that are drawn together by love.

### The Purpose of Life

What does the Bahá'í Faith see as the purpose of human existence<sup>144</sup>? What is the true nature of human beings and what role does religion play in our spiritual development? What is "good" and what is "evil"? What are man's responsibilities to God and what is the spiritual meaning of life?

Many people live their lives without ever reflecting on life itself or its meaning for them. Their lives may be full of activities. They may marry, have children, run a business, or become scientists or musicians, without ever obtaining any degree of understanding of why they do these things. Their lives have no overall purpose to give meaning to separate events, and they may have no clear idea of their own nature or identity, of who they really are.

Bahá'u'lláh taught that only true religion can give purpose to human existence. If there were no Creator, if humans were simply chance products of a thermodynamic system, as many in the world today assert, there would be no purpose in life. Each individual human being would represent the

temporary material existence of a conscious animal trying to move through his or her brief life with as much pleasure and as little pain and suffering as possible.

It is only in relation to the Creator, and the purpose which that Creator has fixed for His creatures, that human existence has any meaning. Bahá'u'lláh described God's purpose for man in the following way:

The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness.<sup>145</sup>

Life should be seen as an eternal process of joyous spiritual discovery and growth: in the beginning stages of earthly life, the individual undergoes a period of training and education which, if it is successful, gives him or her the basic intellectual and spiritual tools necessary for continued growth. When individuals attain physical maturity in adulthood, they become responsible for their further progress, which now depends entirely on the efforts they themselves make. Through the daily struggles of material existence, people gradually deepen their understanding of the spiritual principles underlying reality, and this understanding enables them to relate more effectively to themselves, to others, and to God. After physical death, the individual continues to grow and develop in the spiritual world, which is greater than the physical world, just as the physical world is greater than the world we inhabit while in our mother's womb.

This last statement is based on the Bahá'í concept of the soul and of life after

physical death . According to the Bahá'í teachings, the true nature of human beings is spiritual. Beyond the physical body, each human being has a rational soul, created by God. This soul is a nonmaterial entity, which does not depend on the body. Rather, the body serves as its vehicle in the physical world. The soul of an individual comes into being at the moment the physical body is conceived and continues to exist after the death of the physical body. The soul (also called the spirit) of the individual is the seat or locus of his or her personality, self, and consciousness.

The evolution or development of the soul and its capacities is the basic purpose of human existence. This evolution is towards God and its motive force is knowledge of God and love for Him. As we learn about God, our love for Him increases; and this, in turn, enables us to attain a closer communion with our Creator. Also, as we draw closer to God, our character becomes more refined and our actions reflect more and more the attributes and qualities of God.

Bahá'u'lláh taught that this potential to reflect the attributes of God is the soul's essential reality. It is the meaning of human beings being created "in

the image of God." The divine qualities are not external to the soul. They are latent within it, just as the color, the fragrance, and the vitality of a flower are latent within the seed. They need only to be developed. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh:

Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He [God] hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favour, so enduring a bounty.<sup>146</sup>

The Bahá'í writings refer to the gradual evolution or development of the individual soul as "spiritual progress." Spiritual progress means acquiring the capacity to act in conformity with the Will of God and to express the attributes and spirit of God in one's dealings with one's self and with other human beings. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the only true and enduring happiness for human beings lies in the pursuit of spiritual development.

A person who has become aware of his or her spiritual nature and who consciously strives to progress spiritually is called a "seeker" by Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh described some of the qualities of the true seeker:

That seeker must, at all times, put his trust in God, must renounce the peoples of the earth, must detach himself from the world of dust, and cleave unto Him Who is the Lord of Lords. He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence and refrain from idle talk. For the tongue is a smoldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endureth a century.

That seeker should, also, regard backbiting as grievous error, and keep himself aloof from its dominion, inasmuch as backbiting quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul. He should be content with little, and be freed from all inordinate desire. He should treasure the companionship of them that have renounced the world, and regard avoidance of boastful and worldly people a precious benefit. At the dawn of every day he should commune with God, and with all his soul, persevere in the quest of his Beloved.... He should not wish for others that which he doth not wish for himself, nor promise that which he doth not fulfill.... He should forgive the sinful, and never despise his low estate, for none knoweth what his own end shall be. How often hath a sinner attained, at the hour of death, to the essence of faith, and quaffing the immortal draught, hath taken his flight unto the Concourse on high! And how often hath a devout believer, at the hour of his soul's ascension, been so changed as to fall into the nethermost fire!

Our purpose in revealing these convincing and weighty utterances is to impress upon the seeker that he should regard all else beside God as transient, and count all things save Him, Who is the Object of all adoration, as utter nothingness.

These are among the attributes of the exalted, and constitute the hallmark of the spiritually-minded.... When the detached wayfarer and sincere seeker hath fulfilled these essential conditions, then and only then can he be called a true seeker.<sup>147</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh explained that the fundamental, spiritual role of religion is to enable people to achieve a true understanding of their own nature and of God's will and purpose for them. The spiritual teachings sent down by God through the Messengers or Manifestations of God serve to guide us to a proper comprehension of the spiritual dynamics of life. These principles enable us to understand the laws of existence. Moreover, the very efforts we must make to conform to the teachings of the Manifestations serve to develop our spiritual capacities. For example, when one makes an effort to rid oneself of prejudice and superstition in response to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the result is an increased knowledge of and love for other human beings, and this, in turn, helps the individual to live life more effectively.

Bahá'u'lláh stressed that, without the coming of the Manifestations and their revelation of God's laws and teachings, we would not be able to grow and develop spiritually. The spiritual meaning of life would remain hidden from us, even if we made great efforts to discover it. This is why revealed religion is seen by Bahá'ís as the necessary key to successful spiritual living.

Speaking of the Manifestations, and Their influence on human spiritual development, Bahá'u'lláh said:

Through the Teachings of the Day Star of Truth [i.e. the Manifestation] every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed. It is for this very purpose that in every age and dispensation, the Prophets of God and His chosen Ones have appeared amongst men, and have evinced such power as is born of God and such might, as only the Eternal can reveal.<sup>148</sup>

Since religion has a social dimension, Bahá'ís feel that prolonged withdrawal from the world and from contact with society and one's fellow human beings is usually not necessary or helpful to spiritual growth (although a temporary withdrawal from time to time may be legitimate and healthy). Because we are social beings, our greatest progress is made through living in association with others. Indeed, close association with others in the spirit of loving service and cooperation is essential to the process of spiritual growth.

Bahá'u'lláh related God's purpose for us to the two aspects of religion, the

spiritual and the social:

God's purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established.<sup>149</sup>

In other words, humankind's social development, if properly carried out, should be a collective expression of our spiritual development. All human beings, Bahá'u'lláh states, "have been created to carry forward an everadvancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth."<sup>150</sup>

In summary, the spiritual reason for our life on earth is to provide us with a training ground; our life is a period of growth during which we focus on the development of our innate spiritual and intellectual capacities. Because these capacities are faculties of our immortal soul, they are eternal, and we must make great efforts to develop them. But such efforts are worthwhile, since the soul is the only part of us which endures. Whatever promotes our spiritual development is good, and whatever hinders it is bad.

Heaven and hell: a Bahá'í view of life after death

As in the world's other religions, the Bahá'í concept of life after death is deeply integrated into teachings about the nature of the soul and the purpose of this earthly life.

Bahá'u'lláh confirmed the existence of a separate, rational soul for every human. In this life, He said, the soul is related to the physical body. It provides the underlying animation for the body and is our real self.

Although undetectable by physical instruments, the soul shows itself through the qualities of character that we associate with each person. The soul is the focal point for love and compassion, for faith and courage, and for other such "human" qualities that cannot be explained solely by thinking of a human being as an animal or as a sophisticated organic machine.

The soul does not die; it endures everlastingly. When the human body dies, the soul is freed from ties with the physical body and the surrounding physical world and begins its progress through the spiritual world. Bahá'ís understand the spiritual world to be a timeless and placeless extension of our own universe--and not some physically remote or removed place.

Entry into the next life has the potential to bring great joy. Bahá'u'lláh likened

death to the process of birth. He explains: "The world beyond is as different from this world as this world is different from that of the child while still

in  
the womb of its mother."

The analogy to the womb in many ways summarizes the Bahá'í view of earthly existence. Just as the womb constitutes an important place for a person's initial physical development, the physical world provides the matrix for the development of the individual soul. Accordingly, Bahá'ís view life as a sort of workshop, where one can develop and perfect those qualities which will be needed in the next life.

"Know thou, of a truth, that if the soul of man hath walked in the ways of God, it will, assuredly return and be gathered to the glory of the Beloved," Bahá'u'lláh wrote. "By the righteousness of God! It shall attain a station such as no pen can depict, or tongue can describe."

In the final analysis, heaven can be seen partly as a state of nearness to God; hell is a state of remoteness from God. Each state follows as a natural consequence of individual efforts, or the lack thereof, to develop spiritually. The key to spiritual progress is to follow the path outlined by the Manifestations of God.

Beyond this, the exact nature of the afterlife remains a mystery. "The nature of the soul after death can never be described," Bahá'u'lláh writes.

'The Changeless Faith of God'

When Bahá'ís say that the various religions are one, they do not mean that the various religious creeds and organizations are the same. Rather, they believe that there is only one religion and all of the Messengers of God have progressively revealed its nature. Together, the world's great religions are expressions of a single unfolding Divine plan, "the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future."

People from all of the major religious backgrounds have found that the promises and expectations of their own beliefs are fulfilled in the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'ís from Native American, African and other indigenous backgrounds, similarly, find in the Bahá'í teachings fulfillment of prophetic visions.

For Bahá'ís of Jewish background, Bahá'u'lláh is the appearance of the promised "Lord of Hosts" come down "with ten thousands of saints." A descendent of Abraham and a "scion from the root of Jesse," Bahá'u'lláh has come to lead the way for nations to "beat their swords into plowshares." Many features of Bahá'u'lláh's involuntary exile to the Land of Israel, along with other historical events during Bahá'u'lláh's life and since are seen as fulfilling numerous prophecies in the Bible.

For Bahá'ís of Buddhist background, Bahá'u'lláh fulfils the prophecies for the

coming of "a Buddha named Maitreya, the Buddha of universal fellowship" who will, according to Buddhist traditions, bring peace and enlightenment for all humanity. They see the fulfillment of numerous prophecies, such as the fact that the Buddha Maitreya is to come from "the West", noting the fact that Iran is West of India.

For Bahá'ís of Hindu background, Bahá'u'lláh comes as the new incarnation of Krishna, the "Tenth Avatar" and the "Most Great Spirit." He is "the birthless, the deathless," the One who, "when goodness grows weak," returns "in every age" to "establish righteousness" as promised in the Bhagavad-Gita.

For Bahá'ís of Christian background, Bahá'u'lláh fulfils the paradoxical promises of Christ's return "in the Glory of the Father" and as a "thief in the night." That the Faith was founded in 1844 relates to numerous Christian prophecies. Bahá'ís note, for example, that central Africa was finally opened to Christianity in the 1840s, and that event was widely seen as fulfilling the promise that Christ would return after "the Gospel had been preached 'to all nations.' " In Bahá'u'lláh's teachings Bahá'ís see fulfillment of Christ's promise to bring all people together so that "there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

For Bahá'ís of Muslim background, Bahá'u'lláh fulfils the promise of the Qur'an for the "Day of God" and the "Great Announcement," when "God" will come down "overshadowed with clouds." They see in the dramatic events of the Bábí and Bahá'í movements the fulfillment of many traditional statements of Muhammad, which have long been a puzzle.

### Life, Death, and the Soul

According to Bahá'í teachings human nature is fundamentally spiritual. Although human beings exist on earth in physical bodies, the essential identity of each person is defined by an invisible, rational, and everlasting soul.

The soul animates the body and distinguishes human beings from the animals. It grows and develops only through the individual's relationship with God, as mediated by His Messengers. The relationship is fostered through prayer, knowledge of the scriptures revealed by these Teachers, love for God, moral self-discipline, and service to humanity. This process is what gives meaning to life.

Cultivation of life's spiritual side has several benefits. First, the individual increasingly develops those innate qualities that lie at the foundation of human happiness and social progress. Such qualities include faith, courage, love, compassion, trustworthiness and humility. As these qualities are increasingly manifest, society as a whole advances.

Another effect of spiritual development is alignment with God's will. This growing closer to God prepares the individual for the afterlife. The soul lives on after the body's death, embarking on a spiritual journey towards God

through many "worlds" or planes of existence. Progress on this journey, in traditional terms, is likened to "heaven." If the soul fails to develop, one remains distant from God. This condition of remoteness from God can in some sense be understood as "hell." Thus, heaven and hell are regarded not as literal places but descriptions of one's spiritual progress toward the light of God.

### Prayer, Meditation, and Fasting

...the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by the means of prayer. The Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide. Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá'u'lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and become a dead thing.<sup>151</sup>

For Bahá'ís, the purpose of life is to know and love God, and thus to progress spiritually. As in most other religions, prayer and meditation are primary tools for spiritual development.

Bahá'u'lláh Himself wrote hundreds of prayers. There are prayers for general use, for healing, for spiritual growth, for facing difficulties, for marriage, for community life, and for humanity itself.

Bahá'u'lláh also asked His followers to choose one of three "obligatory" prayers for recitation each day. The shortest of these prayers is just three sentences long. It says much about the relationship between God and humanity. It reads:

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou has created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

The term "obligatory," as applied to these prayers, implies for Bahá'ís an understanding that humans have certain spiritual duties before God.

Bahá'u'lláh also urged His followers to spend each day in meditation:

"Meditate profoundly, that the secret of things unseen may be revealed unto you, that you may inhale the sweetness of a spiritual and imperishable

fragrance..."

Specifically, He encouraged us to reflect at the end of each day on our deeds and their worth. Other than this, Bahá'u'lláh did not specify a particular approach to meditation. Instead, each individual is free to choose his or her own meditational form.

### Morality and Spiritual Growth

The ultimate aim in life of every human soul, the Bahá'í writings state, should

be to attain moral and spiritual excellence--to align one's inner being and outward behavior with the will of an all-loving Creator. That each individual has been bestowed with a unique destiny by God--a destiny which unfolds in accordance with the free exercise of the choices and opportunities presented in life--lies at the center of Bahá'í belief. In particular, it is through the moral

exercise of our divinely conferred free will that opportunities are provided for

spiritual advancement. "All that which ye potentially possess," Bahá'u'lláh confirms, "can...be manifested only as a result of your own volition."<sup>152</sup>

In a poetic passage, Bahá'u'lláh described the actions of the moral individual

and urged His followers to live accordingly:

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the

victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts.

Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of

mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility.<sup>153</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh, like Abraham, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad and the other Divine Messengers who preceded Him, sought to awaken the moral and creative capacities latent in human nature. "Noble have I created thee," is the Divine assurance, "Rise then unto that for which thou wast created."<sup>154</sup> He states

that "the purpose for which mortal men have...stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony."155 "Let each morn," He urges, "be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday. Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches. Take heed that your words be purged from idle fancies and worldly desires and your deeds be cleansed from craftiness and suspicion. Dissipate not the wealth of your precious lives in the pursuit of evil and corrupt affection, nor let your endeavors be spent in promoting your personal interest... Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low."156

From the Bahá'í perspective, religion has been the chief civilizing force in human history. Moral maturity thus comes from spiritual awareness. As stressed throughout the Bahá'í writings, the primary purpose of God in revealing His will through His Messengers is to effect a transformation in the moral and material conditions of human existence. The transformation called for by Bahá'u'lláh is directed to the inner character of every human being and to the organization of society--a transformation that engenders cooperation, compassion, rectitude of conduct, and justice.

In linking spiritual development to personal behavior, Bahá'u'lláh wrote "that the citadels of men's hearts should be subdued through the hosts of a noble character and praiseworthy deeds."157 He exhorts the world's peoples to "illumine their beings with the light of trustworthiness," "the ornament of honesty," and the "emblems" of "generosity."158 Service to humankind is the purpose of both individual life and all social arrangements: "Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men."159

Bahá'u'lláh sets before us the highest standard of morality and urges us to strive to attain it. To do so is the only path to true happiness and fulfillment.

Our moral and spiritual advancement is therefore crucial to our well-being in both this life and the next. As Bahá'u'lláh counsels:

"Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting." 160

#### On Good and Evil

In contrast to a number of other religious doctrines and philosophies, the Bahá'í Faith does not teach that the physical desires of human beings are "evil" or "bad"161. Everything in God's creation is regarded as essentially and fundamentally good. In fact, the very purpose of the human body and its physical faculties is to serve as a proper vehicle for the development of the soul. As the energies of the body are gradually brought under the conscious

control of the soul, they become instruments for the expression of spiritual qualities. It is only undisciplined physical passions that become causes of harm, and hinder spiritual progress.

For example, the human sexual urge is considered to be a gift from God. Its disciplined expression within the legitimate bonds of marriage can be a powerful expression of the spiritual quality of love. However, the same sexual urge, if misused, can lead one into perverse, wasteful, and even destructive actions.

Since the body is the vehicle of the rational soul in this life on earth, it is important to maintain and care for it. Bahá'u'lláh strongly discouraged any form of asceticism or extreme self-denial. His emphasis was on healthy discipline. Therefore the Bahá'í writings contain a number of practical laws relating to the care of the human body: proper nutrition, regular bathing, and so forth. Underlying these, as with many other aspects of Bahá'í belief, is the principle of moderation: things that are beneficial when kept within the limits of moderation become harmful when taken to extremes.

The Bahá'í writings acknowledge explicitly that certain physical factors beyond the control of the individual, such as genetic weaknesses, or inadequate childhood nutrition, can have a significant effect on one's development during his earthly life. But such material influences are not permanent, and they have no power in themselves to harm or damage the soul. At most, they can only retard temporarily the spiritual growth process, and even this effect can be counterbalanced by a subsequent burst of more rapid development. Indeed, the Bahá'í writings explain that it is often in the individual's determined and courageous struggle against physical, emotional, and mental handicaps that the greatest spiritual growth occurs, and the individual may come to view his handicaps as blessings in disguise that have, ultimately, helped him grow spiritually. Thus, admitting that physical conditions can affect, temporarily but significantly, the spiritual growth process is far from believing, as many philosophical materialists do, that we are totally determined by some combination of genetic and environmental physical factors:

...movement is essential to all existence. All material things progress to a certain point, then begin to decline. This is the law which governs the whole physical creation.... But with the human soul, there is no decline. Its only movement is toward perfection; growth and progress alone constitute the motion of the soul....

The world of mortality is a world of contradictions, of opposites; motion being compulsory everything must either go forward or retreat. In the realm of spirit there is no retreat possible, all movement is bound to be towards a perfect state.<sup>162</sup>

The theme of growth through struggle and suffering occurs at several places

in the Bahá'í writings. Although many of our sufferings result from careless living and are therefore potentially avoidable, a certain amount of suffering is

necessary in any growth process. Indeed, we understand and accept that suffering and self-sacrifice are essential components of achieving material or intellectual success. Thus, we should not be surprised that the even more important endeavor of achieving spiritual growth might also involve those same elements:

Everything of importance in this world demands the close attention of its seeker. The one in pursuit of anything must undergo difficulties and hardships until the object in view is attained and the great success is obtained.

This is the case of things pertaining to the world. How much higher is that which concerns the Supreme Concourse!<sup>163</sup>

This brings us to the Bahá'í concept of the relationship between good and evil

in man. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes it thus:

In creation there is no evil, all is good. Certain qualities and natures innate in some men and apparently blameworthy are not so in reality. For example, from the beginning of his life you can see in a nursing child the signs of greed, of anger, and of temper. Then, it may be said, good and evil are innate in the reality of man, and this is contrary to the pure goodness of nature and creation. The answer to this is that greed, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is used suitably. So, if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous, and just, it is most praiseworthy. If he exercises his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, it is very praiseworthy; but if he does not use these qualities in a right way, they are blameworthy.... It is the same with all the natural qualities of man, which constitute the capital of life; if they be used and displayed in an unlawful way, they become blameworthy. Therefore, it is clear that creation is purely good.<sup>164</sup>

The Bahá'í Faith does not therefore accept the concept of "original sin" or any

related doctrine which considers that people are basically evil or have intrinsically evil elements in their nature. All the forces and faculties within

us are God-given and thus potentially beneficial to our spiritual development.

In the same way, the Bahá'í teachings deny the existence of Satan, a devil, or

an "evil force." Evil, it is explained, is the absence of good; darkness is the absence of light; cold is the absence of heat.<sup>165</sup> Just as the sun is the unique source of all life in a solar system, so ultimately is there only one force or

power in the universe, the force we call God.

However, if a person, through his own God-given free will, turns away from this force or fails to make the necessary effort to develop his spiritual capacities, the result is imperfection. Both within the individual and in society, there will be what one might term "dark spots." These dark spots are imperfections, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said that "evil is imperfection."

If a tiger kills and eats another animal, this is not evil, because it is an expression of the tiger's natural instinct for survival. But if a person kills and eats a fellow human being, this same act may be considered evil because man is capable of doing otherwise. Such an act is not an expression of his true nature.

As relatively undeveloped creatures, we have certain intrinsic needs that demand satisfaction. These needs are partly physical and tangible and partly spiritual and intangible. It is God who has created us in this manner and placed us in this situation. Because God truly loves us, he has provided for the legitimate satisfaction of all our needs. But if, whether through simple ignorance or willful rebellion, we try to satisfy some of our needs in an illegitimate or unhealthy way, then we may distort our true nature and generate within ourselves new appetites incapable of genuine satisfaction:

... capacity is of two kinds: natural capacity and acquired capacity. The first, which is the creation of God, is purely good--in the creation of God there is no evil; but the acquired capacity has become the cause of the appearance of evil. For example, God has created all men in such a manner and has given them such a constitution and such capacities that they are benefited by sugar and honey and harmed and destroyed by poison. This nature and constitution is innate, and God has given it equally to all mankind. But man begins little by little to accustom himself to poison by taking a small quantity each day, and gradually increasing it, until he reaches such a point that he cannot live without a gram of opium every day. The natural capacities are thus completely perverted. Observe how much the natural capacity and constitution can be changed, until by different habits and training they become entirely perverted. One does not criticize vicious people because of their innate capacities and nature, but rather for their acquired capacities and nature.166

Bahá'u'lláh said that pride, or self-centeredness, is one of the greatest hindrances to spiritual progress. Pride represents an exaggerated sense of one's own importance in the universe and leads to an attitude of superiority over others. The prideful person feels as though he is or ought to be in absolute control of his life and the circumstances surrounding it, and he seeks power and dominance over others because such power helps him maintain this illusion of superiority. Thus, pride is such a hindrance to spiritual

growth

because it impels the prideful individual on an endless quest to fulfill the expectations of his vainly-conceived and illusory self-concept.

In other words, the key to understanding Bahá'í morality and ethics is to be found in the Bahá'í notion of spiritual progress: that which is conducive to spiritual progress is good, and whatever tends to hinder spiritual progress is bad. Thus, from the Bahá'í viewpoint, learning "good" from "bad" (or "right" from "wrong") means attaining a degree of self-knowledge that permits us to know when something is helpful to our spiritual growth and when it is not.<sup>167</sup> And this knowledge can only be obtained through the teachings of the Manifestations.

Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly stressed that only revealed religion can save us from our imperfections. It is because God has sent his Manifestations to show us the path to spiritual development and to touch our hearts with the spirit of God's love that we are able to realize our true potential and make the effort to

be united with God. This is the "salvation" that religion brings. It does not save us from the stain of some "original sin," nor does it protect us from some external evil force or devil. Rather, it delivers us from captivity to our own lower nature, a captivity that breeds private despair and threatens social destruction, and it shows us the path to a deep and satisfying happiness.

Indeed, the essential reason for such widespread unhappiness and terrible social conflict and crises in the world today is that humankind has turned away from true religion and spiritual principles. The only salvation in any age, Bahá'ís believe, is to turn again towards God, to accept his Manifestation

for that day, and to follow his teachings. Bahá'u'lláh pointed out that, if we

reflect deeply on the conditions of our existence, we must eventually realize and admit to ourselves that, in absolute terms, we possess nothing.

Everything we are or have--our physical body and our rational soul--all comes from our Creator. Since God has freely given us so much, we have, in turn, an obligation to God. Bahá'u'lláh stated that human beings have two basic duties towards God:

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation [i.e. the Manifestation].... It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. <sup>168</sup>

In another passage, Bahá'u'lláh reminded his followers that the duties which God has given to us are only for our benefit: God Himself has no need of our worship or allegiance, for God is entirely self-sufficient and independent of

all His creation. We can therefore be certain that everything God does is motivated uniquely by His pure love for us. There is no "self-interest" on the part of God:

Whatever duty Thou [God] hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.<sup>169</sup>

#### A Global Community

Women and men gather in Garoua Boulai, a rural region of eastern Cameroon, to discuss how they can work together to alleviate some of the burdens placed on the women with regard to child care. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, scholars come together to exchange ideas on the topic "Anarchy into Order: Understanding Humanity's Role and Destiny." People on Goodenough Island, Papua New Guinea, escort a flower-strewn platform carrying a new Book of Laws to their village, ushering it in with respect and joyful songs. In Panchgani, India, young boys are learning how to plant and tend tree seedlings in the course of their studies in sustainable development at a locally run institute. A youth group performs a dance about the terrible consequences of racism to schoolchildren in a school auditorium in British Columbia, Canada. In Colombia, South America, a conga musical group imbues its traditional Latin rhythms with a spiritual message about the unity of humanity, to the delight of listeners at open-air venues. A team of medical specialists from the United Kingdom "twins" efforts with doctors at a hospital in Bulgaria, offering assistance in training local practitioners. These people, though they have in all probability never met one another, share a united view of the world and its future, as well as their own role in shaping that future. They are members of the Bahá'í International Community.

The Bahá'í community, comprising members of the Bahá'í Faith from all over the globe, now numbers some five million souls. They represent 2,112 ethnic and tribal groups and live in over 116,000 localities in 188 independent countries and 45 dependent territories or overseas departments. What was once regarded by some as an obscure, tiny sect is now recognized by the Encyclopedia Britannica as the second-most widely spread independent religion in the world, after Christianity. Its membership cuts across all boundaries of class and race, governing itself through the establishment of local and national elected bodies known as Spiritual Assemblies. Haifa, Israel, is the site of its international center and the seat of its world-governing council, known as the Universal House of Justice.

The worldwide Bahá'í community may well be the most diverse and widespread body of people on earth. It is also among the world's most unified organizations, a feature that is perhaps its most distinguishing characteristic.

Bahá'ís the world over come from all religious backgrounds: Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jew, Muslim, Sikh, Zoroastrian, animist, and nonreligious. Yet they study a common set of sacred writings, observe a unifying code of religious laws, and look to a single international administrative system for continuing guidance.

Their sense of unity goes beyond a shared theology. It is expressed in an abiding commitment to a global program for moral, spiritual and social progress that represents many of the finest ideals of civilization.

Promoting equality of women and men is a primary goal, as are ending racial and ethnic strife, promoting economic justice for all peoples, and ensuring access to good education for all. The community eschews all forms of superstition, emphasizes the importance of an unfettered search for scientific and religious truth, and sets for its followers the goal of meeting the highest moral standards. World peace and the establishment of a united global commonwealth have been and remain distinguishing concerns.

### The Rhythms and Routines of Bahá'í Communities

As a worldwide community, with individuals from more than 2,100 ethnic and tribal groups who reside in more than 230 countries and territories, the Bahá'í Faith is certainly among the most diverse bodies of people on earth.

More often than not, such diversity extends to the local and national levels, as people from a wide variety of backgrounds, ages, professions, and educational levels come together in more than 132,000 localities around the world with common aims: to worship the Creator, promote peace and unity, and serve humanity.

Yet whether in an isolated African village or a cosmopolitan center in North America, the structures that govern the rhythms and routines of Bahá'í community life are both flexible enough to accommodate this diversity and yet strong enough to maintain the essential unity of the Faith, which, unlike the world's other major religions, has resisted splitting into sects and subgroups.

The result is a rich community life. Not only do most Bahá'í communities of any significant size sponsor a wide range of activities -- from social events to economic development projects -- individuals within Bahá'í communities also find a joyful and supportive group of friends who, despite the sometimes wide difference in their backgrounds, find common ground in the high ideals and principles of the Faith.

Roberto Eghrari of Brazil recalls an encounter at a national Bahá'í meeting recently that illustrated this sense of unity in diversity. "I was watching three people standing together, discussing issues of community development," said

Mr. Eghrari, who is a member of the national Bahá'í governing body of the Bahá'ís of Brazil. "One was a woman ticket seller for a circus, from Bahia, in the north. She is illiterate, but is nevertheless quite articulate. Another was an indigenous person, from the Kariri-Xoco tribe in the state of Alagoas, in the Northeast. And another was a man of Iranian background, who has a PhD in nuclear engineering.

"And it struck me how unusual this would be in many places, where it is often felt that only highly educated people are articulate and able to discuss important issues," Mr. Eghrari said, who is himself trained as an electronics engineer. "But that is not true among Bahá'ís. It is accepted that everyone is equal, and that everyone -- whether highly educated or not -- can and should participate in discussions about such things as the future of their communities."

At the local level, Bahá'í community life is governed by the local Spiritual Assembly, a freely elected governing body of lay people who guide and administer the affairs of the community as a whole. In this way, governance in Bahá'í communities springs from the grassroots.

Common activities in Bahá'í communities include classes for the education of children, devotional services, study classes, discussions on global issues, social events, the observance of holy days, marriages, and funeral services. Many local Spiritual Assemblies around the world also oversee small-scale educational, economic or environmental development projects. Such efforts range from the sponsorship of community health workers to small agricultural projects.

The centerpiece of Bahá'í community life is the Nineteen-Day Feast. Held once every 19 days, the Feast is the local community's regular worship gathering -- and more.

Open to both adults and children, the Feast is the regular gathering that promotes and sustains the unity of the local Bahá'í community. The Feast always contains three elements: spiritual devotion, administrative consultation, and social fellowship. As such, the Feast combines religious worship with grassroots governance and social enjoyment.

Yet its program is adaptable to a wide variety of cultural and social needs. Music is often a component of its program, and such music often reflects the geographic and cultural setting. In the southern United States, for example, Feast might well feature Gospel-style music, while in Asia the songs might be pentatonic.

"One thing that is a common theme in our Feasts in Kenya is a love of music," said Charles Mungonya, a 52-year-old sales and marketing specialist in Nairobi who has been a Bahá'í since 1961. And the music at Feast, Mr.

Mungonya said, itself reflects the diversity of the community.

"We have about 40 different tribal groups in Kenya, and almost all of them are represented in the Faith," said Mr. Mungonya. "And in the cities and towns, especially, you will find Bahá'ís from many different backgrounds coming together. This is unusual. Most other religious groups in Kenya are likely to be from a single tribe.

"But we see multi-tribal groups that come together to enter into 'one fold' and pray together and worship together and socialize together. Yet even in Bahá'í communities here where, because of geography, one tribe predominates, the music is from different groups and is often sung in 5 or 6 different languages. Because most of our Bahá'í songs come from all over," said Mr. Mungonya. "And diverse music is enjoyed by everyone, we find."

The use of the word "feast" might seem to imply that a large meal will be served. That is not necessarily the case. While food and beverages are usually served, the term itself is meant to suggest that the community should enjoy a "spiritual feast" of worship, companionship and unity. Bahá'u'lláh stressed the importance of gathering every nineteen days, "to bind your hearts together," even if nothing more than water is served.

During the devotional program, selections from the Bahá'í writings, and often the scriptures from other religions, are read aloud. A general discussion follows, allowing every member a voice in community affairs and making the Feast an "arena of democracy at the very root of society." The Feast ends with a period for socializing.

While the Feast serves to bind Bahá'ís and their families more closely together, Bahá'í communities as a whole are not isolated from society at large. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh encouraged His followers to be fully involved with the rest of humanity. And most Bahá'ís lead lives that would not seem out of place in their native society -- following their professions, raising families, participating in local affairs -- save perhaps for a strong commitment to the high moral and ethical standards that are encouraged by the Faith.

In Belfast, Northern Ireland, for example, many of the women members of the Bahá'í community there have been involved for years with other women in quiet efforts to promote peace in that strife-torn country. It was something that Bahá'í women did as a natural extension of their belief in the importance of tolerance and peace, and this effort evolved as a consequence of their collaboration with other women's organizations.

"We've been essentially working in the background," said Patrica Ann Irvine, a 50-year-old mother. "The women's organizations have been primarily concerned with anything to do with women and children. As Bahá'ís, we participated in this, but we also always talked about peace. Not in the Northern Ireland specific sense, but in the global sense, and we like to think

that some of this has filtered through."

There is also a great deal of communication and other forms of networking that goes on between Bahá'í communities at the local, national and international levels -- all of which serves to connect the individual and their participation at the local level to the great global issues of our time.

Many Bahá'í communities around the world sponsor local seminars or panel discussions on issues such as the equality of women and men, the need to eliminate racism, or the importance of promoting human rights.

The Bahá'í community of Brazil, for example, itself sponsored a number of events at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Among other things, members of the community assisted in organizing a major cultural program during the Summit and in erecting a special Peace Monument to commemorate the meeting.

"By participating in such international events, or working on global issues at the local level, we feel a part of something that has a much larger purpose," said Mr. Eghrari of Brazil. "Being part of the whole world is very much a part of our vision."

The Bahá'í World Centre: Focal Point for a Global Community

Before His passing, Bahá'u'lláh indicated that the world headquarters for the Faith He had founded would be in the Haifa/Acre area in the north of what is now Israel. The region today is home to the spiritual and administrative heart of the Bahá'í Faith.

The final resting places of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb are in the region.

The

gold-domed Shrine of the Báb sits on the slopes of Mount Carmel in Haifa while the majestic Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh is located just across the bay at Bahji,

outside of Acre. Situated in the heart of magnificent gardens, these two spots are the most holy places in the Bahá'í world.

The administrative center of the Bahá'í Faith is in Haifa. Located on Mount Carmel, just above the Shrine of the Báb and at the top of an arc-shaped path in a monument garden, is the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. From this building and others nearby, a staff of more than 600 people from 60 countries administers the international affairs of the Bahá'í world community.

From Haifa, information is transmitted back and forth between national Bahá'í communities; international goals and plans are disseminated; social and economic development projects are monitored; statistics are collected and kept; and international funds are managed. There is also an international archives building, within which are housed relics, writings and artifacts associated with the lives of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

In the early 1990s, a new phase of construction was launched, reflecting the

rapid expansion of the Faith. Ground was broken for a series of terraces extending above and below the Shrine of the Báb and for several other new institutional buildings in a program expected to be completed by the end of the century.

Each year, thousands of pilgrims come from around the world to pray and meditate in the Shrines, and to visit the other Bahá'í holy places in the Haifa/Acre area. These pilgrimages, which bring together Bahá'ís from all over the world, serve further to give social cohesion and integration to the Faith.

#### The Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations

More than a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh called for the creation of a system of international governance, based on the principle of collective security, which would encompass all of the nations of the world and lay the foundations for a lasting and universal peace. In seeking to promote this concept, as well as to engender justice, peace and prosperity at the international level, the worldwide Bahá'í community has, as a duly accredited non-governmental organization, long worked closely with the United Nations, supporting many of its goals and programs. Bahá'í representatives were present in 1945 in San Francisco at the founding of the United Nations. In 1947, the Bahá'í communities of the United States and Canada were recognized by the UN Department of Public Information (DPI). The next year, in 1948, the Bahá'í International Community itself was recognized by the UN DPI as an international non-governmental organization.

In May 1970, the Bahá'í International Community was granted consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), allowing for a greater degree of interaction with the Council and its subsidiary bodies in efforts to promote social and economic development worldwide. In March 1976, the Bahá'í International Community was granted consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), similarly extending opportunities for interaction with the United Nations to promote the health, education and well-being of children.

Relationships with these and other UN bodies and agencies have deepened over the years. Today, for example, the Community enjoys a working relationship with the World Health Organization (WHO), it has an association with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and it has undertaken joint activities with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

As an international non-governmental organization, the Bahá'í International Community is involved in a wide range of activities, including peacebuilding, human rights, women's affairs, education, health, and sustainable development.

These concerns are addressed not only at the United Nations, but through collaboration with other international non-governmental organizations. The

Bahá'í International Community, for example, is a member of the Advocates for African Food Security: Lessening the Burden on Women; of World Wide Fund for Nature's Network on Conservation and Religion; of the Center for Our Common Future in Geneva; and of the Education for All Network.

### Bahá'í Houses of Worship

As gathering places for prayer and meditation, Bahá'í Houses of Worship are buildings that most closely approximate the place of the church, the temple or the mosque in other religions. Yet they are also something more.

As envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh, local Houses of Worship will someday be the focal point for a community's spiritual life--and an expression of its humanitarian concern.

So far, seven Houses of Worship have been built--at least one on each continent, a token of the Faith's global progress. At the present stage of the Faith's development, Bahá'ís have focused on creating and developing the social and spiritual institutions of community life rather than on the construction of physical buildings in every community. Yet those Houses of Worship which have been constructed stand as beacons calling the world to a new mode of religious worship and life.

Each temple has its own distinctive design, and yet conforms to a set of architectural requirements that give a unifying theme. All Bahá'í Houses of Worship must have nine sides and a central dome.

The first House of Worship was built in Russia, in the city of Ashkhabad in Central Asia. Completed around 1908, the Ashkhabad House of Worship served the Bahá'í community of that region until 1938, when the site was appropriated by the Soviet Government. The building was demolished in 1962 after being damaged by an earthquake.

The Ashkhabad House of Worship was in many ways ahead of its time. In addition to serving as a spiritual center for the thriving Bahá'í community in that region, it gave practical expression to the community's humanitarian ideas. Attached to it were a number of subsidiaries, including a hospital, a school, and a hostel for travelers.

The first House of Worship in the West was completed in 1953, in Wilmette, Illinois, U.S.A., on the shores of Lake Michigan, just north of Chicago. Its filigree dome and extraordinary ornamentation combine features drawn from the architectural styles of both East and West, and it has attracted millions of visitors over the years. Other Bahá'í Houses of Worship were subsequently built in Kampala, Uganda; near Sydney, Australia; outside Frankfurt, Germany; overlooking Panama City, Panama; and in Apia, Western Samoa.

The newest House of Worship was completed in 1986 in New Delhi, India. Since that time the structure has won numerous architectural awards and been

featured in hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles. Inspired by the lotus flower, its design is composed of 27 free-standing marble-clad "petals"-arranged in clusters of three to form nine sides. Nine doors open onto a central hall, capable of holding up to 2,500 people. Slightly more than 40 meters tall, its surface luminous, the temple at times seems to float above its 26-acre site on the outskirts of the Indian capital. In a few short years the New Delhi temple has become one of the world's major attractions, drawing more than two and a half million visitors a year. On Hindu holy days, it has drawn as many as 100,000--so revered is the Bahá'í temple by India's people, whatever their religious background.

Indeed, all Houses of Worship are open to people of every religion. There are no sermons, rituals or clergy.

Around the world, more than 120 sites have so far been set aside for future Houses of Worship. Ultimately, every local Bahá'í community will have its own House of Worship. Like the first one in Ashkhabad, each will become the focus of community life, as well as a center for social, scientific, educational, and humanitarian services.

#### A New Vision for Humanity's Future

One of the most distinctive aspects of the worldwide Bahá'í community is the hopeful and yet pragmatic way in which its members face the future. Far from fearing it, Bahá'ís the world over are dedicated to creating a new and peaceful world civilization based on principles of justice, prosperity, and continuing advancement. This vision reflects not only an appreciation for humanity's historic longing for peace and collective well-being, but also our understanding that humanity as a whole has now reached a new level of maturity. That it is possible to create societies founded upon cooperation, trust, and genuine concern for others is at the heart of Bahá'í belief and action. Indeed, Bahá'ís believe that humanity is on the verge of an evolutionary leap that will carry humankind to a future where "world peace is not only possible but inevitable."

A number of other characteristics evident in the Bahá'í community today will, Bahá'ís believe, come to characterize the humanity of our planet's future.

The first of these is unity, the mainspring of humanity's future in a world where disunity is increasingly recognized as the ultimate source of danger and suffering. As national, religious, and ethnic conflicts divide peoples around the globe, the imperative of building bonds of reconciliation and understanding takes on greater urgency. Bahá'u'lláh asserted, "So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth."

Second only to its unity is the universality of the community created by Bahá'u'lláh. No one is left out; no one takes second place. Embracing more than 2,100 ethnic, racial, and tribal groups, the Bahá'í community is quite likely the most diverse organized body of people on the planet. Its very existence challenges prevailing theories about human nature and the prospects for creating peaceful patterns of life.

Third is the new system of values necessary for the development of a global civilization. Such an ethos--where each member of the human race is regarded as a trust of the whole--is guided by an inner ethical orientation relevant to the challenges of the next stage of human development--an orientation that does not come only from legislation and education but from a divine source. Evidence that such a transformation in moral behavior is possible can be found in the response to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings in Bahá'í communities around the globe.

A mechanism promoting the ability to think and decide collectively is the fourth attribute of an evolving world civilization. A mode of decision-making both inclusive and cooperative and that avoids adversarial posturing and partisanship while still democratic in spirit and method now exists uniquely in the Bahá'í community. This administrative order functions at the village, regional, national, and global level.

The will to address the problems confronting humanity is a fifth attribute. In this, the Bahá'í community can offer its experience in the field of social and economic development. More than 1,500 grassroots projects in the areas of health, agriculture, education, and environmental preservation are now being undertaken by Bahá'ís throughout the world. These activities focus not on the delivery of services but rather on the development of capacities within people themselves. Underpinning such efforts is the recognition that every culture and segment of humanity represents a distinct heritage that must be permitted to bear fruit in a global society.

Such strength of will has also enabled members of the Bahá'í community to endure through recurrent waves of persecution<sup>170</sup> and suffering, particularly in the cradle of their Faith, Iran, where over 200 believers have been killed for their Faith since 1979. This strength is also reflected by the systematic growth and consolidation of the Bahá'í Faith all over the globe. Tens of thousands of ordinary people have willingly accepted every type of sacrifice for this goal because of their love for Bahá'u'lláh. As a result, the five-million member Bahá'í community has become the second most widespread religion in the world.

Finally, the manner in which members of the Bahá'í community draw upon the resources of both reason and faith to address challenging problems is a significant model for a future civilization. Bahá'u'lláh stated that the greatest gift of God to humankind is reason, a quality that is continually developed through the maturation of Bahá'í administrative institutions. The turmoil and dislocations confronting present-day society will not be solved until both the scientific and religious genius of the human race are fully utilized.

While the pattern of a future global civilization already exists, in embryonic form, in their community, Bahá'ís see all of these attributes as endowments

of

Bahá'u'lláh's guidance to humankind in this day--guidance available to everybody and not the sole property of Bahá'ís. This conviction is the source of their inspiring and hopeful vision of the future

### The Promise of World Peace

Released in October 1985, on the eve of the United Nations International Year of Peace, this statement of the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith and its international community, was addressed "To the Peoples of the World." Presented to over 160 heads of state and government over the past 10 years, it outlines the major prerequisites for, as well as the obstacles working against, the establishment of world peace.

### The Promise of World Peace

#### Introduction

October 1985

#### To the Peoples of the World:

The Great Peace towards which people of good will throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet--in the words of one great thinker, "the planetization of mankind".

Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. At this critical juncture when the intractable problems confronting nations have been fused into one common concern for the whole world, failure to stem the tide of conflict and disorder would be unconscionably irresponsible.

Among the favourable signs are the steadily growing strength of the steps towards world order taken initially near the beginning of this century in the creation of the League of Nations, succeeded by the more broadly based United Nations Organization; the achievement since the Second World War of independence by the majority of all the nations on earth, indicating the completion of the process of nation building, and the involvement of these fledgling nations with older ones in matters of mutual concern; the consequent vast increase in co-operation among hitherto isolated and

antagonistic peoples and groups in international undertakings in the scientific, educational, legal, economic and cultural fields; the rise in recent

decades of an unprecedented number of international humanitarian organizations; the spread of women's and youth movements calling for an end to war; and the spontaneous spawning of widening networks of ordinary people seeking understanding through personal communication.

The scientific and technological advances occurring in this unusually blessed century portend a great surge forward in the social evolution of the planet, and indicate the means by which the practical problems of humanity may be solved. They provide, indeed, the very means for the administration of the complex life of a united world. Yet barriers persist. Doubts, misconceptions, prejudices, suspicions and narrow self-interest beset nations and peoples in their relations one to another.

It is out of a deep sense of spiritual and moral duty that we are impelled at this opportune moment to invite your attention to the penetrating insights first

communicated to the rulers of mankind more than a century ago by Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, of which we are the Trustees.

"The winds of despair", Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective." This prophetic judgement has been amply confirmed by the common experience of humanity. Flaws in the prevailing order are conspicuous in the inability of sovereign states organized as United Nations to exorcize the spectre of war, the threatened collapse of the international economic order, the spread of anarchy and terrorism, and the intense suffering which these and other afflictions are causing to increasing millions. Indeed, so much have aggression and conflict come to characterize our social, economic and religious systems, that many have succumbed to the view that such behaviour is intrinsic to human nature and therefore ineradicable.

With the entrenchment of this view, a paralyzing contradiction has developed in human affairs. On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony, for an end to the harrowing apprehensions tormenting their daily lives. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on co-operation and reciprocity.

As the need for peace becomes more urgent, this fundamental contradiction, which hinders its realization, demands a reassessment of the assumptions upon which the commonly held view of mankind's historical predicament is

based. Dispassionately examined, the evidence reveals that such conduct, far from expressing man's true self, represents a distortion of the human spirit. Satisfaction on this point will enable all people to set in motion constructive social forces which, because they are consistent with human nature, will encourage harmony and co-operation instead of war and conflict.

To choose such a course is not to deny humanity's past but to understand it. The Bahá'í Faith regards the current world confusion and calamitous condition in human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet. The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.

A candid acknowledgement that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist, that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine.

Whatever suffering and turmoil the years immediately ahead may hold, however dark the immediate circumstances, the Bahá'í community believes that humanity can confront this supreme trial with confidence in its ultimate outcome. Far from signaling the end of civilization, the convulsive changes towards which humanity is being ever more rapidly impelled will serve to release the "potentialities inherent in the station of man" and reveal "the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality".

## Section I

The endowments which distinguish the human race from all other forms of life are summed up in what is known as the human spirit; the mind is its essential quality. These endowments have enabled humanity to build civilizations and to prosper materially. But such accomplishments alone have never satisfied the human spirit, whose mysterious nature inclines it towards transcendence, a reaching towards an invisible realm, towards the ultimate reality, that unknowable essence of essences called God. The religions brought to mankind by a succession of spiritual luminaries have been the primary link between humanity and that ultimate reality, and have galvanized and refined mankind's capacity to achieve spiritual success together with social progress.

No serious attempt to set human affairs aright, to achieve world peace, can

ignore religion. Man's perception and practice of it are largely the stuff of history. An eminent historian described religion as a "faculty of human nature". That the perversion of this faculty has contributed to much of the confusion in society and the conflicts in and between individuals can hardly be denied. But neither can any fair-minded observer discount the preponderating influence exerted by religion on the vital expressions of civilization. Furthermore, its indispensability to social order has repeatedly been demonstrated by its direct effect on laws and morality.

Writing of religion as a social force, Bahá'u'lláh said: "Religion is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein." Referring to the eclipse or corruption of religion, he wrote: "Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine." In an enumeration of such consequences the Bahá'í writings point out that the "perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves, under such circumstances, in their worst and most revolting aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very feeling of peacefulness, of joy and of hope is gradually extinguished."

If, therefore, humanity has come to a point of paralyzing conflict it must look to itself, to its own negligence, to the siren voices to which it has listened, for the source of the misunderstandings and confusion perpetrated in the name of religion. Those who have held blindly and selfishly to their particular orthodoxies, who have imposed on their votaries erroneous and conflicting interpretations of the pronouncements of the Prophets of God, bear heavy responsibility for this confusion--a confusion compounded by the artificial barriers erected between faith and reason, science and religion. For from a fair-minded examination of the actual utterances of the Founders of the great religions, and of the social milieus in which they were obliged to carry out their missions, there is nothing to support the contentions and prejudices deranging the religious communities of mankind and therefore all human affairs.

The teaching that we should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated, an ethic variously repeated in all the great religions, lends force to this latter observation in two particular respects: it sums up the moral attitude, the peace-inducing aspect, extending through these religions irrespective of their place or time of origin; it also signifies an aspect of unity which is their

essential virtue, a virtue mankind in its disjointed view of history has failed to appreciate.

Had humanity seen the Educators of its collective childhood in their true character, as agents of one civilizing process, it would no doubt have reaped incalculably greater benefits from the cumulative effects of their successive missions. This, alas, it failed to do.

The resurgence of fanatical religious fervour occurring in many lands cannot be regarded as more than a dying convulsion. The very nature of the violent and disruptive phenomena associated with it testifies to the spiritual bankruptcy it represents. Indeed, one of the strangest and saddest features of the current outbreak of religious fanaticism is the extent to which, in each case, it is undermining not only the spiritual values which are conducive to the unity of mankind but also those unique moral victories won by the particular religion it purports to serve.

However vital a force religion has been in the history of mankind, and however dramatic the current resurgence of militant religious fanaticism, religion and religious institutions have, for many decades, been viewed by increasing numbers of people as irrelevant to the major concerns of the modern world. In its place they have turned either to the hedonistic pursuit of material satisfactions or to the following of man-made ideologies designed to rescue society from the evident evils under which it groans. All too many of these ideologies, alas, instead of embracing the concept of the oneness of mankind and promoting the increase of concord among different peoples, have tended to deify the state, to subordinate the rest of mankind to one nation, race or class, to attempt to suppress all discussion and interchange of ideas, or to callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.

How tragic is the record of the substitute faiths that the worldly-wise of our age have created. In the massive disillusionment of entire populations who have been taught to worship at their altars can be read history's irreversible verdict on their value. The fruits these doctrines have produced, after decades of an increasingly unrestrained exercise of power by those who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them, are the social and economic ills that blight every region of our world in the closing years of the twentieth century. Underlying all these outward afflictions is the spiritual damage reflected in the apathy that has gripped the mass of the peoples of all nations and by the extinction of hope in the hearts of deprived and anguished millions.

The time has come when those who preach the dogmas of materialism, whether of the east or the west, whether of capitalism or socialism, must give account of the moral stewardship they have presumed to exercise. Where is the "new world" promised by these ideologies? Where is the international

peace to whose ideals they proclaim their devotion? Where are the breakthroughs into new realms of cultural achievement produced by the aggrandizement of this race, of that nation or of a particular class? Why is the

vast majority of the world's peoples sinking ever deeper into hunger and wretchedness when wealth on a scale undreamed of by the Pharaohs, the Caesars, or even the imperialist powers of the nineteenth century is at the disposal of the present arbiters of human affairs?

Most particularly, it is in the glorification of material pursuits, at once the progenitor and common feature of all such ideologies, that we find the roots which nourish the falsehood that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive. It is here that the ground must be cleared for the building of a new world fit for our descendants.

That materialistic ideals have, in the light of experience, failed to satisfy the needs of mankind calls for an honest acknowledgement that a fresh effort must now be made to find the solutions to the agonizing problems of the planet. The intolerable conditions pervading society bespeak a common failure of all, a circumstance which tends to incite rather than relieve the entrenchment on every side. Clearly, a common remedial effort is urgently required. It is primarily a matter of attitude. Will humanity continue in its waywardness, holding to outworn concepts and unworkable assumptions? Or will its leaders, regardless of ideology, step forth and, with a resolute will, consult together in a united search for appropriate solutions?

Those who care for the future of the human race may well ponder this advice. "If long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine."

## Section II

Banning nuclear weapons, prohibiting the use of poison gases, or outlawing germ warfare will not remove the root causes of war. However important such practical measures obviously are as elements of the peace process, they are in themselves too superficial to exert enduring influence. Peoples are ingenious enough to invent yet other forms of warfare, and to use food, raw materials, finance, industrial power, ideology, and terrorism to subvert one another in an endless quest for supremacy and dominion. Nor can the present massive dislocation in the affairs of humanity be resolved through the settlement of specific conflicts or disagreements among nations. A genuine

universal framework must be adopted.

Certainly, there is no lack of recognition by national leaders of the worldwide character of the problem, which is self-evident in the mounting issues that confront them daily. And there are the accumulating studies and solutions proposed by many concerned and enlightened groups as well as by agencies of the United Nations, to remove any possibility of ignorance as to the challenging requirements to be met. There is, however, a paralysis of will; and it is this that must be carefully examined and resolutely dealt with. This paralysis is rooted, as we have stated, in a deep-seated conviction of the inevitable quarrelsomeness of mankind, which has led to the reluctance to entertain the possibility of subordinating national self-interest to the requirements of world order, and in an unwillingness to face courageously the far-reaching implications of establishing a united world authority. It is also traceable to the incapacity of largely ignorant and subjugated masses to articulate their desire for a new order in which they can live in peace, harmony and prosperity with all humanity.

The tentative steps towards world order, especially since World War II, give hopeful signs. The increasing tendency of groups of nations to formalize relationships which enable them to co-operate in matters of mutual interest suggests that eventually all nations could overcome this paralysis. The Association of South East Asian Nations, the Caribbean Community and Common Market, the Central American Common Market, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the European Communities, the League of Arab States, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the South Pacific Forum--all the joint endeavours represented by such organizations prepare the path to world order.

The increasing attention being focused on some of the most deep-rooted problems of the planet is yet another hopeful sign. Despite the obvious shortcomings of the United Nations, the more than two score declarations and conventions adopted by that organization, even where governments have not been enthusiastic in their commitment, have given ordinary people a sense of a new lease on life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the similar measures concerned with eliminating all forms of discrimination based on race, sex or religious belief; upholding the rights of the child; protecting all persons against being subjected to torture; eradicating hunger and malnutrition; using scientific and technological progress in the interest of peace and the benefit of mankind--all such measures, if courageously enforced and expanded, will advance the day when the spectre of war will have lost its power to dominate international relations. There is no need to stress the significance of the issues addressed by these declarations and conventions. However, a few such issues, because of their immediate relevance to establishing world peace, deserve additional comment.

Racism, one of the most baneful and persistent evils, is a major barrier to

peace. Its practice perpetrates too outrageous a violation of the dignity of human beings to be countenanced under any pretext. Racism retards the unfoldment of the boundless potentialities of its victims, corrupts its perpetrators, and blights human progress. Recognition of the oneness of mankind, implemented by appropriate legal measures, must be universally upheld if this problem is to be overcome.

The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those spiritual verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution.

Unbridled nationalism, as distinguished from a sane and legitimate patriotism, must give way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole. Bahá'u'lláh's statement is: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." The concept of world citizenship is a direct result of the contraction of the world into a single neighbourhood through scientific advances and of the indisputable interdependence of nations. Love of all the world's peoples does not exclude love of one's country. The advantage of the part in a world society is best served by promoting the advantage of the whole. Current international activities in various fields which nurture mutual affection and a sense of solidarity among peoples need greatly to be increased.

Religious strife, throughout history, has been the cause of innumerable wars and conflicts, a major blight to progress, and is increasingly abhorrent to the people of all faiths and no faith. Followers of all religions must be willing to face the basic questions which this strife raises, and to arrive at clear answers.

How are the differences between them to be resolved, both in theory and in practice? The challenge facing the religious leaders of mankind is to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace.

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half

of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.

The cause of universal education, which has already enlisted in its service an army of dedicated people from every faith and nation, deserves the utmost support that the governments of the world can lend it. For ignorance is indisputably the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice. No nation can achieve success unless education is accorded all its citizens. Lack of resources limits the ability of many nations to fulfil this necessity, imposing a certain ordering of priorities. The decisionmaking agencies involved would do well to consider giving first priority to the education of women and girls, since it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society. In keeping with the requirements of the times, consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child.

A fundamental lack of communication between peoples seriously undermines efforts towards world peace. Adopting an international auxiliary language would go far to resolving this problem and necessitates the most urgent attention.

Two points bear emphasizing in all these issues. One is that the abolition of war is not simply a matter of signing treaties and protocols; it is a complex task requiring a new level of commitment to resolving issues not customarily associated with the pursuit of peace. Based on political agreements alone, the idea of collective security is a chimera. The other point is that the primary challenge in dealing with issues of peace is to raise the context to the level of principle, as distinct from pure pragmatism. For, in essence, peace stems from an inner state supported by a spiritual or moral attitude, and it is chiefly in evoking this attitude that the possibility of enduring solutions can be found.

There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and

implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them.

### Section III

The primary question to be resolved is how the present world, with its entrenched pattern of conflict, can change to a world in which harmony and co-operation will prevail.

World order can be founded only on an unshakeable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice--prejudice of every kind--race, class, colour, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others.

Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies.

In the Bahá'í view, recognition of the oneness of mankind "calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world-- a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units."

Elaborating the implications of this pivotal principle, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, commented in 1931 that: "Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human

race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity".

The achievement of such ends requires several stages in the adjustment of national political attitudes, which now verge on anarchy in the absence of clearly defined laws or universally accepted and enforceable principles regulating the relationships between nations. The League of Nations, the United Nations, and the many organizations and agreements produced by them have unquestionably been helpful in attenuating some of the negative effects of international conflicts, but they have shown themselves incapable of preventing war. Indeed, there have been scores of wars since the end of the Second World War; many are yet raging.

The predominant aspects of this problem had already emerged in the nineteenth century when Bahá'u'lláh first advanced his proposals for the establishment of world peace. The principle of collective security was propounded by him in statements addressed to the rulers of the world. Shoghi Effendi commented on his meaning: "What else could these weighty words signify," he wrote, "if they did not point to the inevitable curtailment of unfettered national sovereignty as an indispensable preliminary to the formation of the future Commonwealth of all the nations of the world? Some form of a world super-state must needs be evolved, in whose favour all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. Such a state will have to include within its orbit an International Executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth; a World Parliament whose members shall be elected by the people in their respective countries and whose election shall be confirmed by their respective governments; and a Supreme Tribunal whose judgement will have a binding effect even in such cases where the parties concerned did not voluntarily agree to submit their case to its consideration.

"A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of capital and labour definitely recognized; in which the clamour of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished; in which a single code of international law--the product of the considered judgement of the world's federated representatives--shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive intervention of the combined forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship--such indeed, appears, in its broadest outline, the Order anticipated by

Bahá'u'lláh, an Order that shall come to be regarded as the fairest fruit of a slowly maturing age."

The implementation of these far-reaching measures was indicated by Bahá'u'lláh: "The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men."

The courage, the resolution, the pure motive, the selfless love of one people for another--all the spiritual and moral qualities required for effecting this momentous step towards peace are focused on the will to act. And it is towards arousing the necessary volition that earnest consideration must be given to the reality of man, namely, his thought. To understand the relevance of this potent reality is also to appreciate the social necessity of actualizing its

unique value through candid, dispassionate and cordial consultation, and of acting upon the results of this process. Bahá'u'lláh insistently drew attention

to the virtues and indispensability of consultation for ordering human affairs. He said: "Consultation bestows greater awareness and transmutes conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leads the way and guides. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation." The very attempt to achieve peace through the consultative action he proposed can release such a salutary spirit among the peoples of the earth that no power could resist the final, triumphal outcome.

Concerning the proceedings for this world gathering, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh and authorized interpreter of his teachings, offered these insights:

"They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. This supreme and noble undertaking--the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world--should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the

suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure."

The holding of this mighty convocation is long overdue.

With all the ardour of our hearts, we appeal to the leaders of all nations to seize this opportune moment and take irreversible steps to convoke this world meeting. All the forces of history impel the human race towards this act which will mark for all time the dawn of its long-awaited maturity.

Will not the United Nations, with the full support of its membership, rise to the high purposes of such a crowning event?

Let men and women, youth and children everywhere recognize the eternal merit of this imperative action for all peoples and lift up their voices in willing assent. Indeed, let it be this generation that inaugurates this glorious stage in the evolution of social life on the planet.

#### Section IV

The source of the optimism we feel is a vision transcending the cessation of war and the creation of agencies of international co-operation. Permanent peace among nations is an essential stage, but not, Bahá'u'lláh asserts, the ultimate goal of the social development of humanity. Beyond the initial armistice forced upon the world by the fear of nuclear holocaust, beyond the political peace reluctantly entered into by suspicious rival nations, beyond pragmatic arrangements for security and coexistence, beyond even the many experiments in co-operation which these steps will make possible lies the crowning goal: the unification of all the peoples of the world in one universal family.

Disunity is a danger that the nations and peoples of the earth can no longer endure; the consequences are too terrible to contemplate, too obvious to require any demonstration. "The well-being of mankind," Bahá'u'lláh wrote more than a century ago, "its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." In observing that "mankind is groaning, is dying to be led to unity, and to terminate its age-long martyrdom", Shoghi Effendi further commented that: "Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of

human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life."

All contemporary forces of change validate this view. The proofs can be discerned in the many examples already cited of the favourable signs towards world peace in current international movements and developments. The army of men and women, drawn from virtually every culture, race and nation on earth, who serve the multifarious agencies of the United Nations, represent a planetary "civil service" whose impressive accomplishments are indicative of the degree of co-operation that can be attained even under discouraging conditions. An urge towards unity, like a spiritual springtime, struggles to express itself through countless international congresses that bring together people from a vast array of disciplines. It motivates appeals for international projects involving children and youth. Indeed, it is the real source of the remarkable movement towards ecumenism by which members of historically antagonistic religions and sects seem irresistibly drawn towards one another. Together with the opposing tendency to warfare and self-aggrandizement against which it ceaselessly struggles, the drive towards world unity is one of the dominant, pervasive features of life on the planet during the closing years of the twentieth century.

The experience of the Bahá'í community may be seen as an example of this enlarging unity. It is a community of some three to four million people drawn from many nations, cultures, classes and creeds, engaged in a wide range of activities serving the spiritual, social and economic needs of the peoples of many lands. It is a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family, conducting its affairs through a system of commonly accepted consultative principles, and cherishing equally all the great outpourings of divine guidance in human history. Its existence is yet another convincing proof of the practicality of its Founder's vision of a united world, another evidence that humanity can live as one global society, equal to whatever challenges its coming of age may entail. If the Bahá'í experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study.

In contemplating the supreme importance of the task now challenging the entire world, we bow our heads in humility before the awesome majesty of the divine Creator, Who out of His infinite love has created all humanity from the same stock; exalted the gem-like reality of man; honoured it with intellect and wisdom, nobility and immortality; and conferred upon man the "unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him", a capacity that "must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation."

We hold firmly the conviction that all human beings have been created "to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization"; that "to act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man"; that the virtues that befit human dignity are trustworthiness, forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all peoples. We reaffirm the belief that the "potentialities inherent

in

the station of man, the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day of God." These are the motivations for our unshakeable faith that unity and peace are the attainable goal towards which humanity is striving.

At this writing, the expectant voices of Bahá'ís can be heard despite the persecution they still endure in the land in which their Faith was born. By their example of steadfast hope, they bear witness to the belief that the imminent realization of this age-old dream of peace is now, by virtue of the transforming effects of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, invested with the force of divine authority. Thus we convey to you not only a vision in words: we summon the power of deeds of faith and sacrifice; we convey the anxious plea of our co-religionists everywhere for peace and unity. We join with all who are the victims of aggression, all who yearn for an end to conflict and contention, all whose devotion to principles of peace and world order promotes the ennobling purposes for which humanity was called into being by an all-loving Creator.

In the earnestness of our desire to impart to you the fervour of our hope and the depth of our confidence, we cite the emphatic promise of Bahá'u'lláh: "These fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come."

## THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

### The Prosperity of Humankind

This statement of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, released in January 1995 in preparation for the United Nations World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, examines prevailing attitudes and practices in social and economic development. It redefines the roles of all those involved and questions underlying assumptions about the nature of true global prosperity.

### The Prosperity of Humankind<sup>171</sup>

To an extent unimaginable a decade ago, the ideal of world peace is taking on form and substance. Obstacles that long seemed immovable have collapsed in humanity's path; apparently irreconcilable conflicts have begun to surrender to processes of consultation and resolution; a willingness to counter military aggression through unified international action is emerging. The effect has been to awaken in both the masses of humanity and many world leaders a degree of hopefulness about the future of our planet that had been nearly extinguished.

Throughout the world, immense intellectual and spiritual energies are seeking expression, energies whose gathering pressure is in direct proportion to the frustrations of recent decades. Everywhere the signs multiply that the earth's peoples yearn for an end to conflict and to the suffering and ruin from which no land is any longer immune. These rising impulses for change must be

seized upon and channeled into overcoming the remaining barriers that block realization of the age-old dream of global peace. The effort of will required for such a task cannot be summoned up merely by appeals for action against the countless ills afflicting society. It must be galvanized by a vision of human prosperity in the fullest sense of the term -- an awakening to the possibilities of the spiritual and material well-being now brought within grasp. Its beneficiaries must be all of the planet's inhabitants, without distinction, without the imposition of conditions unrelated to the fundamental goals of such a reorganization of human affairs.

History has thus far recorded principally the experience of tribes, cultures, classes, and nations. With the physical unification of the planet in this century and acknowledgement of the interdependence of all who live on it, the history of humanity as one people is now beginning. The long, slow civilizing of human character has been a sporadic development, uneven and admittedly inequitable in the material advantages it has conferred. Nevertheless, endowed with the wealth of all the genetic and cultural diversity that has evolved through past ages, the earth's inhabitants are now challenged to draw on their collective inheritance to take up, consciously and systematically, the responsibility for the design of their future.

It is unrealistic to imagine that the vision of the next stage in the advancement of civilization can be formulated without a searching reexamination of the attitudes and assumptions that currently underlie approaches to social and economic development. At the most obvious level, such rethinking will have to address practical matters of policy, resource utilization, planning procedures, implementation methodologies, and organization. As it proceeds, however, fundamental issues will quickly emerge, related to the long-term goals to be pursued, the social structures required, the implications for development of principles of social justice, and the nature and role of knowledge in effecting enduring change. Indeed, such a reexamination will be driven to seek a broad consensus of understanding about human nature itself.

Two avenues of discussion open directly onto all of these issues, whether conceptual or practical, and it is along these two avenues that we wish to explore, in the pages that follow, the subject of a strategy of global development. The first is prevailing beliefs about the nature and purpose of the development process; the second is the roles assigned in it to the various protagonists.

The assumptions directing most of current development planning are essentially materialistic. That is to say, the purpose of development is defined in terms of the successful cultivation in all societies of those means for the achievement of material prosperity that have, through trial and error, already come to characterize certain regions of the world. Modifications in development discourse do indeed occur, accommodating differences of

culture and political system and responding to the alarming dangers posed by environmental degradation. Yet the underlying materialistic assumptions remain essentially unchallenged.

As the twentieth century draws to a close, it is no longer possible to maintain the belief that the approach to social and economic development to which the materialistic conception of life has given rise is capable of meeting humanity's needs. Optimistic forecasts about the changes it would generate have vanished into the ever-widening abyss that separates the living standards of a small and relatively diminishing minority of the world's inhabitants from the poverty experienced by the vast majority of the globe's population.

This unprecedented economic crisis, together with the social breakdown it has helped to engender, reflects a profound error of conception about human nature itself. For the levels of response elicited from human beings by the incentives of the prevailing order are not only inadequate, but seem almost irrelevant in the face of world events. We are being shown that, unless the development of society finds a purpose beyond the mere amelioration of material conditions, it will fail of attaining even these goals. That purpose must be sought in spiritual dimensions of life and motivation that transcend a constantly changing economic landscape and an artificially imposed division of human societies into "developed" and "developing".

As the purpose of development is being redefined, it will become necessary also to look again at assumptions about the appropriate roles to be played by the protagonists in the process. The crucial role of government, at whatever level, requires no elaboration. Future generations, however, will find almost incomprehensible the circumstance that, in an age paying tribute to an egalitarian philosophy and related democratic principles, development planning should view the masses of humanity as essentially recipients of benefits from aid and training. Despite acknowledgement of participation as a principle, the scope of the decision making left to most of the world's population is at best secondary, limited to a range of choices formulated by agencies inaccessible to them and determined by goals that are often irreconcilable with their perceptions of reality.

This approach is even endorsed, implicitly if not explicitly, by established religion. Burdened by traditions of paternalism, prevailing religious thought seems incapable of translating an expressed faith in the spiritual dimensions of human nature into confidence in humanity's collective capacity to transcend material conditions.

Such an attitude misses the significance of what is likely the most important social phenomenon of our time. If it is true that the governments of the world are striving through the medium of the United Nations system to construct a new global order, it is equally true that the peoples of the world are galvanized by this same vision. Their response has taken the form of a sudden efflorescence of countless movements and organizations of social

change at local, regional, and international levels. Human rights, the advance of women, the social requirements of sustainable economic development, the overcoming of prejudices, the moral education of children, literacy, primary health care, and a host of other vital concerns each commands the urgent advocacy of organizations supported by growing numbers in every part of the globe.

This response of the world's people themselves to the crying needs of the age echoes the call that Bahá'u'lláh raised over a hundred years ago: "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements." The transformation in the way that great numbers of ordinary people are coming to see themselves -- a change that is dramatically abrupt in the perspective of the history of civilization -- raises fundamental questions about the role assigned to the general body of humanity in the planning of our planet's future.

### Section I

The bedrock of a strategy that can engage the world's population in assuming responsibility for its collective destiny must be the consciousness of the oneness of humankind. Deceptively simple in popular discourse, the concept that humanity constitutes a single people presents fundamental challenges to the way that most of the institutions of contemporary society carry out their functions. Whether in the form of the adversarial structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, a glorification of the struggle between classes and other social groups, or the competitive spirit dominating so much of modern life, conflict is accepted as the mainspring of human interaction. It represents yet another expression in social organization of the materialistic interpretation of life that has progressively consolidated itself over the past two centuries.

In a letter addressed to Queen Victoria over a century ago, and employing an analogy that points to the one model holding convincing promise for the organization of a planetary society, Bahá'u'lláh compared the world to the human body. There is, indeed, no other model in phenomenal existence to which we can reasonably look. Human society is composed not of a mass of merely differentiated cells but of associations of individuals, each one of whom is endowed with intelligence and will; nevertheless, the modes of operation that characterize man's biological nature illustrate fundamental principles of existence. Chief among these is that of unity in diversity. Paradoxically, it is precisely the wholeness and complexity of the order constituting the human body -- and the perfect integration into it of the body's cells -- that permit the full realization of the distinctive capacities inherent in each of these component elements. No cell lives apart from the body, whether in contributing to its functioning or in deriving its share from the well-being of the whole. The physical well-being thus achieved finds its purpose in making possible the expression of human consciousness; that is to say, the

purpose of biological development transcends the mere existence of the body and its parts.

What is true of the life of the individual has its parallels in human society. The human species is an organic whole, the leading edge of the evolutionary process. That human consciousness necessarily operates through an infinite diversity of individual minds and motivations detracts in no way from its essential unity. Indeed, it is precisely an inhering diversity that distinguishes unity from homogeneity or uniformity. What the peoples of the world are today experiencing, Bahá'u'lláh said, is their collective coming-of-age, and it is through this emerging maturity of the race that the principle of unity in diversity will find full expression. From its earliest beginnings in the consolidation of family life, the process of social organization has successively moved from the simple structures of clan and tribe, through multitudinous forms of urban society, to the eventual emergence of the nation-state, each stage opening up a wealth of new opportunities for the exercise of human capacity.

Clearly, the advancement of the race has not occurred at the expense of human individuality. As social organization has increased, the scope for the expression of the capacities latent in each human being has correspondingly expanded. Because the relationship between the individual and society is a reciprocal one, the transformation now required must occur simultaneously within human consciousness and the structure of social institutions. It is in the opportunities afforded by this twofold process of change that a strategy of global development will find its purpose. At this crucial stage of history, that purpose must be to establish enduring foundations on which planetary civilization can gradually take shape.

Laying the groundwork for global civilization calls for the creation of laws and institutions that are universal in both character and authority. The effort can begin only when the concept of the oneness of humanity has been wholeheartedly embraced by those in whose hands the responsibility for decision making rests, and when the related principles are propagated through both educational systems and the media of mass communication. Once this threshold is crossed, a process will have been set in motion through which the peoples of the world can be drawn into the task of formulating common goals and committing themselves to their attainment. Only so fundamental a reorientation can protect them, too, from the age-old demons of ethnic and religious strife. Only through the dawning consciousness that they constitute a single people will the inhabitants of the planet be enabled to turn away from the patterns of conflict that have dominated social organization in the past and begin to learn the ways of collaboration and conciliation. "The wellbeing of mankind," Bahá'u'lláh writes, "its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."

## Section II

Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organization. With ever greater frequency, proposals aiming at the development of the planet will have to submit to the candid light of the standards it requires.

At the individual level, justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh avers, justice is "the best beloved of all things" since it permits each individual to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the knowledge of his neighbor or his group. It calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgments, for equity in one's treatment of others, and is thus a constant if demanding companion in the daily occasions of life.

At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. To the extent that justice becomes a guiding concern of human interaction, a consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected. In such a climate the perennial tendencies toward manipulation and partisanship are far less likely to deflect the decision-making process.

The implications for social and economic development are profound. Concern for justice protects the task of defining progress from the temptation to sacrifice the well-being of the generality of humankind -- and even of the planet itself -- to the advantages which technological breakthroughs can make available to privileged minorities. In design and planning, it ensures that limited resources are not diverted to the pursuit of projects extraneous to a community's essential social or economic priorities. Above all, only development programs that are perceived as meeting their needs and as being just and equitable in objective can hope to engage the commitment of the masses of humanity, upon whom implementation depends. The relevant human qualities such as honesty, a willingness to work, and a spirit of cooperation are successfully harnessed to the accomplishment of enormously demanding collective goals when every member of society -- indeed every

component group within society -- can trust that they are protected by standards and assured of benefits that apply equally to all.

At the heart of the discussion of a strategy of social and economic development, therefore, lies the issue of human rights. The shaping of such a strategy calls for the promotion of human rights to be freed from the grip of the false dichotomies that have for so long held it hostage. Concern that each human being should enjoy the freedom of thought and action conducive to his or her personal growth does not justify devotion to the cult of individualism that so deeply corrupts many areas of contemporary life. Nor does concern to ensure the welfare of society as a whole require a deification of the state as the supposed source of humanity's well-being. Far otherwise: the history of the present century shows all too clearly that such ideologies and the partisan agendas to which they give rise have been themselves the principal enemies of the interests they purport to serve. Only in a consultative framework made possible by the consciousness of the organic unity of humankind can all aspects of the concern for human rights find legitimate and creative expression.

Today, the agency on whom has devolved the task of creating this framework and of liberating the promotion of human rights from those who would exploit it is the system of international institutions born out of the tragedies of two ruinous world wars and the experience of worldwide economic breakdown. Significantly, the term "human rights" has come into general use only since the promulgation of the United Nations Charter in 1945 and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights three years later. In these history-making documents, formal recognition has been given to respect for social justice as a correlative of the establishment of world peace.

The fact that the Declaration passed without a dissenting vote in the General Assembly conferred on it from the outset an authority that has grown steadily in the intervening years.

The activity most intimately linked to the consciousness that distinguishes human nature is the individual's exploration of reality for himself or herself. The freedom to investigate the purpose of existence and to develop the endowments of human nature that make it achievable requires protection. Human beings must be free to know. That such freedom is often abused and such abuse grossly encouraged by features of contemporary society does not detract in any degree from the validity of the impulse itself.

It is this distinguishing impulse of human consciousness that provides the moral imperative for the enunciation of many of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration and the related Covenants. Universal education, freedom of movement, access to information, and the opportunity to participate in political life are all aspects of its operation that require explicit

guarantee by the international community. The same is true of freedom of thought and belief, including religious liberty, along with the right to hold opinions and express these opinions appropriately.

Since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This trusteeship constitutes the moral foundation of most of the other rights -- principally economic and social -- which the instruments of the United Nations are attempting similarly to define. The security of the family and the home, the ownership of property, and the right to privacy are all implied in such a trusteeship. The obligations on the part of the community extend to the provision of employment, mental and physical health care, social security, fair wages, rest and recreation, and a host of other reasonable expectations on the part of the individual members of society.

The principle of collective trusteeship creates also the right of every person to expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy the protection of national and international law. Much like the role played by the gene pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment, the immense wealth of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social and economic development of a human race experiencing its collective coming-of-age. It represents a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global civilization. On the one hand, cultural expressions need to be protected from suffocation by the materialistic influences currently holding sway. On the other, cultures must be enabled to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of civilization, free of manipulation for partisan political ends.

"The light of men", Bahá'u'lláh says, "is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance."

### Section III

In order for the standard of human rights now in the process of formulation by the community of nations to be promoted and established as prevailing international norms, a fundamental redefinition of human relationships is called for. Present-day conceptions of what is natural and appropriate in relationships -- among human beings themselves, between human beings and nature, between the individual and society, and between the members of society and its institutions -- reflect levels of understanding arrived at by the human race during earlier and less mature stages in its development. If

humanity is indeed coming of age, if all the inhabitants of the planet constitute a single people, if justice is to be the ruling principle of social organization -- then existing conceptions that were born out of ignorance of these emerging realities have to be recast.

Movement in this direction has barely begun. It will lead, as it unfolds, to a new understanding of the nature of the family and of the rights and responsibilities of each of its members. It will entirely transform the role of women at every level of society. Its effect in reordering people's relation to the work they do and their understanding of the place of economic activity in their lives will be sweeping. It will bring about far-reaching changes in the governance of human affairs and in the institutions created to carry it out. Through its influence, the work of society's rapidly proliferating nongovernmental organizations will be increasingly rationalized. It will ensure the creation of binding legislation that will protect both the environment and the development needs of all peoples. Ultimately, the restructuring or transformation of the United Nations system that this movement is already bringing about will no doubt lead to the establishment of a world federation of nations with its own legislative, judicial, and executive bodies.

Central to the task of reconceptualizing the system of human relationships is the process that Bahá'u'lláh refers to as consultation. "In all things it is necessary to consult," is His advice. "The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation."

The standard of truth seeking this process demands is far beyond the patterns of negotiation and compromise that tend to characterize the present-day discussion of human affairs. It cannot be achieved -- indeed, its attainment is severely handicapped -- by the culture of protest that is another widely prevailing feature of contemporary society. Debate, propaganda, the adversarial method, the entire apparatus of partisanship that have long been such familiar features of collective action are all fundamentally harmful to its

purpose: that is, arriving at a consensus about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment.

What Bahá'u'lláh is calling for is a consultative process in which the individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of a body with its own interests and goals. In such an atmosphere, characterized by both candor and courtesy, ideas belong not to the individual to whom they occur during the discussion but to the group as a whole, to take up, discard, or revise as seems to best serve the goal

pursued. Consultation succeeds to the extent that all participants support the decisions arrived at, regardless of the individual opinions with which they entered the discussion. Under such circumstances an earlier decision can be readily reconsidered if experience exposes any shortcomings.

Viewed in such a light, consultation is the operating expression of justice in

human affairs. So vital is it to the success of collective endeavor that it must constitute a basic feature of a viable strategy of social and economic development. Indeed, the participation of the people on whose commitment and efforts the success of such a strategy depends becomes effective only as consultation is made the organizing principle of every project. "No man can attain his true station", is Bahá'u'lláh's counsel, "except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation."

#### Section IV

The tasks entailed in the development of a global society call for levels of capacity far beyond anything the human race has so far been able to muster. Reaching these levels will require an enormous expansion in access to knowledge, on the part of individuals and social organizations alike. Universal education will be an indispensable contributor to this process of capacity building, but the effort will succeed only as human affairs are so reorganized as to enable both individuals and groups in every sector of society to acquire knowledge and apply it to the shaping of human affairs.

Throughout recorded history, human consciousness has depended upon two basic knowledge systems through which its potentialities have progressively been expressed: science and religion. Through these two agencies, the race's experience has been organized, its environment interpreted, its latent powers explored, and its moral and intellectual life disciplined. They have acted as the real progenitors of civilization. With the benefit of hindsight, it is evident, moreover, that the effectiveness of this dual structure has been greatest during those periods when, each in its own sphere, religion and science were able to work in concert.

Given the almost universal respect in which science is currently held, its credentials need no elaboration. In the context of a strategy of social and economic development, the issue rather is how scientific and technological activity is to be organized. If the work involved is viewed chiefly as the preserve of established elites living in a small number of nations, it is obvious that the enormous gap which such an arrangement has already created between the world's rich and poor will only continue to widen, with the disastrous consequences for the world's economy already noted. Indeed, if most of humankind continue to be regarded mainly as users of products of science and technology created elsewhere, then programs ostensibly designed to serve their needs cannot properly be termed "development".

A central challenge, therefore -- and an enormous one -- is the expansion of scientific and technological activity. Instruments of social and economic

change so powerful must cease to be the patrimony of advantaged segments of society, and must be so organized as to permit people everywhere to participate in such activity on the basis of capacity. Apart from the creation of

programs that make the required education available to all who are able to benefit from it, such reorganization will require the establishment of viable centers of learning throughout the world, institutions that will enhance the capability of the world's peoples to participate in the generation and application of knowledge. Development strategy, while acknowledging the wide differences of individual capacity, must take as a major goal the task of making it possible for all of the earth's inhabitants to approach on an equal basis the processes of science and technology which are their common birthright. Familiar arguments for maintaining the status quo grow daily less compelling as the accelerating revolution in communication technologies now brings information and training within reach of vast numbers of people around the globe, wherever they may be, whatever their cultural backgrounds.

The challenges facing humanity in its religious life, if different in character, are equally daunting. For the vast majority of the world's population, the idea that human nature has a spiritual dimension -- indeed that its fundamental identity is spiritual -- is a truth requiring no demonstration. It is a perception of reality that can be discovered in the earliest records of civilization and that has been cultivated for several millennia by every one of the great religious traditions of humanity's past. Its enduring achievements in law, the fine arts, and the civilizing of human intercourse are what give substance and meaning to history. In one form or another its promptings are a daily influence in the lives of most people on earth and, as events around the world today dramatically show, the longings it awakens are both inextinguishable and incalculably potent.

It would seem obvious, therefore, that efforts of any kind to promote human progress must seek to tap capacities so universal and so immensely creative. Why, then, have spiritual issues facing humanity not been central to the development discourse? Why have most of the priorities -- indeed most of the underlying assumptions -- of the international development agenda been determined so far by materialistic world views to which only small minorities of the earth's population subscribe? How much weight can be placed on a professed devotion to the principle of universal participation that denies the validity of the participants' defining cultural experience?

It may be argued that, since spiritual and moral issues have historically been bound up with contending theological doctrines which are not susceptible of objective proof, these issues lie outside the framework of the international community's development concerns. To accord them any significant role

would be to open the door to precisely those dogmatic influences that have nurtured social conflict and blocked human progress. There is doubtless a measure of truth in such an argument. Exponents of the world's various theological systems bear a heavy responsibility not only for the disrepute into which faith itself has fallen among many progressive thinkers, but for the inhibitions and distortions produced in humanity's continuing discourse on spiritual meaning. To conclude, however, that the answer lies in discouraging the investigation of spiritual reality and ignoring the deepest roots of human motivation is a self-evident delusion. The sole effect, to the degree that such censorship has been achieved in recent history, has been to deliver the shaping of humanity's future into the hands of a new orthodoxy, one which argues that truth is amoral and facts are independent of values.

So far as earthly existence is concerned, many of the greatest achievements of religion have been moral in character. Through its teachings and through the examples of human lives illumined by these teachings, masses of 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 in ways that serve the advancement of civilization. Institutional systems have been devised to translate these moral advances into the norms of social life on a vast scale. However obscured by dogmatic accretions and diverted by sectarian conflict, the spiritual impulses set in motion by such transcendent figures as Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Muhammad have been the chief influence in the civilizing of human character.

Since, then, the challenge is the empowerment of humankind through a vast increase in access to knowledge, the strategy that can make this possible must be constructed around an ongoing and intensifying dialogue between science and religion. It is -- or by now should be -- a truism that, in every sphere of human activity and at every level, the insights and skills that represent scientific accomplishment must look to the force of spiritual commitment and moral principle to ensure their appropriate application. People need, for example, to learn how to separate fact from conjecture -- indeed to distinguish between subjective views and objective reality; the extent to which individuals and institutions so equipped can contribute to human progress, however, will be determined by their devotion to truth and their detachment from the promptings of their own interests and passions. Another capacity that science must cultivate in all people is that of thinking in terms of process, including historical process; however, if this intellectual advancement is to contribute ultimately to promoting development, its perspective must be unclouded by prejudices of race, culture, sex, or sectarian belief. Similarly, the training that can make it possible for the earth's inhabitants to participate in the production of wealth will advance the aims of development only to the extent that such an impulse is illumined by the spiritual insight that service to humankind is the purpose of both individual life and social organization.

## Section V

It is in the context of raising the level of human capacity through the expansion of knowledge at all levels that the economic issues facing humankind need to be addressed. As the experience of recent decades has demonstrated, material benefits and endeavors cannot be regarded as ends in themselves. Their value consists not only in providing for humanity's basic needs in housing, food, health care, and the like, but in extending the reach of

human abilities. The most important role that economic efforts must play in development lies, therefore, in equipping people and institutions with the means through which they can achieve the real purpose of development: that is, laying foundations for a new social order that can cultivate the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness.

The challenge to economic thinking is to accept unambiguously this purpose of development -- and its own role in fostering creation of the means to achieve it. Only in this way can economics and the related sciences free themselves from the undertow of the materialistic preoccupations that now distract them, and fulfill their potential as tools vital to achieving human well-being in the full sense of the term. Nowhere is the need for a rigorous dialogue between the work of science and the insights of religion more apparent.

The problem of poverty is a case in point. Proposals aimed at addressing it are predicated on the conviction that material resources exist, or can be created by scientific and technological endeavor, which will alleviate and eventually entirely eradicate this age-old condition as a feature of human life.

A major reason why such relief is not achieved is that the necessary scientific and technological advances respond to a set of priorities only tangentially related to the real interests of the generality of humankind. A radical reordering of these priorities will be required if the burden of poverty is finally to be lifted from the world. Such an achievement demands a determined quest for appropriate values, a quest that will test profoundly both the spiritual and scientific resources of humankind. Religion will be severely hampered in contributing to this joint undertaking so long as it is held prisoner by sectarian doctrines which cannot distinguish between contentment and mere passivity and which teach that poverty is an inherent feature of earthly life, escape from which lies only in the world beyond. To participate effectively in the struggle to bring material well-being to humanity, the religious spirit must find -- in the Source of inspiration from which it flows -- new spiritual concepts and principles relevant to an age that seeks to establish unity and justice in human affairs.

Unemployment raises similar issues. In most of contemporary thinking, the concept of work has been largely reduced to that of gainful employment aimed at acquiring the means for the consumption of available goods. The system is circular: acquisition and consumption resulting in the maintenance

and expansion of the production of goods and, in consequence, in supporting paid employment. Taken individually, all of these activities are essential to the well-being of society. The inadequacy of the overall conception, however, can be read in both the apathy that social commentators discern among large numbers of the employed in every land and the demoralization of the growing armies of the unemployed.

Not surprisingly, therefore, there is increasing recognition that the world is in urgent need of a new "work ethic". Here again, nothing less than insights generated by the creative interaction of the scientific and religious systems of knowledge can produce so fundamental a reorientation of habits and attitudes. Unlike animals, which depend for their sustenance on whatever the environment readily affords, human beings are impelled to express the immense capacities latent within them through productive work designed to meet their own needs and those of others. In acting thus they become participants, at however modest a level, in the processes of the advancement of civilization. They fulfill purposes that unite them with others. To the extent that work is consciously undertaken in a spirit of service to humanity, Bahá'u'lláh says, it is a form of prayer, a means of worshipping God. Every individual has the capacity to see himself or herself in this light, and it is to this inalienable capacity of the self that development strategy must appeal, whatever the nature of the plans being pursued, whatever the rewards they promise. No narrower a perspective will ever call up from the people of the world the magnitude of effort and commitment that the economic tasks ahead will require.

A challenge of similar nature faces economic thinking as a result of the environmental crisis. The fallacies in theories based on the belief that there is no limit to nature's capacity to fulfill any demand made on it by human beings have now been coldly exposed. A culture which attaches absolute value to expansion, to acquisition, and to the satisfaction of people's wants is being compelled to recognize that such goals are not, by themselves, realistic guides to policy. Inadequate, too, are approaches to economic issues whose decision-making tools cannot deal with the fact that most of the major challenges are global rather than particular in scope.

The earnest hope that this moral crisis can somehow be met by deifying nature itself is an evidence of the spiritual and intellectual desperation that the crisis has engendered. Recognition that creation is an organic whole and that humanity has the responsibility to care for this whole, welcome as it is, does not represent an influence which can by itself establish in the consciousness

of people a new system of values. Only a breakthrough in understanding that is scientific and spiritual in the fullest sense of the terms will empower the human race to assume the trusteeship toward which history impels it.

All people will have sooner or later to recover, for example, the capacity for contentment, the welcoming of moral discipline, and the devotion to duty that, until relatively recently, were considered essential aspects of being human. Repeatedly throughout history, the teachings of the Founders of the great religions have been able to instill these qualities of character in the mass

of people who responded to them. The qualities themselves are even more vital today, but their expression must now take a form consistent with humanity's coming-of-age. Here again, religion's challenge is to free itself from the obsessions of the past: contentment is not fatalism; morality has nothing in common with the life-denying Puritanism that has so often presumed to speak in its name; and a genuine devotion to duty brings feelings not of self-righteousness but of self-worth.

The effect of the persistent denial to women of full equality with men sharpens still further the challenge to science and religion in the economic life of humankind. To any objective observer the principle of the equality of the sexes is fundamental to all realistic thinking about the future well-being of the earth and its people. It represents a truth about human nature that has waited largely unrecognized throughout the long ages of the race's childhood and adolescence. "Women and men", is Bahá'u'lláh's emphatic assertion, "have been and will always be equal in the sight of God." The rational soul has no sex, and whatever social inequities may have been dictated by the survival requirements of the past, they clearly cannot be justified at a time when humanity stands at the threshold of maturity. A commitment to the establishment of full equality between men and women, in all departments of life and at every level of society, will be central to the success of efforts to conceive and implement a strategy of global development.

Indeed, in an important sense, progress in this area will itself be a measure of the success of any development program. Given the vital role of economic activity in the advancement of civilization, visible evidence of the pace at which development is progressing will be the extent to which women gain access to all avenues of economic endeavor. The challenge goes beyond ensuring an equitable distribution of opportunity, important as that is. It calls for a fundamental rethinking of economic issues in a manner that will invite the full participation of a range of human experience and insight hitherto largely excluded from the discourse. The classical economic models of impersonal markets in which human beings act as autonomous makers of self-regarding choices will not serve the needs of a world motivated by ideals of unity and justice. Society will find itself increasingly challenged to

develop new economic models shaped by insights that arise from a sympathetic understanding of shared experience, from viewing human beings in relation to others, and from a recognition of the centrality to social wellbeing of the role of the family and the community. Such an intellectual breakthrough -- strongly altruistic rather than self-centered in focus -- must draw heavily on both the spiritual and scientific sensibilities of the race, and millennia of experience have prepared women to make crucial contributions to the common effort.

## Section VI

To contemplate a transformation of society on this scale is to raise both the question of the power that can be harnessed to accomplish it and the issue inextricably linked to it, the authority to exercise that power. As with all other implications of the accelerating integration of the planet and its people, both of these familiar terms stand in urgent need of redefinition.

Throughout history -- and despite theologically or ideologically inspired assurances to the contrary -- power has been largely interpreted as advantage enjoyed by persons or groups. Often, indeed, it has been expressed simply in terms of means to be used against others. This interpretation of power has become an inherent feature of the culture of division and conflict that has characterized the human race during the past several millennia, regardless of the social, religious, or political orientations that have enjoyed ascendancy in given ages, in given parts of the world. In general, power has been an attribute of individuals, factions, peoples, classes, and nations. It has been an attribute especially associated with men rather than women. Its chief effect has been to confer on its beneficiaries the ability to acquire, to surpass, to dominate, to resist, to win.

The resulting historical processes have been responsible for both ruinous setbacks in human well-being and extraordinary advances in civilization. To appreciate the benefits is to acknowledge also the setbacks, as well as the clear limitations of the behavioral patterns that have produced both. Habits and attitudes related to the use of power which emerged during the long ages of humanity's infancy and adolescence have reached the outer limits of their effectiveness. Today, in an era most of whose pressing problems are global in nature, persistence in the idea that power means advantage for various segments of the human family is profoundly mistaken in theory and of no practical service to the social and economic development of the planet. Those who still adhere to it -- and who could in earlier eras have felt confident in such adherence -- now find their plans enmeshed in inexplicable frustrations and hindrances. In its traditional, competitive expression, power is as irrelevant to the needs of humanity's future as would be the technologies of railway locomotion to the task of lifting space satellites into orbits around

the  
earth.

The analogy is more than a little apt. The human race is being urged by the requirements of its own maturation to free itself from its inherited understanding and use of power. That it can do so is demonstrated by the fact that, although dominated by the traditional conception, humanity has always been able to conceive of power in other forms critical to its hopes. History provides ample evidence that, however intermittently and ineptly, people of every background, throughout the ages, have tapped a wide range of creative resources within themselves. The most obvious example, perhaps, has been the power of truth itself, an agent of change associated with some of the greatest advances in the philosophical, religious, artistic, and scientific experience of the race. Force of character represents yet another means of mobilizing immense human response, as does the influence of example, whether in the lives of individual human beings or in human societies. Almost wholly unappreciated is the magnitude of the force that will be generated by the achievement of unity, an influence "so powerful", in Bahá'u'lláh's words, "that it can illuminate the whole Earth."

The institutions of society will succeed in eliciting and directing the potentialities latent in the consciousness of the world's peoples to the extent that the exercise of authority is governed by principles that are in harmony with the evolving interests of a rapidly maturing human race. Such principles include the obligation of those in authority to win the confidence, respect, and genuine support of those whose actions they seek to govern; to consult openly and to the fullest extent possible with all whose interests are affected by decisions being arrived at; to assess in an objective manner both the real needs and the aspirations of the communities they serve; to benefit from scientific and moral advancement in order to make appropriate use of the community's resources, including the energies of its members. No single principle of effective authority is so important as giving priority to building and maintaining unity among the members of a society and the members of its administrative institutions. Reference has already been made to the intimately associated issue of commitment to the search for justice in all matters.

Clearly, such principles can operate only within a culture that is essentially democratic in spirit and method. To say this, however, is not to endorse the ideology of partisanship that has everywhere boldly assumed democracy's name and which, despite impressive contributions to human progress in the past, today finds itself mired in the cynicism, apathy, and corruption to which it has given rise. In selecting those who are to take collective decisions on its behalf, society does not need and is not well served by the political theater of nominations, candidature, electioneering, and solicitation. It lies within the capacity of all people, as they become progressively educated and convinced

that their real development interests are being served by programs proposed to them, to adopt electoral procedures that will gradually refine the selection of their decision-making bodies.

As the integration of humanity gains momentum, those who are thus selected will increasingly have to see all their efforts in a global perspective. Not only at the national, but also at the local level, the elected governors of human affairs should, in Bahá'u'lláh's view, consider themselves responsible for the welfare of all of humankind.

## Section VII

The task of creating a global development strategy that will accelerate humanity's coming-of-age constitutes a challenge to reshape fundamentally all the institutions of society. The protagonists to whom the challenge addresses itself are all of the inhabitants of the planet: the generality of humankind, members of governing institutions at all levels, persons serving in agencies of international coordination, scientists and social thinkers, all those endowed with artistic talents or with access to the media of communication, and leaders of non-governmental organizations. The response called for must base itself on an unconditioned recognition of the oneness of humankind, a commitment to the establishment of justice as the organizing principle of society, and a determination to exploit to their utmost the possibilities that a systematic dialogue between the scientific and religious genius of the race can bring to the building of human capacity. The enterprise requires a radical rethinking of most of the concepts and assumptions currently governing social and economic life. It must be wedded, as well, to a conviction that, however long the process and whatever setbacks may be encountered, the governance of human affairs can be conducted along lines that serve humanity's real needs.

Only if humanity's collective childhood has indeed come to an end and the age of its adulthood is dawning does such a prospect represent more than another utopian mirage. To imagine that an effort of the magnitude envisioned here can be summoned up by despondent and mutually antagonistic peoples and nations runs counter to the whole of received wisdom. Only if, as Bahá'u'lláh asserts to be the case, the course of social evolution has arrived at one of those decisive turning points through which all of the phenomena of existence are impelled suddenly forward into new stages of their development, can such a possibility be conceived. A profound conviction that just so great a transformation in human consciousness is underway has inspired the views set forth in this statement. To all who recognize in it familiar promptings from within their own hearts, Bahá'u'lláh's words bring assurance that God has, in this matchless day, endowed humanity with spiritual resources fully equal to the challenge:

O ye that inhabit the heavens and the earth! There hath appeared what hath never previously appeared.

This is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things.

The turmoil now convulsing human affairs is unprecedented, and many of its consequences enormously destructive. Dangers unimagined in all history gather around a distracted humanity. The greatest error that the world's leadership could make at this juncture, however, would be to allow the crisis to cast doubt on the ultimate outcome of the process that is occurring. A world is passing away and a new one is struggling to be born. The habits, attitudes, and institutions that have accumulated over the centuries are being subjected to tests that are as necessary to human development as they are inescapable. What is required of the peoples of the world is a measure of faith and resolve to match the enormous energies with which the Creator of all things has endowed this spiritual springtime of the race. "Be united in counsel," is Bahá'u'lláh's appeal,

be one in thought. May each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday. Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches. Take heed that your words be purged from idle fancies and worldly desires and your deeds be cleansed from craftiness and suspicion. Dissipate not the wealth of your precious lives in the pursuit of evil and corrupt affection, nor let your endeavors be spent in promoting your personal interest. Be generous in your days of plenty, and be patient in the hour of loss. Adversity is followed by success and rejoicings follow woe. Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low. Beware lest ye sow tares of dissension among men or plant thorns of doubt in pure and radiant hearts.

Who Is Writing the Future?

This statement of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, released in February 1999, examines the events of the twentieth century in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and relates these developments to the challenges facing humanity at century's end.

Who Is Writing the Future? Reflections on the Twentieth Century

On May 28, 1992, Brazil's Chamber of Deputies met in special session to commemorate the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, whose influence is becoming an increasingly familiar feature of the world's social and intellectual landscape. His message of unity had clearly struck a deep chord with the Brazilian legislators. During the course of the proceedings, speakers representing all parties in the Chamber paid tribute to a body of writings which one deputy described as "the most colossal religious work written by

the pen of a single Man," and to a conception of our planet's future which, "transcending material frontiers", in the words of another, "reached out to humanity as a whole, without petty differences of nationality, race, limits, or beliefs." 172

The tribute was all the more striking because of the fact that, in the land of his birth, Bahá'u'lláh's work continues to be bitterly condemned by the Muslim clergy who rule Iran. Their predecessors had been responsible for his banishment and imprisonment in the middle years of the nineteenth century, and for the massacre of thousands of those who shared his ideals for the transforming of human life and society. Even as the proceedings in Brasilia were under way, refusal to deny beliefs that have won high praise throughout most of the rest of the world was bringing the 300,000 Bahá'ís living in Iran persecution, privation, and, in all too many cases, imprisonment and death.

Similar opposition characterized the attitudes of various totalitarian regimes over the past century.

What is the nature of the body of thought that has aroused such sharply divergent reactions?

I

The mainspring of Bahá'u'lláh's message is an exposition of reality as fundamentally spiritual in nature, and of the laws that govern that reality's operation. It not only sees the individual as a spiritual being, a "rational soul",

but also insists that the entire enterprise that we call civilization is itself a

spiritual process, one in which the human mind and heart have created progressively more complex and efficient means to express their inherent moral and intellectual capacities.

Rejecting the reigning dogmas of materialism, Bahá'u'lláh asserts an opposing interpretation of the historical process. Humanity, the arrowhead of the evolution of consciousness, passes through stages analogous to the periods of infancy, childhood, and adolescence in the lives of its individual members. The journey has brought us to the threshold of our long-awaited coming of age as a unified human race. The wars, exploitation, and prejudice that have marked immature stages in the process should not be a cause of despair but a stimulus to assuming the responsibilities of collective maturity.

Writing to the political and religious leaders of his own day, Bahá'u'lláh said

that new capacities of incalculable power--beyond the conception of the generation then living--were awakening in the earth's peoples, capacities which would soon transform the material life of the planet. It was essential, he said, to make of these coming material advances vehicles for moral and social development. If nationalistic and sectarian conflicts prevented this from happening, then material progress would produce not only benefits, but

unimagined evils. Some of Bahá'u'lláh's warnings awaken grim echoes in our own age: "Strange and astonishing things exist in the earth", he cautioned. "These things are capable of changing the whole atmosphere of the earth and their contamination would prove lethal."<sup>173</sup>

## II

The central spiritual issue facing all people, Bahá'u'lláh says, whatever their nation, religion, or ethnic origin, is that of laying the foundations of a global society that can reflect the oneness of human nature. The unification of the earth's inhabitants is neither a remote utopian vision nor, ultimately, a matter of choice. It constitutes the next, inescapable stage in the process of social evolution, a stage toward which all the experience of past and present is impelling us. Until this issue is acknowledged and addressed, none of the ills afflicting our planet will find solutions, because all the essential challenges of the age we have entered are global and universal, not particular or regional.

The many passages of Bahá'u'lláh's writings dealing with humanity's coming of age are permeated by his use of light as a metaphor to capture the transforming power of unity: "So powerful is the light of unity", they insist, "that it can illuminate the whole earth".<sup>174</sup> The assertion places current history in a perspective sharply different from the one that prevails at the end of the twentieth century. It urges us to find--within the suffering and breakdown of our times--the operation of forces that are liberating human consciousness for a new stage in its evolution. It calls on us to re-examine what has been happening over the past one hundred years and the effect that these developments have had on the heterogeneous mass of peoples, races, nations, and communities who have experienced them.

If, as Bahá'u'lláh asserts, "the well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established"<sup>175</sup> it is understandable why Bahá'ís view the twentieth century--with all its disasters--as "the century of light".<sup>176</sup> For these one hundred years witnessed a transformation in both the way the earth's inhabitants have begun to plan our collective future and in the way we are coming to regard one another. The hallmark of both has been a process of unification. Upheavals beyond the control of existing institutions compelled world leaders to begin putting in place new systems of global organization that would have been unthinkable at the century's beginning. As this was occurring, rapid erosion was overtaking habits and attitudes that had divided peoples and nations through unnumbered centuries of conflict and that had seemed likely to endure for ages to come.

At the midpoint of the century, these two developments produced a breakthrough whose historic significance only future generations will properly appreciate. In the stunned aftermath of World War II, far-sighted leaders found it at last possible, through the United Nations organization, to begin consolidating the foundations of world order. Long dreamed of by progressive thinkers, the new system of international conventions and related agencies was now endowed with crucial powers that had tragically been denied to the abortive League of Nations. As the century advanced, the system's primitive muscles of international peacekeeping were progressively exercised in such a way as to demonstrate persuasively what can be accomplished. With this came the steady expansion throughout the world of democratic institutions of governance. If the practical effects are still disappointing, this in no way diminishes the historic and irreversible change of direction that has taken place in the organization of human affairs.

As with the cause of world order, so with the rights of the world's people. Exposure of the appalling suffering visited on the victims of human perversity during the course of the war produced a worldwide sense of shock--and what can only be termed deep feelings of shame. Out of this trauma emerged a new kind of moral commitment that was formally institutionalized in the work of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and its associated agencies, a development inconceivable to the nineteenth century rulers to whom Bahá'u'lláh had addressed himself on the subject. Thus empowered, a growing body of nongovernmental organizations have set out to ensure that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is established as the foundation of normative international standards and is enforced accordingly.

A parallel process took place with respect to economic life. During the first half of the century, as a consequence of the havoc wrought by the great depression, many governments adopted legislation that created social welfare programs and systems of financial control, reserve funds, and trade regulations that sought to protect their societies from a recurrence of such devastation. The period following World War II brought the establishment of institutions whose field of operation is global: the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and a network of development agencies devoted to rationalizing and advancing the material prosperity of the planet. At century's end--whatever the intentions and however crude the present generation of tools--the masses of humanity have been shown that the use of the planet's wealth can be fundamentally reorganized in response to entirely new conceptions of need.

The effect of these developments was enormously amplified by the accelerating extension of education to the masses. Apart from the willingness of national and local governments to allocate greatly increased resources to this field and the society's ability to mobilize and train armies of professionally qualified teachers, two twentieth century advances at the international level were particularly influential. The first was the series of

development plans focussed on educational needs and massively financed by such bodies as the World Bank, government agencies, major foundations and several branches of the United Nations system. The second was the information technology explosion that has made all of the earth's inhabitants potential beneficiaries of the whole of the race's learning.

This process of structural reorganization on a planetary scale was animated and reinforced by a profound shift of consciousness. Entire populations found themselves abruptly compelled to face the costs of ingrained habits of mind that breed conflict--and to do so in the full glare of worldwide censure of what were once considered acceptable practices and attitudes. The effect was to stimulate revolutionary change in the way that people regard one another.

Throughout history, for example, experience seemed to demonstrate--and religious teaching to confirm--that women are essentially inferior in nature to men. Overnight, in the historical scheme of things, this prevailing perception was suddenly everywhere in retreat. However long and painful may be the process of giving full effect to Bahá'u'lláh's assertion that women and men are in every sense equal, intellectual and moral support for any opposing view steadily disintegrates.

Yet another fixture of humanity's view of itself throughout past millennia was a celebration of ethnic distinctions which, in recent centuries, had hardened into various racist fantasies. With a swiftness that is breathtaking in the perspective of history, the twentieth century saw the unity of the human race establish itself as a guiding principle of international order. Today, the ethnic conflicts that continue to wreak havoc in many parts of the world are seen not as natural features of the relations among diverse peoples, but as willful aberrations that must be brought under effective international control.

Throughout humanity's long childhood, it was also assumed--again with the full concurrence of organized religion--that poverty was an enduring and inescapable feature of the social order. Now, however, this mind-set, an assumption that had shaped the priorities of every economic system the world had ever known, has been universally rejected. In theory at least, government has come to be everywhere regarded as essentially a trustee responsible to ensure the well-being of all of society's members.

Particularly significant--because of its intimate relationship with the roots of human motivation--was the loosening of the grip of religious prejudice. Prefigured in the "Parliament of Religions" that attracted intense interest as the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, the process of interfaith dialogue and collaboration reinforced the effects of secularism in undermining the once impregnable walls of clerical authority. In the face of the transformation in religious conceptions that the past hundred years witnessed, even the current outburst of fundamentalist reaction may come, in

retrospect, to be seen as little more than desperate rear-guard actions against an inevitable dissolution of sectarian control. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh, "There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God."<sup>177</sup>

During these critical decades the human mind was also experiencing fundamental changes in the way that it understood the physical universe. The first half of the century saw the new theories of relativity and quantum mechanics--both of them intimately related to the nature and operation of light--revolutionize the field of physics and alter the entire course of scientific development. It became apparent that classical physics could explain phenomena within only a limited range. A new door had suddenly opened into the study of both the minute constituents of the universe and its large cosmological systems, a change whose effects went far beyond physics, shaking the very foundations of a world view that had dominated scientific thinking for centuries. Gone forever were the images of a mechanical universe run like a clock and a presumed separation between observer and observed, between mind and matter. Against the background of the far-reaching studies thus made possible, theoretical science now begins to address the possibility that purpose and intelligence are indeed intrinsic to the nature and operation of the universe.

In the wake of these conceptual changes, humanity entered an era in which interaction among physical sciences--physics, chemistry, and biology, along with the nascent science of ecology--opened breathtaking possibilities for the enhancement of life. The benefits in such vital areas of concern as agriculture and medicine became dramatically apparent as did those brought about by success in tapping new sources of energy. Simultaneously, the new field of materials science began providing a wealth of specialized resources unknown when the century opened--plastics, optical fibers, carbon fibers.

Such advances in science and technology were reciprocal in their effects. Grains of sand--the most humble and ostensibly worthless of materials--metamorphosed into silicon wafers and optically pure glass, making possible the creation of worldwide communications networks. This, together with the deployment of ever more sophisticated satellite systems, has begun providing access to the accumulated knowledge of the entire human race for people everywhere, without distinction. It is apparent that the decades immediately ahead will see the integration of telephone, television, and computer technologies into a single, unified system of communication and information, whose inexpensive appliances will be available on a mass scale. It would be difficult to exaggerate the psychological and social impact of the anticipated replacement of the jumble of existing monetary systems--for many, the ultimate fortress of nationalist pride--by a single world currency operating largely through electronic impulses.

Indeed, the unifying effect of the twentieth century revolution is nowhere

more readily apparent than in the implications of the changes that took place in scientific and technological life. At the most obvious level, the human race is now endowed with the means needed to realize the visionary goals summoned up by a steadily maturing consciousness. Viewed more deeply, this empowerment is potentially available to all of the earth's inhabitants, without regard to race, culture, or nation. "A new life", Bahá'u'lláh prophetically saw, "is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth;

and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive." 178 Today, more than a century after these words were written, the implications of what has since taken place begin to be apparent to thoughtful minds everywhere.

### III

To appreciate the transformations brought about by the period of history now ending is not to deny the accompanying darkness that throws the achievements into sharp relief: the deliberate extermination of millions of helpless human beings, the invention and use of new weapons of destruction capable of annihilating whole populations, the rise of ideologies that suffocated the spiritual and intellectual life of entire nations, damage to the physical environment of the planet on a scale so massive that it may take centuries to heal, and the incalculably greater damage done to generations of children taught to believe that violence, indecency, and selfishness are triumphs of personal liberty. Such are only the more obvious of a catalogue of evils, unmatched in history, whose lessons our era will leave for the education of the chastened generations who will follow us.

Darkness, however, is not a phenomenon endowed with some form of existence, much less autonomy. It does not extinguish light nor diminish it, but marks out those areas that light has not reached or adequately illumined. So will twentieth century civilization no doubt be assessed by the historians of a more mature and dispassionate age. The ferocities of animal nature, which raged out of control through these critical years and seemed at times to threaten society's very survival, did not in fact prevent the steady unfoldment of the creative potentialities which human consciousness possesses. On the contrary. As the century advanced, growing numbers of people awakened to how empty were the allegiances and how insubstantial the fears that had held them captive only short years before.

"Peerless is this Day," Bahá'u'lláh insists, "for it is as the eye to past ages and centuries, and as a light unto the darkness of the times." 179 In this perspective, the issue is not the darkness that slowed and obscured the progress achieved in the extraordinary hundred years now ending. It is, rather, how much more suffering and ruin must be experienced by our race before we wholeheartedly accept the spiritual nature that makes us a single people, and gather the courage to plan our future in the light of what has been so painfully learned.

## IV

The conception of civilization's future course laid out in Bahá'u'lláh's writings

challenges much that today imposes itself on our world as normative and unchangeable. The breakthroughs made during the century of light have opened the door to a new kind of world. If social and intellectual evolution is in fact responding to a moral intelligence inherent in existence, a great deal of

the theory determining contemporary approaches to decision-making is fatally flawed. If human consciousness is essentially spiritual in nature--as the vast majority of ordinary people have always been intuitively aware--, its development needs cannot be understood or served through an interpretation of reality that dogmatically insists otherwise.

No aspect of contemporary civilization is more directly challenged by Bahá'u'lláh's conception of the future than is the prevailing cult of individualism, which has spread to most parts of the world. Nurtured by such cultural forces as political ideology, academic elitism, and a consumer economy, the "pursuit of happiness" has given rise to an aggressive and almost boundless sense of personal entitlement. The moral consequences have been corrosive for the individual and society alike--and devastating in terms of disease, drug addiction and other all-too-familiar blights of century's

end. The task of freeing humanity from an error so fundamental and pervasive will call into question some of the twentieth century's most deeply entrenched assumptions about right and wrong.

What are some of these unexamined assumptions? The most obvious is the conviction that unity is a distant, almost unattainable ideal to be addressed only after a host of political conflicts have been somehow resolved, material needs somehow satisfied, and injustices somehow corrected. The opposite, Bahá'u'lláh asserts, is the case. The primary disease that afflicts society and

generates the ills that cripple it, he says, is the disunity of a human race that is

distinguished by its capacity for collaboration and whose progress to date has depended on the extent to which unified action has, at various times and in various societies, been achieved. To cling to the notion that conflict is an intrinsic feature of human nature, rather than a complex of learned habits and attitudes, is to impose on a new century an error which, more than any other single factor, has tragically handicapped humanity's past. "Regard the world", Bahá'u'lláh advised elected leaders, "as the human body which, though at its creation whole and perfect, hath been afflicted, through various causes, with grave disorders and maladies." 180

Intimately related to the issue of unity is a second moral challenge that the past century has posed with ever increasing urgency. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh insists, justice is the "best beloved of all things".<sup>181</sup>It

enables the

individual to see reality through his or her own eyes rather than those of others and endows collective decision making with the authority that alone can ensure unity of thought and action. However gratifying is the system of international order that has emerged from the harrowing experiences of the twentieth century, its enduring influence will depend on acceptance of the moral principle implicit in it. If the body of humankind is indeed one and indivisible, then the authority exercised by its governing institutions represents essentially a trusteeship. Each individual person comes into the world as a trust of the whole, and it is this feature of human existence that constitutes the real foundation of the social, economic and cultural rights that

the United Nations Charter and its related documents articulate. Justice and unity are reciprocal in their effect. "The purpose of justice", Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance." 182

As society commits itself--however hesitantly and fearfully--to these and related moral principles, the most meaningful role it will offer the individual will be that of service. One of the paradoxes of human life is that development of the self comes primarily through commitment to larger undertakings in which the self--even if only temporarily--is forgotten. In an age that opens up to people of every condition an opportunity to participate effectively in the shaping of the social order itself, the ideal of service to others assumes entirely new significance. To exalt such goals as acquisition and self-assertion as the purpose of life is to promote chiefly the animal side of human nature. Nor can simplistic messages of personal salvation any longer address the yearnings of generations who have come to know, with deep certainty, that true fulfillment is as much a matter of this world as it is of

the next. "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in," is Bahá'u'lláh's counsel, "and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements." 183

Such perspectives have profound implications for the conduct of human affairs. It is obvious, for example, that, whatever its past contributions, the longer the nation state persists as the dominant influence in determining the fate of humankind, the longer will the achievement of world peace be delayed and the greater will be the suffering inflicted on the earth's population. In humanity's economic life, no matter how great the blessings brought by globalization, it is apparent that this process has also created unparalleled concentrations of autocratic power that must be brought under international democratic control if they are not to produce poverty and despair for countless millions. Similarly, the historic breakthrough in information and communication technology, which represents so potent a means to promote social development and the deepening of people's sense of their common humanity, can, with equal force, divert and coarsen impulses vital to the

service of this very process.

V

What Bahá'u'lláh is speaking of is a new relationship between God and humankind, one that is in harmony with the dawning maturity of the race. The ultimate Reality that has created and sustains the universe will forever remain beyond the reach of the human mind. Humanity's conscious relationship with it, to the extent that one has been established, has been the result of the influence of the Founders of the great religions, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad and earlier figures whose names are, for the most part, lost to memory. Through responding to these impulses of the Divine, the earth's peoples have progressively developed the spiritual, intellectual, and moral capacities that have combined to civilize human character. This millennia-long, cumulative process has now reached the stage characteristic of all the decisive turning points in the evolutionary process, when previously unrealized possibilities suddenly emerge: "This is the Day", Bahá'u'lláh asserts, "in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things." 184

Viewed through Bahá'u'lláh's eyes, the history of tribes, peoples, and nations

has effectively reached its conclusion. What we are witnessing is the beginning of the history of humankind, the history of a human race conscious of its own oneness. To this turning point in the course of civilization, his writings bring a redefinition of the nature and processes of civilization and a reordering of its priorities. Their aim is to call us back to spiritual awareness and responsibility.

There is nothing in Bahá'u'lláh's writings to encourage the illusion that the changes envisioned will come about easily. Far otherwise. As the events of the twentieth century have already demonstrated, patterns of habit and attitude which have taken root over thousands of years are not abandoned either spontaneously or in response simply to education or legislative action. Whether in the life of the individual or that of society, profound change occurs more often than not in response to intense suffering and to unendurable difficulties that can be overcome in no other way. Just so great a testing experience, Bahá'u'lláh warned, is needed to weld the earth's diverse peoples into a single people.

Spiritual and materialistic conceptions of the nature of reality are irreconcilable with one another and lead in opposite directions. As a new century opens, the course set by the second of these two opposing views has already carried a hapless humanity far beyond the outermost point where an illusion of rationality, let alone of human well-being, could once be sustained. With every passing day, the signs multiply that great numbers of people everywhere are awakening to this realization.

Despite widely prevalent opinion to the contrary, the human race is not a blank tablet on which privileged arbiters of human affairs can freely inscribe their own wishes. The springs of the spirit rise up where they will, as they will. They will not indefinitely be suppressed by the detritus of contemporary society. It no longer requires prophetic insight to appreciate that the opening years of the new century will see the release of energies and aspirations infinitely more potent than the accumulated routines, falsities, and addictions that have so long blocked their expression.

However great the turmoil, the period into which humanity is moving will open to every individual, every institution, and every community on earth unprecedented opportunities to participate in the writing of the planet's future.

"Soon", is Bahá'u'lláh's confident promise, "will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead." 185

#### Turning Point for All Nations

[This statement<sup>186</sup>, which calls on world leaders to take bold new steps to strengthen the United Nations' capacity for global coordination to meet the challenges of the post-Cold War world, was issued on the 50th anniversary of the UN and urges leaders to convene a world summit on global governance before the end of the century.]

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nationbuilding has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.

-Shoghi Effendi, 1936

#### I. Overview: An Opportunity for Reflection

The 20th Century, one of the most tumultuous periods in human history, has been marked by numerous upheavals, revolutions and radical departures from the past. Ranging from the collapse of the colonial system and the great nineteenth century empires to the rise and fall of broad and disastrous experiments with totalitarianism, fascism and communism, some of these upheavals have been extremely destructive, involving the deaths of millions, the eradication of old lifestyles and traditions, and the collapse of timehonored institutions.

Other movements and trends have been more obviously positive. Scientific discoveries and new social insights have spurred many progressive social, economic and cultural transformations. The way has been cleared for new definitions of human rights and affirmations of personal dignity, expanded

opportunities for individual and collective achievement, and bold new avenues for the advancement of human knowledge and consciousness.

These twin processes -- the collapse of old institutions on the one hand and the blossoming of new ways of thinking on the other -- are evidence of a single trend which has been gaining momentum during the last hundred years: the trend toward ever-increasing interdependence and integration of humanity.

This trend is observable in wide-ranging phenomena, from the fusion of world financial markets, which in turn reflect humanity's reliance on diverse and interdependent sources of energy, food, raw materials, technology and knowledge, to the construction of globe-girdling systems of communications and transportation. It is reflected in the scientific understanding of the earth's

interconnected biosphere, which has in turn given a new urgency to the need for global coordination. It is manifest, albeit in a destructive way, in the capacities of modern weapons systems, which have gradually increased in power to the point where it is now possible for a handful of men to bring an end to human civilization itself. It is the universal consciousness of this trend

-- in both its constructive and destructive expressions -- that lends such poignancy to the familiar photograph of the earth as a swirling sphere of blue and white against the infinite blackness of space, an image crystallizing the realization that we are a single people, rich in diversity, living in a common homeland.

This trend is reflected, too, in steady efforts by the nations of the world to forge a world political system that can secure for humanity the possibility of peace, justice and prosperity. Twice in this century humanity has attempted to bring about a new international order. Each attempt sought to address the emergent recognition of global interdependence, while nevertheless preserving intact a system which put the sovereignty of the state above all else. In the perspective of the century now ending, the League of Nations, a breakthrough in the concept of collective security, marked a first decisive step toward world order.

The second effort, born from the cataclysm of World War II and based on a Charter drawn up principally by the victors of that conflagration, has for fifty years provided an international forum of last resort, a unique institution standing as a noble symbol for the collective interests of humanity as a whole.

As an international organization, the United Nations has demonstrated humanity's capacity for united action in health, agriculture, education, environmental protection, and the welfare of children. It has affirmed our collective moral will to build a better future, evinced in the widespread adoption of international human rights Covenants. It has revealed the human

race's deep-seated compassion, evidenced by the devotion of financial and human resources to the assistance of people in distress. And in the allimportant realms of peace-building, peace-making and peace-keeping, the United Nations has blazed a bold path toward a future without war.<sup>187</sup>

Yet the overall goals set out in the Charter of the United Nations have proved elusive. Despite the high hopes of its founders, the establishment of the United Nations some fifty years ago did not usher in an era of peace and prosperity for all.<sup>188</sup> Although the United Nations has surely played a role in preventing a third world war, the last half decade has nevertheless been marked by numerous local, national and regional conflicts costing millions of lives. No sooner had improved relations between the superpowers removed the ideological motivation for such conflicts, than long-smoldering ethnic and sectarian passions surfaced as a new source of conflagration. In addition, although the end of the Cold War has reduced the threat of a global, terminal war, there remain instruments and technologies -- and to some extent the underlying passions -- which could bring about planet-wide destruction.

With respect to social issues, likewise, grave problems persist. While new levels of consensus have been reached on global programs to promote health, sustainable development and human rights, the situation on the ground in many areas has deteriorated. The alarming spread of militant racialism and religious fanaticism, the cancerous growth of materialism, the epidemic rise of crime and organized criminality, the widespread increase in mindless violence, the ever-deepening disparity between rich and poor, the continuing inequities faced by women, the intergenerational damage caused by the pervasive break-down of family life, the immoral excesses of unbridled capitalism and the growth of political corruption -- all speak to this point.

At

least a billion live in abject poverty and more than a third of the world's people are illiterate.<sup>189</sup>

As the twin processes of collapse and renewal carry the world toward some sort of culmination, the 50th anniversary of the United Nations offers a timely opportunity to pause and reflect on how humanity may collectively face its future. Indeed, there has emerged of late a wide range of useful proposals for strengthening the United Nations and improving its capacity to coordinate the responses of nations to these challenges.

These proposals fall roughly into three categories. One group addresses primarily bureaucratic, administrative and financial problems within the United Nations system. Another group comprises those that suggest reconfiguring bodies like the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council and the Bretton Woods economic institutions. Still others propose to undertake changes in the United Nations political structure, calling, for example, for an expansion of the Security Council and/or a reconsideration of the United Nations Charter itself.<sup>190</sup>

Most of these works are constructive; some are also provocative. Among them, one of the most balanced and thoughtful is the report of the

Commission on Global Governance, entitled *Our Global Neighborhood*, which argues for the widespread adoption of new values, as well as structural reforms in the United Nations system.<sup>191</sup>

It is in the spirit of contributing to the ongoing discussion and consultation on this issue of paramount importance that the Bahá'í International Community has been moved to share its views. Our perspective is based on three initial propositions. First, discussions about the future of the United Nations need to take place within the broad context of the evolution of the international order and its direction. The United Nations has co-evolved with other great institutions of the late twentieth century. It is in the aggregate that these institutions will define -- and themselves be shaped by -- the evolution of the international order. Therefore, the mission, role, operating principles and even activities of the United Nations should be examined only in the light of how they fit within the broader objective of the international order.

Second, since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This relationship between the individual and the collective constitutes the moral foundation of most of the human rights which the instruments of the United Nations are attempting to define. It also serves to define an overriding purpose for the international order in establishing and preserving the rights of the individual.

Third, the discussions about the future of the international order must involve and excite the generality of humankind. This discussion is so important that it cannot be confined to leaders -- be they in government, business, the academic community, religion, or organizations of civil society. On the contrary, this conversation must engage women and men at the grassroots level. Broad participation will make the process self-reinforcing by raising awareness of world citizenship and increase support for an expanded international order.

## II. Recognizing the Historical Context: A Call to World Leaders

The Bahá'í International Community regards the current world confusion and the calamitous condition of human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet.

The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.<sup>192</sup> The process of global integration, already a reality in the realms of business, finance, and communications, is beginning to materialize in the political arena.

Historically, this process has been accelerated by sudden and catastrophic events. It was the devastation of World Wars I and II that gave birth to the

League of Nations and the United Nations, respectively. Whether future accomplishments are also to be reached after similarly unimaginable horrors or embraced through an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. Failure to take decisive action would be unconscionably irresponsible.

Since sovereignty currently resides with the nation-state, the task of determining the exact architecture of the emerging international order is an obligation that rests with heads of state and with governments. We urge leaders at all levels to take a deliberate role in supporting a convocation of world leaders before the turn of this century to consider how the international order might be redefined and restructured to meet the challenges facing the world. As some have suggested, this gathering might be called the World Summit on Global Governance.<sup>193</sup>

This proposed Summit might build on the experience gained from the series of highly successful United Nations conferences in the early 1990s. These conferences, which have included the World Summit for Children in 1990, the Earth Summit in 1992, the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, have established a new methodology for global deliberations on critical issues.

A key to the success of these deliberations has been the substantive participation by organizations of civil society. Painstaking negotiations among government delegations about changes in the world's political, social and economic structures have been informed and shaped by the vigorous involvement of these organizations, which tend to reflect the needs and concerns of people at the grass roots. It is also significant that in each case, the gathering of world leaders, in the presence of civil society and the global media, gave the stamp of legitimacy and consensus to the processes of the conference.

In preparing for the proposed Summit, world leaders would be wise to heed these lessons, to reach out to as wide a circle as possible and to secure the goodwill and support of the world's peoples.

Some fear that international political institutions inevitably evolve toward excessive centralization and constitute an unwarranted layer of bureaucracy. It needs to be explicitly and forcefully stated that any new structures for global governance must, as a matter of both principle and practicality, ensure that the responsibility for decision-making remains at appropriate levels.<sup>194</sup>

Striking the right balance may not always be easy. On the one hand, genuine development and real progress can be achieved only by people themselves, acting individually and collectively, in response to the specific concerns and needs of their time and place. It can be argued that the decentralization of governance is the *sine qua non* of development.<sup>195</sup> On the other hand, the

international order clearly requires a degree of global direction and coordination.

Therefore, in accordance with the principles of decentralization outlined above, international institutions should be given the authority to act only on issues of international concern where states cannot act on their own or to intervene for the preservation of the rights of peoples and member states. All other matters should be relegated to national and local institutions.<sup>196</sup>

Furthermore, in devising a specific framework for the future international order, leaders should survey a broad range of approaches to governance. Rather than being modeled after any single one of the recognized systems of government, the solution may embody, reconcile and assimilate within its framework such wholesome elements as are to be found in each one of them.

For example, one of the time-tested models of governance that may accommodate the world's diversity within a unified framework is the federal system. Federalism has proved effective in decentralizing authority and decision-making in large, complex, and heterogeneous states, while maintaining a degree of overall unity and stability. Another model worth examining is the commonwealth, which at the global level would place the interest of the whole ahead of the interest of any individual nation.

Extraordinary care must be taken in designing the architecture of the international order so that it does not over time degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagoguery corrupting the life and machinery of the constituent political institutions.

In 1955, during the first decade review of the UN charter, the Bahá'í International Community offered a statement to the United Nations, based on ideas articulated nearly a century before by Bahá'u'lláh. "The Bahá'í concept

of world order is defined in these terms: A world Super-State in whose favor all the nations of the world will have ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for the purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. This State will have to include an International Executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the Commonwealth; a World Parliament whose members are elected by the peoples in their respective countries and whose election is confirmed by their respective governments; a Supreme Tribunal whose judgment has a binding effect even in cases where the parties concerned have not voluntarily agreed to submit their case to its consideration."<sup>197</sup>

While we believe this formulation of a world government is at once the ultimate safeguard and the inevitable destiny of humankind, we do recognize that it represents a long-term picture of a global society. Given the pressing nature of the current state of affairs, the world requires bold, practical and actionable strategies that go beyond inspiring visions of the future. Nevertheless, by focusing on a compelling concept, a clear and consistent

direction for evolutionary change emerges from the mire of contradictory views and doctrines.

### III. Defining a Role for the UN Within the Emerging International Order

The United Nations was the centerpiece of the international system created by the victors of World War II and, during the long decades of ideological conflict between the East and the West, it served as a forum for international dialogue. Over the years, its activities have expanded to include not only international standard-setting and promotion of social and economic development but also peacekeeping operations on several continents.

Over the same period, the political reality of our world has experienced a dramatic transformation. At the time of the UN's inception, there were some fifty independent states. That number has grown to exceed 185. At the close of World War II, governments were the main actors on the global scene. Today, the growing influence of organizations of civil society and of multinational corporations has created a much more intricate political landscape.

Despite the growing complexity in its mission, the United Nations system has retained more or less the same structure that was designed for a new international organization some fifty years ago. It is not surprising then that the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary has stimulated a new dialogue about its ability to meet the political realities of the 21st Century. Unfortunately, in this dialogue, criticism has far outweighed praise.

Most criticisms of the operations of the United Nations are based on comparisons with the operations of the leading organizations in the private sector or on measurements relative to inflated initial expectations. Although some specific comparisons may be useful in increasing the efficiency of the United Nations more general exercises of this kind are essentially unfair. The United Nations lacks not only the clear authority, but also the requisite resources to act effectively in most instances. Accusations of the UN's failure are in fact indictments of the member states themselves.

Judged in isolation from the reality within which it operates, the United Nations will always seem inefficient and ineffective. However, if it is viewed as one element of a larger process of development in systems of international order, the bright light of analysis would shift from the UN's shortcomings and failures to shine on its victories and accomplishments. To those with an evolutionary mindset, the early experience of the United Nations offers us a rich source of learning about its future role within the international regime.

An evolutionary mindset implies the ability to envision an institution over a long time frame perceiving its inherent potential for development, identifying the fundamental principles governing its growth, formulating high-impact strategies for short-term implementation, and even anticipating radical

discontinuities along its path.

Studying the United Nations from this perspective unveils significant opportunities to strengthen the current system without the wholesale restructuring of its principal institutions or the intensive re-engineering of its core processes. In fact, we submit that no proposal for UN reform can produce high impact unless its recommendations are internally consistent and direct the UN along a projected evolutionary path toward a distinctive and relevant role within the future international order.

We believe the combination of recommendations described herein meets these conditions and that their adoption would represent a measured but significant step toward building a more just world order.<sup>198</sup>

#### A. Resuscitating the General Assembly

The foundation for any system of governance is the rule of law and the primary institution for promulgating law is the legislature. While the authority of local and national legislatures is generally respected, regional and international legislative bodies have been the subject of fear and suspicion.

In addition, the United Nations General Assembly has been a target of attack for its ineffectiveness. Although some of the accusations hurled against it are unfounded, there are at least two shortcomings that hamper the ability of the General Assembly to have impact.

First, the current arrangement gives undue weight to state sovereignty, resulting in a curious mix of anarchy and conservatism. In a reformed United Nations, the legislative branch and its voting structure will need to represent more accurately the people of the world as well as nation-states.<sup>199</sup>

Second, General Assembly resolutions are not binding unless they are separately ratified as a treaty by each member state. If the current system, which places state sovereignty above all other concerns, is to give way to a system which can address the interests of a single and interdependent humanity, the resolutions of the General Assembly -- within a limited domain of issues -- must gradually come to possess the force of law with provisions for both enforcement and sanctions.

These two shortcomings are closely linked inasmuch as the majority of the world's people, suspicious and fearful of world government, are unlikely to submit to an international institution unless it is itself more genuinely representative.<sup>200</sup>

Nevertheless, in the short term, five practical measures are possible to strengthen the General Assembly, enhance its reputation and align it with a longer term direction.

##### 1. Raising minimum requirements for membership

The minimum standards for conduct by a government towards its people have been well established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent international covenants, collectively referred to as the International Bill of Human Rights.

Without an unshakable commitment to regular and periodic elections with universal participation by secret ballot, to freedom of expression and to other such human rights, a member state stands in the way of the active and intelligent participation of the vast majority of its population in the affairs of its own communities.

We propose that there should be consequences for member states that violate these standards. Similarly, nations seeking recognition should be denied membership until they openly espouse these standards or make recognizable efforts to move in that direction.

## 2. Appointing a commission to study borders and frontiers

Outstanding irredentist claims continue to be a major source of conflict and war, highlighting the critical need for general agreements on national boundaries. Such treaties can only be arrived at after consideration of the arbitrary manner in which many nation-states were originally defined and of all outstanding claims of nations and ethnic groups.

Rather than relegating such claims to the World Court, we believe it would be best to establish a special International Commission to research all claims affecting international boundaries and then, after careful consideration, to make recommendations for action.<sup>201</sup> The results would serve as an early warning system for growing tension among civil or ethnic groups and assessment of threats in situations benefiting from early preventive diplomacy.

In order to establish a genuine community of nations in the long run, it will be necessary to settle finally all disputes over borders. This research would serve that end.

## 3. Searching for new financial arrangements

Primarily triggered by the unwillingness of some member states to remit their general assessments on time, compounded by the absence of authority to collect any interest accrued because of that delay, and further aggravated by the bureaucratic inefficiencies in parts of its operations, the annual budget shortfall pressures the UN into a crisis management mentality.

Voluntary payments from member states will never be a reliable approach to finance an international institution. Vigorous approaches to revenue generation must be devised to enable the smooth functioning of the UN machinery. We propose the immediate appointment of an expert Task Force to begin a rigorous search for solutions.

In studying alternatives, the Task Force should be mindful of several

fundamental principles. First, there should be no assessments without representation. Second, in the interest of fairness and justice, assessments should be graduated. Third, mechanisms for encouraging voluntary contributions by individuals and communities should not be overlooked.<sup>202</sup>

#### 4. Making a commitment to a universal auxiliary language and a common script

The United Nations, which currently uses six official languages, would derive substantial benefit from either choosing a single existing language or creating a new one to be used as an auxiliary language in all its fora. Such a step has long been advocated by many groups, from the Esperantists to the Bahá'í International Community itself.<sup>203</sup> In addition to saving money and simplifying bureaucratic procedures, such a move would go far toward promoting a spirit of unity.

We propose the appointment of a high-level Commission, with members from various regions and drawn from relevant fields, including linguistics, economics, the social sciences, education and the media, to begin careful study on the matter of an international auxiliary language and the adoption of a common script.

We foresee that eventually, the world cannot but adopt a single, universally agreed-upon auxiliary language and script to be taught in schools worldwide, as a supplement to the language or languages of each country. The objective would be to facilitate the transition to a global society through better communication among nations, reduction of administrative costs for businesses, governments and others involved in global enterprise, and a general fostering of more cordial relations between all members of the human family.<sup>204</sup>

This proposal should be read narrowly. It does not in any way envision the decline of any living language or culture.

#### 5. Investigating the possibility of a single international currency

The need to promote the adoption of a global currency as a vital element in the integration of the global economy is self-evident. Among other benefits, economists believe that a single currency will curb unproductive speculation and unpredictable market swings, promote a leveling of incomes and prices worldwide, and thereby result in significant savings.<sup>205</sup>

The possibility of savings will not lead to action unless there is an overwhelming body of evidence addressing the relevant concerns and doubts of skeptics, accompanied by a credible implementation plan. We propose the appointment of a Commission consisting of the most accomplished government leaders, academics and professionals to begin immediate exploration into the economic benefits and the political costs of a single currency and to hypothesize about an effective implementation approach.

#### B. Developing a Meaningful Executive Function

At the international level, the single most important executive function is the

enforcement of a collective security pact.<sup>206</sup>

Collective security implies a binding covenant among nations to act in concert against threats to the collective. The effectiveness of the covenant depends on the degree to which members commit themselves to the collective good, even if motivated by a sense of enlightened self-interest.

Within the United Nations, the enforcement role is largely carried out by the Security Council, with other functions of the executive being shared with the Secretariat. Both are hampered in fulfilling their mandated roles. The Security Council suffers from an inability to take decisive action. The Secretariat is pressured by the complex demands of the member states.

In the short term, four practical measures are possible to strengthen the executive function within the United Nations.

#### 1. Limiting the exercise of the veto power

The original intention of the UN Charter in conferring veto power on the five Permanent Members was to prevent the Security Council from authorizing military actions against a Permanent Member or requiring the use of its forces against its will.<sup>207</sup> In fact, beginning with the Cold War, the veto power has been exercised repeatedly for reasons that have to do with regional or national security.

In its 1955 submission on UN reform, the Bahá'í International Community argued for the gradual elimination of the concepts of "permanent membership" and "veto power" as confidence in the Security Council would build. Today, forty years later, we reaffirm that position. However, we also propose that, as a transitional step, measures be introduced to curb the exercise of the veto power to reflect the original intention of the Charter.

#### 2. Institutionalizing ad hoc military arrangements

To support the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, and to add credibility to resolutions of the Security Council, an International Force should be created.<sup>208</sup> Its loyalty to the UN and its independence from national considerations must be assured. The command and control of such a fully armed Force would reside with the Secretary-General under the authority of the Security Council. Its finances, however, would be determined by the General Assembly. In constructing such a force, the Secretary-General would seek to draw competent personnel from all regions of the world.

If properly implemented, this Force would also provide a sense of security that might encourage steps toward global disarmament, thereby making possible an outright ban on all weapons of mass destruction.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, in line with the principle of collective security, it would become gradually understood that states need only maintain armaments sufficient for their own defense and the maintenance of internal order.

As an immediate step toward the establishment of this Force, the present system of ad hoc arrangements could be institutionalized to establish core

regional forces for rapid deployment during a crisis.

### 3. Applying the notion of collective security to other problems of the global commons

Although originally conceived within the context of a threat of military aggression, the principle of collective security, some argue, may now be applied in an expansive manner to all threats which, although apparently local in nature, are actually the result of the complex breakdown of the present-day global order. These threats include but are not limited to international drug trafficking, food security, and the emergence of new global pandemics.<sup>210</sup>

We believe this issue would have to be included on the agenda of the proposed Global Summit. However, it is unlikely that expansive formulations of collective security would preclude the fundamental cause of military aggression.

### 4. Retaining successful UN institutions with independent executive function

Some of the more independent organizations within the UN family, such as the UN International Children's Emergency Fund, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Universal Postal Union, the International Telegraph and Communications Union, the International Labor Organization, and the World Health Organization, have enjoyed conspicuous success with focused but important areas of international concern.

Generally, these organizations already have their own executive function. Their independence should be retained and reinforced as part of the international executive.<sup>211</sup>

### C. A Strengthened World Court

In any system of governance, a strong judicial function is necessary to moderate the powers of the other branches and to enunciate, promulgate, protect and deliver justice. The drive to create just societies has been among the fundamental forces in history<sup>212</sup> -- and without doubt no lasting world civilization can be founded unless it is firmly grounded in the principle of justice.

Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organization.

At the individual level, justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh avers, justice is "the best beloved of all things" since it permits

each individual to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the knowledge of his neighbor or his group.

At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision-making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. To the extent that justice becomes a guiding concern of human interaction, a consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected. In such a climate the perennial tendencies toward manipulation and partisanship are far less likely to deflect the decision-making process.

Such a conception of justice will be gradually reinforced by the realization that in an interdependent world, the interests of the individual and society are inextricably intertwined. In this context, justice is a thread that must be woven into the consideration of every interaction, whether in the family, the neighborhood, or at the global level.

We see in the current United Nations system the foundation for a strengthened World Court. Established in 1945 as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice is characterized by many positive elements. The current system for the selection of judges, for example, seeks to create a judicial panel which is representative of a wide range of peoples, regions, and judicial systems.<sup>213</sup>

The Court's primary shortcoming is that it lacks the authority to issue legally binding decisions, except in those cases where states have chosen in advance to be bound by its decisions. Without jurisdiction, the Court is powerless to administer justice.<sup>214</sup> In time, the decisions of the World Court may become binding and enforceable upon all states; however, in the short term, the World Court might be strengthened through two other measures.

#### 1. Extending the court's jurisdiction

Currently, the Court's jurisdiction is limited to a few categories of cases, and only nations have standing to bring an action. We propose that in addition to member states, other organs of the United Nations should be given the right to bring cases before the Court.

#### 2. Coordinating the thematic courts

The World Court should act as an umbrella for existing and new thematic courts, that arbitrate and adjudicate international cases within specific

thematic domains.

Early components of a unified system can already be found in the specialized courts for arbitration of such matters as commerce and transportation, and in the proposals for such bodies as an International Criminal Court and a Chamber for Environmental Matters. Other issue areas that might need to be addressed under such a system would include courts for international terrorism and drug trafficking.

#### IV. Releasing the Power of the Individual: A Critical Challenge of the Emerging International Order

The primary objective of governing institutions at all levels is the advancement of human civilization. This objective is difficult to satisfy without the inspired and intelligent participation of the generality of humankind in the life and affairs of the community.

With a focus on building institutions and creating a community of nations, international bodies have historically remained distant from the minds and hearts of the world's people. Separated by several layers of government from the international arena and confused by the media's coverage of international news, the vast majority of people have not yet developed an affinity for institutions like the United Nations. Only those individuals who have had some access to the international arena through channels like organizations of civil society seem able to identify with these institutions.

Paradoxically, international institutions cannot develop into an effective and mature level of government and fulfill their primary objective to advance human civilization, if they do not recognize and nurture their relationship of mutual dependency with the people of the world. Such recognition would set in motion a virtuous cycle of trust and support that would accelerate the transition to a new world order.

The tasks entailed in the development of a global society call for levels of capacity far beyond anything the human race has so far been able to muster. Reaching these levels will require an enormous expansion in access to knowledge on the part of every individual. International institutions will succeed in eliciting and directing the potentialities latent in the peoples of the world to the extent that their exercise of authority is moderated by their obligation to win the confidence, respect, and genuine support of those whose actions they seek to govern and to consult openly and to the fullest extent possible with all those whose interests are affected.

Individuals who become confident and respectful of these institutions will, in turn, demand that their national governments increase their support, both political and economic, for the international order. In turn, the international institutions, with increased influence and power, will be better positioned to undertake further actions to establish a legitimate and effective world order.

Along with the measures for strengthening its structure, the United Nations

needs to adopt initiatives that release the latent power in all people to participate in this galvanizing process. To this end, certain themes that accelerate the advancement of the individual and society warrant special consideration. Among them, promoting economic development, protecting human rights, advancing the status of women, and emphasizing moral development are four priorities so closely tied to the advancement of civilization that they must be emphasized as part of the United Nations agenda.

#### A. Promoting Economic Development

Economic development strategies employed by the United Nations, the World Bank and a number of governments during the last fifty years, however sincerely conceived and executed, have fallen far short of aspirations. In much of the world, the gap between the "haves" and "havenots" has widened and is accelerating with the persistent disparity in income levels. Social problems have not subsided. In fact, crime and disease are not just on the rise; they are also becoming endemic and more difficult to combat.

These failures can be traced to a number of factors. They include a misplaced focus on large-scale projects and bureaucratic over-centralization, unjust terms of international trade, a pervasive corruption that has been allowed to flourish throughout the system, the exclusion of women from the decisionmaking processes at all levels, a general inability to ensure that resources reach the poor, and the diversion of development resources into military hardware.

A dispassionate examination of these factors betrays a common systematic and fundamental flaw in the current paradigm for economic development: material needs are often addressed without taking into account the spiritual factors and their motivating power.

Development should not become confused with the creation of an unsustainable consumer society. True prosperity encompasses spiritual as well as material well-being. Food, drink, shelter and a degree of material comfort are essential, but human beings cannot and never will find fulfillment in these necessities. Nor is contentment to be found in the somewhat more intangible material attainments such as social recognition or political power. Ultimately, not even intellectual achievement satisfies our deepest needs.

It is in the hunger for something more, something beyond ourselves, that the reality of the human spirit can be properly understood. Although the spiritual side of our nature is obscured by the day-to-day struggle for material attainment, our need for the transcendent cannot long be disregarded. Thus a sustainable development paradigm must address both the spiritual aspirations of human beings and their material needs and desires.

Education is the best investment in economic development. "Man is the

supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess," writes Bahá'u'lláh. "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom."<sup>215</sup> Education implies more than a process of mastering a narrow body of knowledge or learning a set of life skills. In truth, education, which should be a fundamental imperative of development, must also teach the process for knowledge acquisition, cultivate the powers of intellect and reasoning, and infuse the student with indispensable moral qualities.

It is this comprehensive approach to education that allows people to contribute to the creation of wealth and encourage its just distribution. <sup>216</sup>

Genuine wealth is created when work is undertaken not simply as a means of earning a livelihood but also as a way to contribute to society. We hold that meaningful work is a basic need of the human soul, as important to the proper development of the individual as nutritious food, clean water and fresh air are to the physical body.

Because of the spiritually damaging nature of dependency, schemes which focus solely on redistributing material wealth are doomed to failure in the long run. Distribution of wealth must be approached in an efficient and equitable manner. In fact, it must be intimately integrated with the process of wealth creation.

We propose the following recommendation to the United Nations system for promoting more effective development.

#### 1. Launching a determined campaign to implement Agenda 21

The plan of action formulated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development incorporated a wide range of views from civil society and a set of principles not unlike those articulated in this statement. Unfortunately, however, little has been done by member states to implement the measures described in the plan.

If the objectives of Agenda 21 are to be addressed and satisfied, an expanded effort, different in nature but comparable in scale and commitment to the Marshall Plan for the redevelopment of post-war Europe, might be necessary. In this case, the Bretton Woods institutions would be called upon to mount a pronounced campaign to expedite national implementation efforts. A mandate of this nature can result only from a conference, similar to the first Bretton Woods meetings fifty years ago, dedicated to a wholesale reexamination of these institutions. The purpose of this re-examination would be to make available to the people of the world sufficient resources so that they could implement local initiatives. Moreover, the conference could also expand its agenda to address deeper issues of global economic security through the redefinition of existing institutions or the creation of new structures.<sup>217</sup>

If successful, this new machinery could also be extended to coordinate

implementation of the measures identified at the recent Social Summit.

## B. Protecting Fundamental Human Rights

Over the five decades since the United Nations was founded, an understanding has emerged that human rights must be recognized and protected internationally if peace, social progress and economic prosperity are to be established.

The foundation for international agreement on the nature of human rights is the all-important Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948 and elaborated in two international covenants -- the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. In addition, some 75 other conventions and declarations identify and promote the rights of women and children, the right to freedom of worship, and the right to development, to name but a few.

The current United Nations human rights regime has two major shortcomings: limited means for enforcement and follow-up, and too little emphasis on the responsibilities that accompany all rights.

Human rights enforcement at the international level needs to be handled in a manner similar to the treatment of military aggression under a collective security regime. The violation of human rights in one state must be considered the concern of all, and enforcement mechanisms must provide for a unified response on the part of the entire international community. The question of when and how to intervene to protect human rights is more difficult to answer. Vigorous enforcement will require a high degree of global consensus on what constitutes a flagrant and willful violation.

Important steps toward global consensus were taken during the process leading up to the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, which affirmed unequivocally that human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent, and ended the long-standing debate about the relative importance of civil and political rights as compared to social, economic and cultural rights.<sup>218</sup>

Conference resolutions also confirmed that human rights must be applied irrespective of differences of racial background, ethnic origin, religious belief

or national identity. They encompass the equality of women and men; they include for all individuals worldwide the same rights to freedom of investigation, information and religious practice; and they embody the right of everyone to basic necessities such as food, shelter, and health care.<sup>219</sup>

Beyond the need to build consensus and strengthen enforcement of human rights, it is important to establish a greater understanding that to each right is

attached a corresponding responsibility.

The right to be recognized as a person before the law, for example, implies the responsibility to obey the law -- and to make both the laws and the legal system more just. Likewise, in the socio-economic realm, the right to marry

carries with it the responsibility to support the family unit, to educate one's children and to treat all family members with respect.<sup>220</sup> The right to work cannot be divorced from the responsibility to perform one's duties to the best of one's ability. In the broadest sense, the notion of "universal" human rights implies a responsibility to humanity as a whole.

Ultimately, while it is up to the individual to fulfill the responsibility in each such area, it is up to international institutions to protect the related human right. We propose three measures for immediate action.

#### 1. Strengthening the machinery of the UN for monitoring, implementation and follow-up

The United Nations machinery for the monitoring, implementation and follow-up of government compliance with international covenants is inadequate. The Centre for Human Rights consists of a very small professional staff struggling to support efforts to monitor the compliance by countries of all treaties they have ratified.

We believe the resources assigned to this Centre must be dramatically increased if it is to discharge its duties properly.

#### 2. Encouraging universal ratification of international conventions on human rights

Since ratifying the international conventions on human rights creates an obligation for member states, albeit not a practically enforceable one, the Secretary-General and all bodies of the UN might consider every opportunity to encourage member states to act on this issue. In fact, a demanding timeline for universal ratification may be an inspiring goal to be set by the General Assembly.

#### 3. Assuring respect for the monitoring organs of UN involved in human rights

Since the mandate of the human rights monitoring agencies is of a very serious nature, the UN needs to be particularly mindful of perceptions created by the structure and processes of these agencies and equally deliberate in acting to resolve compromising situations.

We believe it would be prudent to explore during the nomination process the qualifications of member states in visible positions and to exclude from election to membership on the Commission on Human Rights and other monitoring agencies, any member states that have not yet ratified the international conventions. While these member states would still be able to fully participate in deliberations, it would protect the United Nations from a potentially embarrassing and compromising situation.

We also believe that a single exception is warranted to the above rule. Member states, not under the scrutiny of the UN, that have sufficient protection for fundamental human rights within their constitutions, but which have not been able to complete the ratification process because of internal

political reasons, should not be barred from election to visible positions.

Finally, it also seems prudent for member states that have ratified the international conventions but are under scrutiny for gross human rights violations to be disqualified from election to the offices of conferences and other meetings of the Commission on Human Rights. This will prevent a widespread perception of the proceedings as a mockery.

### C. Advancing the Status of Women

The creation of a peaceful and sustainable world civilization will be impossible without the full participation of women in every arena of human activity.<sup>221</sup> While this proposition is increasingly supported, there is a marked difference between intellectual acceptance and its implementation.

It is time for the institutions of the world, composed mainly of men, to use their influence to promote the systematic inclusion of women, not out of condescension or presumed self-sacrifice but as an act motivated by the belief that the contributions of women are required for society to progress.<sup>222</sup> Only as the contributions of women are valued will they be sought out and woven into the fabric of society. The result will be a more peaceful, balanced, just and prosperous civilization.<sup>223</sup>

The obvious biological differences between the sexes need not be a cause for inequality or disunity. Rather, they are an aspect of complementarity. If the role of women as mothers is properly valued, their work in nurturing and educating children will be respected and properly rewarded. It should also be acknowledged that the child-bearing role does not diminish one's aptitude for leadership, or undermine one's intellectual, scientific or creative capacity. Indeed, it may be an enhancement.

We believe progress on a few critical fronts would have the greatest impact on the advancement of women. We share the following perspectives which are foundational to the recommendations which follow.

First and foremost, violence against women and girls, one of the most blatant and widespread abuses of human rights, must be eradicated. Violence has been a fact of life for many women throughout the world, regardless of race, class, or educational background. In many societies, traditional beliefs that women are inferior or a burden make them easy targets of anger and frustration. Even strong legal remedies and enforcement mechanisms will have little effect until they are supported by a transformation in the attitudes of men. Women will not be safe until a new social conscience takes hold, one which will make the mere expression of condescending attitudes towards women, let alone any form of physical violence, a cause for deep shame. Second, the family remains the basic building block of society and behaviors observed and learned there will be projected onto interactions at all other levels of society. Therefore, the members of the institution of the family must be transformed so that the principle of equality of women and men is internalized. Further, if the bonds of love and unity cement family

relationships, the impact will reach beyond its borders and affect society as a whole.

Third, while the overall goal of any society must be to educate all its members, at this stage in human history the greatest need is to educate women and girls.<sup>224</sup> For over twenty years, studies have consistently documented that, of all possible investments, educating women and girls pays the highest overall dividends in terms of social development, the eradication of poverty and the advancement of community.<sup>225</sup>

Fourth, the global dialogue on the role of men and women must promote recognition of the intrinsic complementarity of the two sexes. For the differences between them are a natural assertion of the necessity of women and men to work together to bring to fruition their potentialities for advancing civilization, no less than for perpetuating the human race. Such differences are inherent in the interactive character of their common humanity. This dialogue needs to consider the historical forces which have led to the oppression of women and examine the new social, political and spiritual realities which are today transforming our civilization.

As a starting point for this dialogue we offer this analogy from the Bahá'í Writings: "The world of humanity has two wings -- one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible."<sup>226</sup> In addition, we support the following three specific measures.

#### 1. Increasing the participation of women in member state delegations

We recommend that member states be encouraged to appoint an increased number of women to ambassadorial or similar diplomatic positions.

#### 2. Encouraging universal ratification of international conventions that protect women's rights and improve their status

As with the international conventions on human rights, the Secretary-General and all bodies of the UN should consider every opportunity to encourage member states to proceed with ratification of conventions and protocols that protect women's rights and seek their advancement.

#### 3. Planning ahead for implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action

The Forward-Looking Strategies declaration adopted at the Nairobi conference was highly bold and imaginative, yet its implementation was rather ineffective.<sup>227</sup> We believe that a lesson should be learned from this unfortunate experience and deliberate plans be put into place to ensure that the Platform of Action emerging from the Beijing conference does not meet a similar fate.

We propose that a monitoring system be established to prepare status reports on the implementation of adopted measures and to make presentations to the General Assembly annually, highlighting the top twenty and bottom twenty member states in terms of compliance.

#### D. Emphasizing Moral Development

The process of integrating human beings into larger and larger groups, although influenced by culture and geography, has been driven largely by religion, the most powerful agent for changing human attitudes and behavior. By religion, however, we mean the essential foundation or reality of religion, not the dogmas and blind imitations which have gradually encrusted it and which are the cause of its decline and effacement.

In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Material civilization is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit.... Without the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless."<sup>228</sup>

The concept of promoting specific morals or values may be controversial, especially in this age of humanistic relativism. Nevertheless, we firmly believe there exists a common set of values that have been obscured from recognition by those who exaggerate minor differences in religious or cultural practice for political purposes.<sup>229</sup> These foundation virtues, taught by all spiritual communities, constitute a basic framework for moral development.

Reflection on the commonalities inherent in the great religious and moral systems of the world reveals that each one espouses unity, cooperation and harmony among people, establishes guidelines for responsible behavior and supports the development of virtues which are the foundation for trust-based and principled interactions.<sup>230</sup>

##### 1. Promoting the development of curricula for moral education in schools

We advocate a universal campaign to promote moral development. Simply put, this campaign should encourage and assist local initiatives all over the world to incorporate a moral dimension into the education of children. It may necessitate the holding of conferences, the publication of relevant materials and many other supportive activities, all of which represent a solid investment in a future generation.

This campaign for moral development may begin with a few simple precepts. For example, rectitude of conduct, trustworthiness, and honesty are the foundation for stability and progress; altruism should guide all human endeavor, such that sincerity and respect for the rights of others become an integral part of every individual's actions; service to humanity is the true source of happiness, honor and meaning in life.

We also believe the campaign will be successful only to the extent that the force of religion is relied upon in the effort. The doctrine of the separation of church and state should not be used as a shield to block this salutary influence. Specifically, religious communities will have to be drawn in as collaborative partners in this important initiative.

As it proceeds, this campaign will accelerate a process of individual empowerment that will transform the way in which people, regardless of economic class, social standing, or ethnic, racial or religious background, interact with their society.

#### V. A Turning Point for All Nations: A Call to World Leaders

We have reached a turning point in the progress of nations.

"Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nationbuilding has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life."<sup>231</sup>

Over a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh taught that there is but one God, that there is only one human race, and that all the world's religions represent stages in the revelation of God's will and purpose for humanity. Bahá'u'lláh announced the arrival of the time, foretold in all of the world's scriptures, when humanity would at last witness the uniting of all peoples into a peaceful and integrated society.

He said that human destiny lies not merely in the creation of a materially prosperous society, but also in the construction of a global civilization where individuals are encouraged to act as moral beings who understand their true nature and are able to progress toward a greater fulfillment that no degree of material bounty alone can provide.

Bahá'u'lláh was also among the first to invoke the phrase "new world order" to describe the momentous changes in the political, social and religious life of the world. "The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing Order appeareth to be lamentably defective," He wrote. "Soon will the present-day order be rolled up and a new one spread out in its stead."<sup>232</sup> To this end, He laid a charge on the leaders and members of society alike. "It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens."<sup>233</sup> Above all else, leaders for the next generation must be motivated by a sincere desire to serve the entire community and must understand that leadership is a responsibility; not a path to privilege. For too long, leadership has been understood, by both leaders and followers, as the assertion of control over others. Indeed, this age demands a new definition of leadership and a new type of leader.<sup>234</sup> This is especially true in the international arena. In order to establish a sense of trust,

win the confidence, and inculcate a fond affinity in the hearts of the world's people for institutions of the international order, these leaders will have to reflect on their own actions.

Through an unblemished record of personal integrity, they must help restore confidence and trust in government. They must embody the characteristics of honesty, humility and sincerity of purpose in seeking the truth of a situation. They must be committed to and guided by principles, thereby acting in the best long-term interests of humanity as a whole.

"Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own selves," Bahá'u'lláh wrote. "Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men."<sup>235</sup>

### Advancing the Status of Women

"The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations.

There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge."

This position, taken from a statement on peace written by the Universal House of Justice in 1985, reiterates the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh that society must reorganize its life to give practical expression to the principle of equality between women and men.

Since its inception nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, the Bahá'í Faith has taught the equality of the sexes. Indeed, the Bahá'í Faith is the only independent world religion whose Founder has stated unequivocally that women and men are equal.

"Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God," said Bahá'u'lláh.

In accordance with this teaching, the worldwide Bahá'í community has been at the forefront of the movement to advance the rights of women for more than a century. And the Bahá'í approach, which advocates full equality and a firm sense of partnership between women and men, is increasingly recognized as being on the cutting edge of women's issues worldwide.

Bahá'ís understand, for example, that the values which women bring to human interaction are necessary to the proper functioning and advancement of modern society, and that qualities that have formerly been associated with the feminine sides of our natures--such as compassion, nurturing, cooperation

and empathy--will be increasingly important in creating a peaceful, just, and sustainable world civilization.

Bahá'í institutions around the world promote various educational efforts for women, and work to raise the consciousness of both women and men about this fundamental equality. Many of its schools, learning centers, and grassroots social and economic development projects specifically include the promotion of women's advancement into their curricula or agendas.

Women compose approximately 30 percent of elected leadership in Bahá'í councils at the national level, comparing favorably to national parliaments, which average 10 percent women worldwide.

Bahá'í women have long been active in the struggle to promote women's equality. The Bahá'í Faith was founded in 1844 in Iran and among its early followers was Tahiri, a Persian poet and scholar. In 1852, she laid down her life in defense of her beliefs, which included her right to lay aside the veil and to work for the complete emancipation of women.

Laura Dreyfus-Barney, a member of the first Bahá'í community in Europe, was among the leading figures in promoting the advancement of women in the early years of this century. In the years after World War I, she focused her attention on mobilizing women for peace. She represented the International Council of Women (ICW) in the League of Nations and was President of ICW's Peace and Arbitration Commission.

After World War II, Ms. Dreyfus-Barney played an important role in the development of the relationship between the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Martha Root, an American journalist from Pennsylvania, circled the globe several times in the 1920s and 1930s to promote the cause of women's equality--along with the other progressive principles of the Bahá'í Faith. With

a unique facility for approaching high dignitaries, she took the Bahá'í message of interdependence and oneness to kings, queens, presidents, ministers, statesmen, professors, clergymen and poets in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia.

Since the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) obtained consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1970, it has cooperated officially with the United Nations in its work to improve the status of women throughout the world.

The Bahá'í International Community has worked directly with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and its Secretariat, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women. In addition, the BIC has established close, cooperative relationships with other international

nongovernmental organizations at the United Nations that seek to promote the advancement of women.

Initially the BIC contributed to the work of the United Nations by submitting statements to United Nations bodies, and in particular the Commission on the Status of Women, on various aspects of equality. Such statements have addressed the education of girls, the importance of elevating the status of women as mothers, the relevance of women's participation at local, national and international levels to the establishment of world peace.

As part of International Women's Year in 1975, the BIC participated in the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City. Two Bahá'í representatives were officially accredited to attend the Conference and nine representatives attended the NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) Tribune, the parallel meeting for non-governmental organizations.

During the next ten years, designated the United Nations Decade for Women, the Bahá'í International Community developed a solid reputation for its work promoting the advancement of women. BIC representatives served on NGO committees on the Status of Women in New York, Geneva and Vienna and participated in the World Conferences on Women held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1980, in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985, and in Beijing, China in 1995.

The Community's representatives have also been involved in planning parallel activities for NGOs at these meetings. Relationships were established with major organizations worldwide whose focus is also the promotion of the advancement of women.

The BIC collaborates on an increasing basis with UN agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA).

### Unity of the Human Race

In 1936, on the eve of the second World War, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, wrote a letter to the Bahá'ís of the Western world in which he outlined the Bahá'í perspective on the establishment of a future global commonwealth. This visionary document, which reiterates and develops Bahá'u'lláh's teachings about the next stage in the development of human civilization, still reads as though it were composed yesterday.

### Unity of the Human Race<sup>236</sup>

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This world commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind,

ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples.

A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system.

A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve center of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. A world language will either be invented or chosen from among the existing languages and will be taught in the schools of all the federated nations as an auxiliary language to their mother tongue. A world script, a world literature, a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind.

In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will cooperate, and will harmoniously develop. The press will, under such a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversified views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously manipulated by vested interests, whether private or public, and will be liberated from the influence of contending governments and peoples. The economic resources of the world will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

National rivalries, hatreds, and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding and cooperation. The causes of religious strife will be permanently removed, economic barriers and restrictions will be completely abolished, and the inordinate distinction between classes will be obliterated. Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear. The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to

the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation-- such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.

Social Action

Social and Economic Development

All human beings, Bahá'u'lláh states, have been "created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization." The creation of a peaceful global society that fosters both individual and collective well-being is at the heart of the

Bahá'í

vision of the future. Within the framework of a growing community concerned with moral and spiritual transformation, social and economic development is one expression of the Bahá'í commitment to realizing this vision.

The worldwide Bahá'í community, as an organic whole, transcends divisions prevalent in society today, such as "North" and "South", "developed" and "underdeveloped". Social and economic development efforts are undertaken by Bahá'ís everywhere, irrespective of the degree of material prosperity achieved by their nations, as they strive to apply the teachings of

Bahá'u'lláh

to the gradual process of building a new civilization. Every individual is a potential contributor to this process.

Thus, Bahá'í efforts in the field of social and economic development generally take the form of grassroots initiatives carried out by small groups of

individuals in the towns and villages in which they reside. As these initiatives

evolve, some grow into more substantial programs with permanent administrative structures. Yet very few can be compared with the kind of complex development projects promoted and funded by government agencies and large multilateral organizations.

The distinguishing features of the Bahá'í approach to development are the principles and processes being employed by Bahá'í communities around the world rather than the number or size of projects. In a very real sense, social and economic development activities are an expression of faith in action. Consequently, Bahá'í development initiatives are designed to engage and benefit all the members of a community and not just Bahá'ís.

At the heart of all Bahá'í development undertakings is the recognition of a deep and inseparable connection between the practical and spiritual aspects of daily life. Creating a desire for social change and instilling confidence that it

can be achieved must ultimately come from an awakening of the human spirit. While pragmatic approaches to problem solving play a key role in development initiatives, tapping the spiritual roots of human motivation provides the essential impulse that ensures genuine social advancement.

Individual and community development, Bahá'ís believe, require both the "light" of spiritual awareness and the "lamp" of material resources. Material advancement is not viewed as an end in itself, but rather as a vehicle for moral, spiritual, and social progress. Meaningful social change does not simply result from the acquisition of technical skills, but more importantly from the development of qualities and attitudes that foster cooperative and creative patterns of human interaction.

In villages and cities around the globe, Bahá'ís are attempting to construct patterns of living that truly integrate the spiritual and practical. This understanding of development anticipates the emergence of communities in which the application of spiritual values such as justice, trustworthiness, and generosity will enhance material well-being, while material resources and advances will make possible new avenues of spiritual endeavor that will promote cohesion and unity of purpose within and across societies. "The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquility of peoples, and the peace of all that dwell on earth", Bahá'u'lláh explains, "are among the principles and ordinances of God."

Workers in the development field have increasingly come to understand that the creation and diffusion of knowledge lie at the heart of social progress. The Bahá'í experience confirms this understanding. Bahá'í social and economic development is therefore focused on increasing the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to take concrete steps that promote their spiritual and material well-being. This process of capacity building involves a global enterprise of learning in which Bahá'ís from virtually every cultural and ethnic background are working to apply the methods of science and the moral and spiritual insights found in the Bahá'í teachings to their particular local conditions. It is a process of action, evaluation, and adjustment; one in which local communities gradually improve their ability to define, analyze, and meet their own needs.

From the beginning, Bahá'í activities in the development area have emphasized collective decision-making and collective action at the grassroots level. Consultation among all the members of a community is central to the success of every Bahá'í development project. The use of consultative methods often promotes novel solutions to community problems and greater fairness in the distribution of community resources, and serves to uplift those

members of a community, such as women and minorities, who have been historically excluded from decision-making. Experience has shown that consultation is an indispensable tool that enables communities to sustain and modify development initiatives and thereby contributes to self-sufficiency and a higher quality of life. The ability of people to be drawn together in new patterns of participation and interaction is in some respects more important than the specific practical goals of development projects themselves.

From the Bahá'í perspective, then, the set of capacities necessary for building

up the social, economic, and moral fabric of collective life must draw upon the resources of both the mind and the heart. By fully integrating spiritual principles into community development activities, ideas, values, and practical measures emerge that promote self-reliance and safeguard human dignity. In this way, patterns of dependency are avoided and conditions of inequality are progressively eliminated.

Bahá'u'lláh refers to the human being "as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value," and states that the purpose of life and society is to generate creative processes which serve to release those "gems" of human potential. As individuals begin to cultivate their innate capacities, so the community around them is transformed, and impetus is given to "an ever-advancing civilization." It is therefore the hope of the Bahá'í community that its current

modest efforts in the development field will serve to promote a model of capacity building that results in widespread moral and material advancement.

### Bahá'í Development Projects: A Global Process of Learning

A tangible expression of Bahá'í efforts to promote constructive change in the life of society is found in the various social and economic activities of Bahá'í

communities around the world. For the most part, these activities are very simple initiatives that take place at the grassroots level. They are noteworthy not for their scope or scale, but rather for the new concepts and fresh approaches they utilize to unlock the moral and creative capabilities of individuals and communities.

Bahá'í development activities are initiated either by Bahá'í administrative institutions or by individuals or groups. Together, these activities contribute to a global process of learning about a Bahá'í approach to social and economic development. They presently fall into three general categories: Fixed Duration (Category 1) Sustained (Category 2) and Advanced (Category 3).

#### Activities of Fixed Duration

Most Bahá'í social and economic development efforts are fairly simple activities of fixed duration in which Bahá'ís in villages and towns around the

world apply spiritual principles to the problems and challenges faced by their localities. These activities either originate in the Bahá'í communities themselves or are a response to the invitation of other organizations. It is estimated that in 1996-97 there were some 1,450 endeavors of this kind, including tree-planting and clean-up projects, health camps, workshops and seminars on such themes as race unity and the advancement of women, and short-term training courses.

### Sustained Projects

The second category of Bahá'í social and economic development consists of approximately 225 ongoing projects. The vast majority are academic schools, while others focus on areas such as literacy, basic health care, immunization, substance abuse, child care, agriculture, the environment, or microenterprise. Some of these projects are administered by nascent development organizations which have the potential to grow in complexity and in their range of influence. All projects seek to apply or explore particular Bahá'í principles.

### Organizations with Capacity to Undertake Complex Action

Certain Bahá'í development efforts have achieved the stature of development organizations with relatively complex programmatic structures and significant spheres of influence. They systematically train human resources and manage a number of lines of action to address problems of local communities and regions in a coordinated, interdisciplinary manner. Also included in this category are several institutions--especially large schools--which, although focusing only on one field, have the potential to make a significant impact in contributing to the welfare of the communities in which they operate. In this category there are currently 31 such organizations, which are located in all continents of the globe.

### Global Campaigns

While most projects begin at the local level this does not exclude the possibility of action at higher levels. In recent years, the Bahá'í community has initiated global campaigns in the areas of literacy, primary health care training, and the advancement of women. Projects are now underway in a number of countries in Africa, Asia, and South America. The campaigns attempt to draw on certain approaches and methodologies to development that have proven effective in different social contexts and seek to adapt such knowledge to a wider range of communities. In some cases, these initiatives have involved collaboration with national governments and international agencies. The campaigns demonstrate the potential for widespread implementation of development programs throughout the global network of Bahá'í communities.

### Moral Development

New Virtues, New Moral Standards, New Capacities: Moral Development Activities in the Bahá'í

## World Community

All created things have their degree or stage of maturity. The period of maturity in the life of a tree is the time of its fruit-bearing... The animal attains a state of full growth and completeness, and in the human kingdom man reaches his maturity when the light of his intelligence attains its greatest power and development... Similarly there are periods and stages in the collective life of humanity. At one time it was passing through its stage of childhood, at another its period of youth, but now it has entered its long-predicted phase of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere apparent... That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race can neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day, this period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former state of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities. New bounties, perfect bestowals, are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity.<sup>237</sup>

This passage from the Bahá'í writings summarizes the Faith's basic approach to the development of humankind. Bahá'ís see the unfolding of history as the path of an "ever-advancing civilization," the progress of which is dependent upon humanity's moral as well as material development. We stand now at the threshold of maturity, for which we must acquire new virtues, new moral standards, and new capacities in order to reap the benefits of the age. Elsewhere in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Son of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, this theme has been elucidated as follows:

Two calls to success and prosperity are being raised from the heights of the happiness of mankind, awakening the slumbering, granting sight to the blind, causing the heedless to become mindful, bestowing hearing upon the deaf, unloosing the tongue of the mute and resuscitating the dead.

The one is the call of civilization, of the progress of the material world.

This

pertaineth to the world of phenomena, promoteth the principles of material achievement, and is the trainer for the physical accomplishments of mankind. It compriseth the laws, regulations, arts and sciences through which the world of humanity hath developed; laws and regulations which are the outcome of lofty ideals and the result of sound minds, and which have stepped forth into the arena of existence through the efforts of the wise and cultured in past and subsequent ages. The propagator and executive power of this call is just government.

The other is the soul-stirring call of God, Whose spiritual teachings are safeguards of the everlasting glory, the eternal happiness and illumination of the world of humanity, and cause attributes of mercy to be revealed in the

human world and the life beyond.

This second call is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God.

However, until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained.<sup>238</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement outlines the basic approach of the Bahá'í community around the world in the activities it has undertaken with regard to moral development. Material progress is desirable, but it should be accompanied by spiritual growth--both individual and collective. During a talk given in America in April 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá compared these two elements or powers to the wings of a bird, saying, "Both must be developed, for flight is impossible with one wing."<sup>239</sup>

While the Bahá'í Faith is still a relatively young religion, it has made a number of efforts throughout the world to develop programs that will promote both the material and the spiritual progress not only of its members but of the wider communities in which they live. Many of these activities fall under the broad heading of social and economic development--health care and literacy training, the establishment of schools, income-generating projects--but some have a distinct focus on moral training. This article will survey five such projects and programs around the world: "ZIPOPO," or "The Happy Hippo Show," a television program in Russia that promotes awareness and discussion of moral issues among youthful viewers; the moral leadership training program at Nur University in Bolivia; the "On the Wings of Words" literacy project in Guyana; the School of the Nations in Macau; and the Moral Education Project in St. Petersburg, Russia.

"ZIPOPO" or "The Happy Hippo Show"

This television show was first developed by Shamil Fattakhov, a journalist from Kazan, to promote consultation in youth groups on situations centered around themes connected to moral education. The name of the program, "ZIPOPO," is taken from the first letters of the words "Zaochniy institut pozitivnovo povedeniya," which translates as "The Academy of Positive Behavior." In English the program is called "The Happy Hippo Show," a title inspired by a story related about 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who, during His trip to America in 1911-12, is reported to have said to a crying child, "Don't be sad, be a happy hippopotamus!"

The concept underlying "ZIPOPO" is to present viewers with an opportunity to look at moral or ethical issues and to provide them with the means to approach life problems and find positive solutions through specific dramatic

examples. As Mr. Fattakhov has noted, the power of positive example has a long and distinguished history in Russia. He cites the instance where, following the publication in the late nineteenth century of Leo Tolstoy's novel *The Resurrection*, about a man who forfeits his wealth and prominent position in society to repent for an evil deed he committed in his youth, many readers of the popular work radically changed their lives, confessing to crimes they had committed, donating their possessions to charity, and performing good works.

"ZIPOPO," which runs weekly in a number of cities in Russia and is about 40 minutes in length, features a dramatic skit performed by actors, a live audience of between eighty and a hundred people--mostly youth--and hosts who facilitate the discussion. The hosts begin by warming up the audience and introducing the topic for the show, after which the first scene of a situation based on the topic is acted out. The drama freezes at a crucial point of tension, and audience discussion opens up, facilitated by the hosts who, from time to time, interject relevant points or perhaps quote brief passages from various literary or religious sources to further fuel the exchange of viewpoints. Sometimes an expert on the topic is present to contribute ideas as well. Following the discussion, which always focuses on finding positive solutions to the situation, the dramatic sketch resumes and one possible solution to the particular moral dilemma is presented. A second round of audience discussion following the dramatic conclusion helps those present to recognize a pattern of response to the problem, based on moral principles. Many of the scripts have been developed by Mr. Fattakhov, but he welcomes other authors and encourages youth to submit their ideas for future programs; one scenario was written by a seventeen-year-old high school student. Well over two hundred such sketches have now been written and performed, including ones on topics such as how to avoid drug addiction, suicide, the difference between sex and love, youth and the police, stealing, unemployment, racial conflict, divorce, running away from home, how to find the right partner to establish a healthy family life, how to develop virtues, and so on. In one sketch, for example, a girl and her boyfriend are sitting on a park bench talking about how much they love each other. He begins to pressure her to have sex; she says she wants to wait until they are married. "But everybody does it," he argues, and besides, they should "test each other out" before marriage. Finally he delivers an ultimatum: if she doesn't prove that she loves him by sleeping with him tonight, their relationship is over. At this point the action freezes. Should she give in or not? The audience discusses the issue before the sketch resumes to present one possible resolution to the situation.

The program has become very popular, not only with youth but with entire families, because it features ordinary people exploring moral solutions to common dilemmas that are often not addressed in society. Viewers, then, see how they can practically apply moral principles in their own lives. Mr. Fattakhov describes the goal of the program as "the healing and education of society through regular collective deepening in moral aspects, based on the

highest moral principles proclaimed by prophets of all world religions, by outstanding philosophers and prominent people, accumulated by the wisdom of the whole of mankind."

The use of drama makes the problem more emotionally immediate and provides the opportunity for different social and age groups to share a common experience. The discussion allows youth to broaden their knowledge of life and experience consultation in a supportive atmosphere where collective thinking is used in search of positive solutions to life's problems. Positive actions and behavior are thus legitimized in the minds of young viewers; individuals can become responsible for their own moral choices, make positive decisions, and take action. Families, too, can consult in their own homes on topics introduced in the shows.

Audience bases for "ZIPOPO" are expanding. Host training workshops have been held since 1994, and as a result the show is now established in a number of Russian cities, including Chita, Khabarovsk, Izhevsk, Ulan-Ude, Kazan, Leninogorsk, and Perm. It has also been introduced into India, China, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Italy, Moldova, Latvia, and the Ukraine. And while "ZIPOPO" began as a program primarily directed at youth, different variations of the show have been developed, aimed at children, women, families, and social groups such as teachers, businessmen, journalists, and so on. Because the format of the show is flexible and portable, it can be (and has been) done in locations as varied as kindergartens, youth camps, schools, colleges and universities, and on mass media, including radio, television, and newspapers.

In the city of Khabarovsk eighteen-year-old Tanya Maros, who had been trained as a host, was galvanized to start up a radio version of the show, which she produced and hosted herself. Another young host, Leonid Osokin, hosted a live TV program called the "Orange Show," modeled on "ZIPOPO," for some two years in his home city of Ulan-Ude. The popular show, which ran biweekly, reached some one million people and was discontinued only when Mr. Osokin left to pursue a doctoral degree in morality and ethics.

Recently, Mr. Fattakhov has adapted the basic format of "ZIPOPO" for different audiences. For example, he has offered seminars to businessmen on subjects such as ethics in business--an issue of real concern in Russian society. The dramatic sketch presented at one such seminar opens with a businessman advising his wife over the telephone not to buy fruit or vegetables from a particular vendor who uses chemical sprays that could endanger the health of their family. Immediately following this conversation two people are ushered into the man's office, the first complaining about the pollution released by the businessman's factory and its effects on her child. The second, who is meanwhile quietly sobbing and obviously carrying something bulky under her coat, suddenly throws aside her wrap and deposits a dead dog on the businessman's desk, crying that this was her beloved pet that was poisoned by drinking from the stream next to the man's factory. At that point the action freezes and the seminar participants are invited to

discuss

what has happened, identify the moral principles involved in the situation, and devise a positive solution. According to Mr. Fattakhov, the businessmen at the seminar were galvanized by the sketch and engaged in a very energetic discussion of ethics in business practices--something they claimed they had not done previously.

Responses such as those of the businessmen--as well as the popular reception of "ZIPOPO" on the television and radio in various cities--underscore people's hunger for presentations and programs that address in a substantive, participatory way the issues of morality and ethics that are central to their lives. And the format developed by Mr. Fattakhov also shows that addressing such issues is far from a dull, dry exercise.

#### Moral Leadership Training Program at Nur University, Bolivia

Universidad Nur, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1996, is a private educational institution in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, founded by a number of Bahá'ís who were concerned with the lack of higher educational opportunities for Bolivians and were motivated by the need for trained professionals who could contribute to the development of the country.

Nur's mission statement is "to contribute to an educational process that facilitates individual and social transformation through the development of human capabilities, fostering a dynamic coherence between the intellectual, spiritual, and physical dimensions, for the establishment of a just, peaceful, and harmonious global society." Nur began its first academic year in April 1985 with 97 students; it currently has 2,600 undergraduate, 500 graduate, and more than 2,000 continuing education students; women compose 43% of the student body.

Underlying Nur's approach to education is the belief that the mere transfer of information and knowledge will not raise up people who can bring about a personal and collective transformation in service to the common good. Therefore, the university emphasizes ethical and moral education; courses also look at the integrative and disintegrative forces at work in the world that

will eventually lead to the establishment of peace and the acceptance of the concept of world citizenship. Latin American nations are still consolidating stable forms of democratic government, which many leaders of thought in the region believe must be rooted in moral leadership. Nur hopes that its programs will help create such leaders.

Nur has identified eighteen specific moral leadership capabilities that it seeks to develop, including the following: to participate effectively in consultation; to act with rectitude of conduct based on ethical and moral principles; to evaluate one's own strengths and weaknesses without involving the ego; to take initiative in a creative, disciplined form; to learn from systematic reflection on action within a consistent and evolutionary conceptual framework; to commit to empowering educational activities; to

create a vision of a desired future based on shared values and principles, and to articulate it clearly and simply so that it inspires others to work for its fulfillment; to understand relationships based on dominance and to contribute towards their transformation into relationships based on interconnectedness, reciprocity, and service; to contribute to the establishment of justice.

Emphasis in the moral leadership program is placed on the individual's moral responsibility to search for and recognize truth, and then to apply that truth in all aspects of his or her life. Students are encouraged to find principles that can serve as the basis of their lives and then to base decisions and actions on them, while remaining open to the investigation of new principles so as to allow for continuing growth. Students thus develop a principle-based vision of the desired future of their community and examine different points of view and facts in order to investigate the truth.

A framework for teaching moral leadership has been incorporated into Nur's core curriculum. Since 1990, all undergraduate students have been required to complete 120 hours of community service as a requirement for graduation. Almost 1,000 students have now participated in more than 200 projects, some taking the initiative to offer leadership workshops to local high schools as part of their service.

Other programs also contain moral leadership components. A pilot project, carried out from May 1993 to October 1995 in the departments of Santa Cruz and Tarija, sought to empower 460 rural teachers to become community development agents. Emphasis was placed on the role that rural teachers can play in aiding communities to pursue their own path of development by analyzing their own needs, establishing their order of priority, and managing their own projects. Rural teachers, acting as facilitators, can serve as a source of initiative, knowledge, and guidance in community organization, in the empowerment of grassroots organizations, and in the management of their projects.

Training for the project was carried out by means of a three-semester degree course for the teachers, conducted through distance education. Spiritual principles, which are seen as an essential part of life and the development process, formed a central aspect of the course through an emphasis on moral leadership. The five elements underlying this component of the course are that leadership should be oriented towards service and should not be an exercise of power; that the aim of development is an active engagement in the process of individual and collective transformation; that participants commit to the fundamental moral responsibilities of searching for truth, of recognizing truth, and of applying truth in all aspects of their lives; that moral leadership is based on eternal values and a commitment to service and the process of personal and collective transformation; and that emphasis should be placed on the development of personal, interpersonal, and societal

capabilities of leadership.

Another program seeks to strengthen women's leadership role in the field of community health, emphasizing moral leadership capabilities that increase women's ability to take initiative in improving health in their communities. Components of the program include study of moral leadership for social transformation and consultation as a method of group decision-making, learning how to form a collective vision and how to learn from reflecting on experience, how to take creative initiative, and how participatory evaluation aids in collective learning. The National Public Health System of Bolivia, women from a number of rural communities who belong to a Rural Women's Center, and the 35 member organizations of the Santa Cruz branch of the National Confederation of Women's Organizations have also received moral leadership training.

Several Bolivian NGOs active in the fields of women's rights, children's education, child survival, literacy, the protection of the environment, and the improvement of agricultural production have had their management and field staff trained in moral leadership by Nur, as have the National Secretariat for Popular Participation, the state government of Santa Cruz, and several municipal governments. Members of the Bahá'í community, including members of the institution of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants and Bahá'í rural school teachers, have also received training.

Further extension of these activities is planned. Nur is developing a strategy to apply moral leadership training to environmental issues. It is seeking funding for a project focusing on the health of female adolescents, addressing problems such as venereal disease, AIDS, and abortions resulting from unwanted pregnancies by educating adolescents in these health risks, emphasizing the importance of moral responsibility and developing participants' capacity to prevent problems before they occur. Collaborating with the Harvard Institute for International Development, Nur is also working to design a comprehensive program to provide training in moral leadership, public administration, and concepts of just governance to civic authorities in 46 Bolivian municipalities.

"On the Wings of Words," Guyana

In 1994, pilot literacy projects were undertaken by the Bahá'í communities in three countries--Guyana, Cambodia, and the Central African Republic--at the invitation of the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre as the initial part of a proposed global literacy campaign. The literacy projects seek to address the concern of the Universal House of Justice, which prompted it to call, in 1989, for systematic efforts toward the eventual elimination of illiteracy in the Bahá'í community.

The campaign is based on a concept of literacy achieved through a combination of study of the Bahá'í writings on education, the experience of some Bahá'ís in the field, the application of the work of Paulo Freire, and guidance received from the Bahá'í World Centre. In this view, literacy is

seen

as more than skills in basic reading, writing, and numeracy. The project combines spiritual and moral themes with the mechanics of writing, an approach that acknowledges each individual's need for direct access to the Word of God.

"On the Wings of Words," as the literacy project is called in Guyana, operates under the guidance of the Varqa Foundation, a Bahá'í-inspired agency. The program was initially offered in ten Bahá'í communities, and approximately thirty Bahá'í facilitators received intensive training in how to use the materials that had been developed, how to structure a literacy class, and how to use the generative themes to encourage development of the moral and spiritual aspects of the program.

Five of the ten initial areas began to flourish, as groups of up to 25 youth between ages ten and sixteen gathered weekly. The task force that had originated the project supplied study workbooks, which were supplemented by materials from local Bahá'í community libraries.

By the end of the first year, the project was strengthened when it was opened up to the involvement of the wider public. Concern about Guyana's declining literacy rate created a greater receptivity for the program among the country's leaders of thought and educators. Indeed, one leading columnist wrote, "I can think of no more important initiative under way in Guyana now." The Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, the extramural arm of the University of Guyana, became a partner of the Bahá'í community in the endeavor and offered a certificate to facilitators who received training and participated in the program.

In May 1996, the project's new phase was launched at Guyana's National Cultural Center, attracting over 200 people from all over the country. The launching was listed among events celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of Guyana's independence and received attention on both radio and television. The country's Senior Minister of Education, Dale Bisnauth, lauded the Bahá'ís for their initiative and mentioned that he was particularly pleased that the program focused not only on the mechanics of reading and writing but on moral aspects as well. The Director of the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education and a member of the Bahá'í Literacy Task Force also addressed the meeting.

A follow-up session a month later brought together 200 participants who learned more about the vision of the program and the materials to be used. They also consulted about how to popularize the program in their home communities. The next step was the holding in Georgetown of a five-day training program for the facilitators, who comprised a diverse group from different parts of the country, different religious backgrounds, different ages,

and different levels of qualification. One indication of the success of the training sessions was that there were no dropouts; in fact, additional people appeared each day until the organizers regretfully had to turn away more prospective participants.

Some of the topics covered were the vision of literacy underlying the project, the concept of generative themes, the mechanics of reading, testing for baseline data, planning, memorization, logistics, aids and games, teaching styles and methodologies, and singing. The overall themes of the project-- "We are noble beings," "We have control over our actions," and "Our actions affect others"--were also addressed. Additional training sessions were held in remote areas for people who wished to become facilitators but could not afford to attend the session in Georgetown. Organizers afterwards commented on the spirit of active participation throughout the initial training session and on the proactive approach of the facilitators in getting support from their communities when they began to set up classes.

In all, 33 literacy classes for over 1,200 children were held over the summer in the regions of Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice, with a high level of interest and enthusiasm on the part of both facilitators and students. In the fall, after the rainy season, eight regions of the interior Rupununi region also held classes, which were attended by an additional 300 children. Support for the project was received from the Guyana Book Foundation, which provided \$3,800 in funding, offered one set of free books to each community group that requested one, and made other books available on the same nominal terms on which they are provided to schools.

An evaluative meeting held at the end of the summer looked at the challenges encountered, and materials for new modules were introduced. Facilitators commented on the positive attitudinal changes they saw in the youth who had participated, and the spiritual aspect of the program came in for high praise from those present. Guyana TV covered the event and broadcast highlights. Throughout the following months further meetings provided continued training and support to the facilitators and helped them look back and evaluate the progress of the program. Weekend and vacation-time sessions with students also continued the education process throughout the year, and a newsletter on the groups' activities was started to provide students with reinforcement and encouragement. Other training programs are being planned for the future.

The Project has also arranged a "Festival of Words" in each area where literacy classes have been held, during which the students present to the public a selection of songs, poems, and stories. In July 1997, a national Festival of Words, with youth representing each village, sub-region, and region, will be held in Georgetown.

School of the Nations, Macau

Founded in 1988, the School of the Nations has pioneered the development of

a moral education component in the country's school curriculum. Generally, in Macau formal education is geared to academic subjects. Moral development, while a concern of teachers, is handled by them on an individual basis or by the parents of the student. Societal changes and pressures, however, have indicated an increasing need for a more formal program of moral education.

The Badi Foundation, which runs the School of the Nations, is a private nongovernmental organization whose purpose is to develop human resources for the social and economic progress of the region. All of the Foundation's programs include elements for the development of moral or spiritual values, qualities, and capabilities.

International in character, the School of the Nations has approximately 500 students from 36 different countries and runs from kindergarten through Form 6 or 12th grade. Some 70 percent of the students are from Macau, Hong Kong, and China.

The school has committed itself to concerted experimentation in curriculum development in the area of moral education, focusing on the development of moral capabilities--particularly at the kindergarten and secondary levels. The activities and the qualities, attitudes, skills, abilities, and concepts promoted are geared to the children's level.

In kindergarten, the development of moral capabilities forms part of every subject--from math to science to languages--in the belief that not to include moral questions is to say that they are irrelevant.

The concept fundamental to the development of any moral capability is seen to be the oneness of humankind, which is reinforced throughout the curriculum. In science class, for example, the students study the scientific concept of "system" by looking at the family, the elements that compose it, and the behaviors and virtues that can be found in it; from here, they move on to look at the ways different families in their community interact; and finally, they expand their investigation to all the families in the world--the family of humankind. In mathematics, a similar approach is taken to teaching sets, where students look at concrete sets--sets of children who are happy or who want to be obedient, sets of children in their class, the set of children in Macau, and the set of children in the world.

The concept that each of us chooses his or her own behavior--and can choose to change--is also taught in various ways. In the science class for five-yearolds, for example, after learning the names of parts of their bodies, students discuss what the parts do. A mouth eats and sings, but it also speaks. Does the mouth decide what it will say? Do the feet decide where they will walk? By answering such questions, students become aware that there are decisions to be made and that they themselves--their spirits or souls--are what decides. This concept is, again, reinforced across the curriculum.

At the secondary level, the focus is on the development of five moral capabilities: creating a healthy family; empowering others; bringing joy to others; preserving and rationally using the environment; and consultation. All activities are organized around the core concept of service. Elements of the program include two hours weekly in moral education class, either doing service projects in the community or in the classroom, where students are asked to reflect on activities they have completed or to plan future activities.

Consultation with teachers, with other students, and with the population they are serving, as well as the writing of journals and other assignments, all lead the students towards deep reflection and discussion on the capability they are exploring so that they can relate their experiences to the rest of their lives.

The Form 1 (Grade 8) students' program centers around working with the kindergarten students in the school and studying elements of child development and education. Students also reflect on their own families' values and values they have adopted for themselves. The following year students undertake service to promote environmental conservation and beautification of the environment, outside the school. In Form 3, cooperation with the Cultural Institute of Macau is the focus. Students have assisted in recording the history of Macau and have worked with social service organizations, seeing how a society takes care of its members and their own role in that process. During their final two years at the school, students work at homes for the elderly or with programs for the homebound and at a home for the mentally handicapped, receiving special training from professional social service workers. By the end of the program, the students have learned how to make others comfortable, how to listen and encourage others, and how to be more courageous, compassionate, and humble.

The moral capabilities program at the School of the Nations is continually being developed. It does not claim to turn out students who are perfect models of moral behavior, because it sees the development of moral capabilities as a lifelong process, but it does give students a start along the path of their own spiritual growth, encountering challenging life situations and seeing the reality of applying moral values in society--a process involving difficulties and ambiguities as well as rewards and triumphs. For its efforts in this area, the School of the Nations recently won an award from the Department of Education as Macau's top moral education program and was awarded third place in an international competition for moral education programs.

Moral Education Project, St. Petersburg, Russia

Begun in 1995, the Moral Education Project based in St. Petersburg aims to promote the development of a course on moral education for youth, to present lectures on religion and science at the university level, and to prepare materials on moral education for publication in English and Russian. In these endeavors, the Bahá'ís who spearhead the project seek to collaborate with Russian intellectuals and academics working in this field.

In 1996, the project sponsored a regular full-semester course in moral education at the St. Petersburg Electrotechnical University, in which 38 third-year public relations students enrolled. Given the positive response to this initial offering, it appears likely that the course will be repeated. William S.

Hatcher, the project founder, also presented a paper at the plenary session of an international conference on pedagogical issues in university education, held at the Electrotechnical University, using materials from the project.

At the request of the head of the ethics department of St. Petersburg State University, a short course on ethics based on the materials from the Moral Education Project was given, and future collaboration between the project and the university in the formulation of a new fundamental course in ethics, required for all philosophy students, is likely.

A monograph on moral education, generated by the project, is soon to be published in English in St. Petersburg, after which it will be released in Russian. This material will then form the basis of an annual course in moral education in the Master's program at Landegg Academy, Switzerland. Project materials have also formed the basis of lectures at the university in Minsk, in Brest, Belarus, and in Finland.

Publications include two booklets, containing some twelve lectures on various themes related to the Bahá'í Faith; a booklet compiling statements of philosophers, scientists, and artists concerning the existence and nature of God; a Russian translation of an article entitled Economics and Moral Values; and basic course materials for the project's program, entitled "A Non-Ideological Approach to the Moral Education of Youth and Young Adults."

The approach taken by the Moral Education Project is simply this: that moral development is a process that leads to the development of each individual as an independent human being who is able to attain true well-being. Project members call this model "non-ideological" because it is founded on the premise that the source of moral behavior comes from an individual's understanding of what they refer to as "the moral law of cause and effect" rather than through inculcation of a moral credo or a set of rules for moral behavior. The program, in fact, views religious fanaticism and sectarianism as moral evils because they lead to dependence on a restrictive moral credo rather than to authentic knowledge of moral law; they also contribute to various antisocial attitudes undermining one's own and others' spiritual wellbeing.

Moral development, then, is a process by which the individual learns how to generate and sustain positive encounters with the law of cause and effect embedded in every aspect of reality. According to our reading of these encounters, we construct our own individual "value paradigm," which is the system--albeit largely unarticulated--by which we make our value choices. The Moral Education Project sees the essential challenge of moral education

as the understanding of this moral law of cause and effect and, as a result, the development of a correct value paradigm. To develop this paradigm we reflect upon and strive to understand the fundamental moral principles underlying our encounters with reality. The curriculum the project has developed for youth identifies and elaborates these fundamental principles. It also leads them towards experiencing "transformative interactions" and allows students to see for themselves the operation of the moral law of cause and effect in various contexts.

There are a number of categories of these interactions with reality on which the program focuses, including, notably, the self (which refers to the individual soul or spirit, as defined in the Bahá'í writings) with the Divine; the self with the self, the self with other humans, with social groups, and with objects and collections of objects.

Through developing an understanding of the dynamics of value choice in these various categories, the project pursues the goal of developing a scientifically based, Bahá'í-inspired curriculum for youth and young adults. Project founders identify scientific ideas or theories as "Bahá'í-inspired" insofar as they have been examined in light of the Bahá'í writings and fit with the basic spiritual conception of the human being that is found there. Since Bahá'u'lláh has taught that science and religion agree, the process is seen as both scientific and Bahá'í in nature.

If the goal of spiritual education is seen as producing genuinely happy and autonomous human beings, then training young people to recognize and evaluate their own experiences of the world--and to acquire the motivation to make moral choices that will bring about their own spiritual well-being--is an important contribution to that end. It rests on the belief that people's capacities of mind, will, and heart, when properly developed, will enable them to recognize the truth about reality, to pursue goodness, and to love and be faithful to beauty. The program of moral education conceived by the project begins this development with an examination of the origin of the most common notions about human value. The curriculum takes students through a critical examination of the concept of human value found in collectivism and individualism and then moves on to look at the spiritual conception of human value as an alternative to these two extremes. In the latter system, it is posited that the soul, which has inherent capacities not determined by external forces as in the other two systems, is directly created by God and thus possesses intrinsic universal value. Acting in accordance with this spiritual conception of human value gives meaning to individual life and also creates social harmony--without sacrifice of the quality and meaning of individual life nor

the overall good of the collectivity.

One exercise that reinforces the spiritual conception of human value and assists students to learn to make moral choices has them compile a list of all their possessions, following which they are asked to determine which ones cannot be taken away by circumstances of life beyond their control. Through this exercise students learn that, in fact, there are no material possessions that

cannot be taken away and that the proper relationship between the self and material objects is not "possession"--which is largely illusory--but rather "legitimate use." Knowing this, individuals can reevaluate their relationship to material things, which, of course, are not ends in themselves. Students can also formulate from this exercise a general moral principle concerning their interactions: that a higher or more valuable thing should never be sacrificed or made a means to obtain a lesser or less valuable thing.

Through the means developed by the project, students can experience spiritual growth, the true purpose of moral education, as a process of creative discovery.

## Conclusion

While the five efforts surveyed in this article represent a wide range of undertakings to promote moral education and training in different parts of the world, they hold several common tenets of belief: first, that each human being is a noble creation--a "mine rich in gems of inestimable value," in the words of Bahá'u'lláh, which education alone can bring to the surface; second, that the individual, who must take responsibility for his or her own actions, can be trained in how to make decisions that will foster spiritual growth; and third, that the individual, his or her family, and society as a whole will benefit

from such training. The moral person is a social actor who, having effected change in himself or herself, also has responsibility to contribute to the transformation of the social order.

At a talk He gave in Paris in 1912 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of the "patient lives of active service" through which "the elect of God" have "brought light into the world." He exhorted His listeners,

Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers. Turn towards God, and seek always to do that which is right and noble. Enrich the poor, raise the fallen, comfort the sorrowful, bring healing to the sick, reassure the fearful, rescue the oppressed, bring hope to the hopeless, shelter the destitute!

This is the work of a true Bahá'í, and this is what is expected of him. If we strive to do all this, then are we true Bahá'ís, but if we neglect it, we are not followers of the Light, and we have no right to the name.

God, who sees all hearts, knows how far our lives are the fulfillment of our

words.240

With this high ideal in mind, Bahá'ís strive to promote moral as well as material development of the peoples of the world.

### Human Rights

Over the five decades since the United Nations was founded, there has emerged a growing understanding that the recognition and protection of human rights at the international level plays a fundamental role in the promotion of peace, democracy, social progress and economic prosperity.

Starting in 1948 with the all-important Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this understanding has given rise to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, which together are also known as the International Bill of Rights, as well as some 75 other conventions which identify and promote the rights of women and children, the right to freedom of worship, and development, to name but a few.

Viewed as a whole, it is worth noting that the international movement to recognize and codify human rights has risen in parallel with the everincreasing integration and interdependence of nations, cultures, and previously isolated peoples. The development of international human rights, in this sense, must be seen as yet another feature of the increasing maturation of humanity. And the continued development and emphasis on human rights is, likewise, a pre-condition for our continued advancement and progress.

For the worldwide Bahá'í community, activities in relation to international human rights have for the most part fallen into two areas: 1) the promotion of the concept of universal human rights in general; and, 2) efforts to protect specific Bahá'í communities that have been deprived of human rights, a process which has focused primarily on the persecution of the Bahá'í community of Iran.

As recognized in 1993 at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. Upon reflection, it can be seen that these concepts stem from our underlying sense of oneness and the subconscious recognition that we are all parts of an interrelated whole.

The basic human rights which flow from this principle, as noted, are now widely recognized. They include, of course, the understanding that human rights must be applied irrespective of differences of racial background, ethnic origin, religious belief or national identity. They encompass the equality of women and men. And they comprehend that all individuals worldwide possess the same rights to freedom of investigation, information and religious practice. They also include an understanding that basic social, economic and cultural rights, such as the right to basic necessities such as food, shelter, and health care, also stem from the understanding that the benefits of medicine,

science and technology, the products of agriculture, and the knowledge that is imparted by education come from a collective process of evolution that has led to the creation of our present day civilization. The fruits of civilization are

the birthright of all, and steps to promote and protect human rights should keep this understanding clearly in the foreground.

Bahá'í communities have promoted these and other similar concepts primarily at the international level, by participating at key United Nations conferences and meetings on human rights. At the local and national levels, Bahá'ís have promoted these ideas largely through the promotion of basic Bahá'í teachings, which are themselves supportive of these concepts. Indeed, Bahá'ís understand that at the most fundamental level, human rights are God-given rights.

In recent years, the systematic persecution of the Iranian Bahá'í community by the Government there has also been a major focus of Bahá'í activity in the realm of human rights as Bahá'ís around the world have sought to draw attention to the plight of their co-religionists.

Since 1979, Bahá'ís in Iran have suffered intimidation, discrimination, violence and even death simply because its religious beliefs differ from those held by the authorities. More than 200 Bahá'ís have been killed or executed and thousands more have been imprisoned, fired from their jobs, or deprived of access to education. All national Bahá'í administrative structures have been banned by the Government of Iran, and holy places, shrines and cemeteries have been confiscated or destroyed.

In response to international condemnation, the most violent aspects of this persecution had abated by the early 1990s -- although unequivocal evidence of a centrally orchestrated governmental campaign against the Bahá'í community came to light in 1993. Recent events, including the execution of a Bahá'í in Mashhad in July 1998, and the arrest in late September 1998 of 32 faculty members of the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education--an effort to provide education for Bahá'í youth who are denied educational opportunities by the Iranian authorities--demonstrate that whatever the official assertion of the Iranian Government, the Bahá'í community of Iran remains unprotected, and officials in that country can persecute the Bahá'ís at will and with impunity.

International efforts to ensure the basic human rights of the Iranian Bahá'ís continue. The successes so far in ameliorating what would otherwise have surely been the wholesale genocide of the Bahá'í community in Iran offers an important model for protecting minorities populations in general.

The response of Bahá'ís to this persecution provides a glimpse into the community's spiritual reserves. In June 1983, when the persecution was reaching its peak, the Iranian authorities paraded the entire national leadership of the Tudeh (communist) Party on national television. The prisoners willingly confessed to every crime charged against them, and

begged for their lives. During that same eventful month ten Bahá'í women and girls were subject to similar physical and mental abuse in an effort to coerce them to recant their Faith. Their persecutors did not dare to put them on television because these brutalities produced not a vestige of compliance.

#### Advancement of Women

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge."

This position, taken from a statement on peace written by the Universal House of Justice in 1985, reiterates the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh that society must reorganize its life to give practical expression to the principle of equality between women and men.

Since its inception nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, the Bahá'í Faith has taught the equality of the sexes. Indeed, the Bahá'í Faith is the only independent world religion whose Founder has stated unequivocally that women and men are equal.

"Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God," said Bahá'u'lláh.

In accordance with this teaching, the worldwide Bahá'í community has been at the forefront of the movement to advance the rights of women for more than a century. And the Bahá'í approach, which advocates full equality and a firm sense of partnership between women and men, is increasingly recognized as being on the cutting edge of women's issues worldwide.

Bahá'ís understand, for example, that the values which women bring to human interaction are necessary to the proper functioning and advancement of modern society, and that qualities that have formerly been associated with the feminine sides of our natures--such as compassion, nurturing, cooperation and empathy--will be increasingly important in creating a peaceful, just, and sustainable world civilization.

Bahá'í institutions around the world promote various educational efforts for women, and work to raise the consciousness of both women and men about this fundamental equality. Many of its schools, learning centers, and grassroots social and economic development projects specifically include the promotion of women's advancement into their curricula or agendas.

Women compose approximately 30 percent of elected leadership in Bahá'í

councils at the national level, comparing favorably to national parliaments, which average 10 percent women worldwide.

Bahá'í women have long been active in the struggle to promote women's equality. The Bahá'í Faith was founded in 1844 in Iran and among its early followers was Táhirih, a Persian poet and scholar. In 1852, she laid down her life in defense of her beliefs, which included her right to lay aside the veil and to work for the complete emancipation of women.

Laura Dreyfus-Barney, a member of the first Bahá'í community in Europe, was among the leading figures in promoting the advancement of women in the early years of this century. In the years after World War I, she focused her attention on mobilizing women for peace. She represented the International Council of Women (ICW) in the League of Nations and was President of ICW's Peace and Arbitration Commission.

After World War II, Ms. Dreyfus-Barney played an important role in the development of the relationship between the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Martha Root, an American journalist from Pennsylvania, circled the globe several times in the 1920s and 1930s to promote the cause of women's equality--along with the other progressive principles of the Bahá'í Faith.

With

a unique facility for approaching high dignitaries, she took the Bahá'í message of interdependence and oneness to kings, queens, presidents, ministers, statesmen, professors, clergymen and poets in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia.

Since the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) obtained consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1970, it has cooperated officially with the United Nations in its work to improve the status of women throughout the world.

The Bahá'í International Community has worked directly with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and its Secretariat, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women. In addition, the BIC has established close, cooperative relationships with other international nongovernmental organizations at the United Nations that seek to promote the advancement of women.

Initially the BIC contributed to the work of the United Nations by submitting statements to United Nations bodies, and in particular the Commission on the Status of Women, on various aspects of equality. Such statements have addressed the education of girls, the importance of elevating the status of women as mothers, the relevance of women's participation at local, national and international levels to the establishment of world peace.

As part of International Women's Year in 1975, the BIC participated in the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City. Two Bahá'í representatives were officially accredited to attend the Conference and nine representatives attended the NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) Tribune, the parallel meeting for non-governmental organizations.

During the next ten years, designated the United Nations Decade for Women, the Bahá'í International Community developed a solid reputation for its work promoting the advancement of women. BIC representatives served on NGO committees on the Status of Women in New York, Geneva and Vienna and participated in the World Conferences on Women held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1980, in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985, and in Beijing, China in 1995.

The Community's representatives have also been involved in planning parallel activities for NGOs at these meetings. Relationships were established with major organizations worldwide whose focus is also the promotion of the advancement of women.

The BIC collaborates on an increasing basis with UN agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA).  
Perspectives and Profiles

#### Perspectives

Since its inception, the Bahá'í Faith has been intimately concerned with questions addressing the reconstruction and advancement of society. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are principally directed toward effecting a transformation in the spiritual and material conditions of humankind--a transformation that Bahá'u'lláh states "will ensure the freedom, well-being, tranquillity, exaltation and advancement of all men."

With every passing decade concepts that were bewildering or unthinkable when Bahá'u'lláh first identified and elaborated them have increasingly been accepted by leaders of thought and public opinion. Bahá'ís are therefore confident that the vision of global peace and prosperity set forth in the Bahá'í teachings will eventually be embraced by humanity.

Whether in areas of governance, community organization and identity, economic justice, social and economic development, the advancement of women, moral development, or human rights, the Bahá'í teachings offer unique perspectives on contemporary global trends and movements of social change. In this section, individual Bahá'í authors examine a variety of subjects of current interest. Also included are statements by various National Bahá'í institutions around the world. Essays by individual authors do not represent the official view of any Bahá'í institution.

#### Profiles

Around the globe, individual Bahá'ís and Bahá'í communities are giving creative expression to insights found in the Bahá'í teachings. "Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self," wrote Bahá'u'lláh. Whether in the arts, youth initiatives, or in formal involvement with the United Nations, Bahá'ís everywhere are seeking to promote greater understanding and dialogue among diverse cultures, religions, and peoples. This section highlights a few of the many activities undertaken by Bahá'ís.

Footnotes

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), p. 20.

return

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), p. 129.

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Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* (Bahá'í World Centre, 1972), p. 4.

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*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 149.

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*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 68.

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*Ibid.*, p. 27.

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'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), p. 172.

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*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 221.

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*The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968), p. 14.

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*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 109.

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*The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, p. 5.

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'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1912. 11th ed. 1969), p. 136.

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*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 20.

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Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 3 January 1982.

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*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 89.

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Ibid., p. 125.

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Adapted from William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 74-75, 123-26.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 64-65.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 261-62.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 3d ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), pp. 220-21.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 177-79.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 49.

return

Adapted from William S. Hatcher and Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 87-89.

return

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 49-50.

return

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 105-06.

return

In this connection, Bahá'ís regard Bahá'u'lláh as the "complete incarnation of the names and attributes of God." See Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 112.

return

`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 222.

return

Adapted from William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 115-123.

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An objective discussion of this fundamental question of the nature of what Bahá'ís refer to as the Manifestation of God is made more difficult by traditional loyalties. Orthodox followers of each Manifestation have tended to claim some kind of uniqueness or superiority for the Founder of their faith. For example, many Christians view Jesus Christ as God incarnate, consider Moses to be inferior Him in some way, and regard Muhammad as an imposter. A majority of orthodox Jews see Moses as the human vehicle

through which the Law of God was transmitted to humanity and consider Jesus Christ to be a false prophet. Muslims consider both Moses and Jesus Christ to be valid prophets, but the majority reject the Buddha and the Founders of other major faiths. For them, Muhammad was the last prophet whom God will send to man, and revelation of the Divine Will ended with the Qur'an.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 47-48.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp. 287-88.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, pp.59-60.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1922. 2nd edition 1982, p. 181.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 3d ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), pp. 151-52.

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Shoghi Effendi, *High Endeavours, Messages to Alaska* (National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Alaska, 1976), p. 71.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 157-59.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 230-31.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 164.

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Adapted from William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 81-84.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2d. rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 287-88.

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Shoghi Effendi, "The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh" in *World Order*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1972-73), p.7.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 158-59.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í

Publishing Trust, 1939. 2d rev. ed. 1976), p. 194.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, pp. 153-55.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks: Addresses given by `Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912, 11th ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), p. 91.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, pp. 81-82.

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From a letter date 27 February 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.

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Adapted from William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 99-104.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 70.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, p. 65.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, pp. 264-66.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, pp. 79-80.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), p. 143.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, p. 215.

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Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, published in Bahá'í News 102 (August 1936), p. 3.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 2d. rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 149.

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Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh p. 285.

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Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), p. 9.

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Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Trustworthiness: A Compilation of Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. 5.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 138.

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Trustworthiness, p. 5.

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Ibid., p. 2; and Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 25.

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Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 93-94.

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*The Hidden Words*, p. 3.

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Adapted from William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 108-114.

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'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), pp. 89-90. However, there are inherent limits to human spiritual development, whether in this world or the next. The Bahá'í writings affirm that human beings can approach but never attain a state of absolute perfection. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "If it were possible to reach a limit of perfection, then one of the realities of the beings might reach the condition of being independent of God, and the contingent might attain to the condition of the absolute. But for every being there is a point which it cannot overpass...he who is in the condition of servitude, however far he may progress in gaining limitless perfections, will never reach the condition of Deity...All that he can do is, in the condition of servitude, to attain endless perfections..." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) pp. 230-31.

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'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Divine Art of Living* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944), p. 92.

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'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 215 (1981 ed.).

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Bahá'u'lláh explained that references to Satan in the Scriptures of earlier religions are symbolic and should not be taken literally. Satan is the personification of man's lower nature which can destroy him if it is not brought into harmony with his spiritual nature. There is, in fact, a well-known philosophical problem concerning God's goodness and omnipotence and the possible existence of a Satan. This problem is discussed in some detail in both the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the same way, heaven and hell are, Bahá'u'lláh taught, not literal places. Rather, they symbolize the psychological and spiritual states of being close to God or far from him. Heaven is the natural consequence of spiritual progress while Hell represents the results of failure to progress spiritually.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 214-215 (1981 ed.).

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In this connection, Bahá'u'lláh has said: "...man should know his own self and

know those things which lead to loftiness or to baseness, to shame or to honor." Bahá'u'lláh in *Bahá'í World Faith* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust,

1976), p. 167.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), par. 1.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 4-5.

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A.L.M. Nicolas, *Siyyid Ali-Muhammad dit le Báb* (Paris: Librairie Critique, 1908), pp. 203-4, 376. Quoted in *The Dawnbreakers*, p. 515 (footnote).

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Throughout the past century, the Bahá'ís of Iran have been persecuted. With the triumph of the Islamic revolution in 1979, this persecution has been systematized. More than 200 Bahá'ís have been executed or killed, hundreds more have been imprisoned, and tens of thousands have been deprived of jobs, pensions, businesses, and educational opportunities. All national and local Bahá'í administrative institutions have been banned by the Government, and Bahá'í holy places, cemeteries and community properties have been confiscated, vandalized, or destroyed.

The 300,000-member Bahá'í community is the largest religious minority in that country, and Bahá'ís have been oppressed solely because of religious intolerance. Islamic leaders in Iran and elsewhere have long viewed the Bahá'í Faith as a threat to Islam and have branded the Bahá'ís as heretics.

The

progressive stands of the Faith on women's rights, independent investigation of truth, and education have particularly rankled Muslim clerics.

In June 1983, for example, the Iranian authorities arrested ten Bahá'í women and girls. The charge against them: teaching children's classes on the Bahá'í Faith -- the equivalent of Sunday school in the West.

The women were subjected to intense physical and mental abuse in an effort to coerce them to recant their Faith -- an option that is always pressed on Bahá'í prisoners. Yet, like most Bahá'ís who have been arrested in Iran, they

refused to deny their beliefs. As a result, they were executed.

Similar attempts to force Iranian Bahá'ís to deny their beliefs have continued,

although the Government has recently refrained from the worst human rights

violations - killings and imprisonments - in the face of international pressure.

As recently as August 2004, Iranian authorities sought to force Iranian Bahá'í youth to identify themselves as Muslims by pre-printing "Islam" on college examination forms after holding out the prospect that Bahá'ís would be allowed to return to university after two decades of exclusion. Because Bahá'ís do not as a matter of religious principle misrepresent their faith, the move effectively extends the ban on Bahá'í students at national universities

- a ban that has sought to deprive an entire generation of higher education. In early 2004, as well, the Government allowed the destruction of two important Bahá'í holy places. In April, the gravesite of Quddus, a prominent figure in early Baha'i history, was razed to the ground, despite protests from Baha'is at the local, national, and international levels. In June 2004, the Government destroyed another holy site, the house of Mirza Abbas Nuri, the father of Bahá'u'lláh.

The destruction of that building was made all the more terrible because Mirza Abbas Nuri was widely known as a great nineteenth century statesman, calligrapher and literary figure. His house was considered a precious example of Islamic-Iranian architecture, "a matchless model of art, spirituality, and architecture," as one Iranian commentator said.

These recent episodes reflect the continuation of a policy established by the Government of Iran that systematically seeks to destroy Iran's Bahá'í community as a viable entity. That policy came to light in 1993 with the discovery of a secret memorandum aimed at establishing a coordinated policy regarding "the Bahá'í question." Drafted by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and signed by Ali Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the document states unequivocally that the "progress and development" of the Bahá'í community "shall be blocked."

Such a statement flatly contravenes the Government's oft-repeated contention that it has no campaign of persecution directed against the Bahá'ís. To this day, the Government has not retracted this document or offered any indication that it has changed its mind about its long-held and deep-seated determination to eradicate the Bahá'í community of Iran.

Bahá'ís in many different localities in Iran are still subjected to arbitrary arrest, short-term detention, and persistent harassment, intimidation and discrimination. All attempts to obtain redress are systematically denied as officials continue to confiscate Bahá'í homes, deny them their rightfully earned pensions and inheritance, block their access to employment or impede their private business activities. The authorities also interfere with classes given to Bahá'í youth in private houses and persist in banning the sacred institutions that perform, in the Bahá'í Faith, important functions reserved

to

clergy in other religions.

International pressure has greatly helped to protect Iran's Bahá'í community from wholesale eradication. Since 1979, thousands of newspaper articles about the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran have appeared around the world. Prominent international organizations, including the European Parliament and several national legislatures, have passed resolutions condemning or expressing concern about the Bahá'ís of Iran. Most important, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly have pressed the Iranian regime to observe international human rights covenants with resolutions -- resolutions that have paid specific attention to the Bahá'í situation.

In the face of such pressure, the Iranian Government in the late 1980s reduced the rate of executions and the number of Bahá'ís held in prison.

The most recent documented killing of a Bahá'í in Iran was carried out on 21 July 1998, when Mr. Rúhullah Rawhani, a Bahá'í businessman and father of four in Mashhad, was executed. Mr. Rawhani was not accorded any legal process or access to a lawyer and no sentence had been announced.

Yet, even though the killing of Bahá'ís in Iran has subsided, there is no evidence that conditions for the Bahá'í community in Iran have changed. The Bahá'ís of Iran continue to be denied fundamental human rights, including the right to practice their religion freely. The full emancipation of this peaceful, law-abiding community therefore remains a central concern of Bahá'ís around the world.

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Statement prepared by the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, Haifa, Israel, 3 March 1995.

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Remarks by Deputy Luis Gushiken and Deputy Rita Camata. "Sessão Solene da Câmara Federal em Homenagem ao Centenario da Ascensão de Bahá'u'lláh", Brasília, 28 May 1992.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), p. 69.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 14.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, section CXXXI.

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'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 74, 126.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, section CXI.

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Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 79.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, no. 2 from the Arabic.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, section IV.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, section IV.

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A Statement of the Bahá'í International Community on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations, Bahá'í International Community, United Nations Office, New York, October 1995

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Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. 1992. *An Agenda for Peace: Peace-making and Peace-Keeping*. (Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council, January 31, New York: United Nations.)

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Surely the preamble to the charter of the United Nations is among the most inspired passages in the history of human governance:

"WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED

"to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

"to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

"to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

"to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

"AND FOR THESE ENDS

"to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and

"to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

"to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institutions of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and

"to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

"HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS.

"Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations."

United Nations. 1994. Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice. United Nations Department of Public Information. DPI/511 - 93243 - April 1994 - 40M.

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The World Bank. 1994. World Development Report. (Oxford: Oxford University Press.) pp. 162 - 163.

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Ibid., p. 77.

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There have been a number of recent proposals which discuss the need for reforms in the United Nations system within a particular issue area. Our Common Future, the report of The World Commission on Environment and Development, for example, suggested a number of changes, such as the creation of a special UN "Board for Sustainable Development" to coordinate UN action in promoting development while protecting the environment.

The World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.)

Likewise, the report of The Brandt Commission, Common Crisis North-South: Co-operation for World Recovery, makes suggestions for reform in the critical area of finance, trade and energy, as they affect North-South imbalances.

The Brandt Commission, Common Crisis North-South: Co-operation for World Recovery. (London: Pan Books, 1983.)

The literature proposing widespread changes in the United Nations is also voluminous and continues to grow, especially in anticipation of the 50th

anniversary of the United Nations. The first major and serious reassessments of the United Nations began in the 1950s, in anticipation of the 10th anniversary of the Charter. In this regard the publication in 1958 of *World Peace Through World Law* by Louis B. Sohn and Grenville Clark, which was among the first solid proposals to suggest eliminating the veto power, must be considered a milestone.

Grenville Clark, and Louis B. Sohn, *World Peace Through World Law*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966.)

More recent proposals range from The Stockholm Initiative, which offers a generalist vision of what might be done to strengthen the United Nations, to Harold Stassen's recent *United Nations: a Working Paper for Restructuring*, which gives an article-by-article proposal for rewriting the UN Charter. Benjamin Ferencz's latest book, *New Legal Foundations for Global Survival*, offers a series of hard-headed and legal-minded suggestions for reform based on the premise that nations, peoples and individuals must be free to pursue their destinies in whatever way they may see fit - providing it does not jeopardize or destroy the fundamental human rights of others to live in peace and dignity.

The Stockholm Initiative on Global Security and Governance 1991. *Common Responsibility in the 1990's*. (Stockholm: Prime Minister's Office, Stockholm, Sweden.)

Harold Stassen, *United Nations: A Working Paper for Restructuring*. (Minneapolis: Learner Publications Company, 1994.)

Benjamin Ferencz, *New Legal Foundations for Global Survival*. (Oceana Publications, 1994)

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The Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.)

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Many thinkers have recognized the reality of oneness and understood its implications for the development of human society, including paleontologist Richard Leakey: "We are one species, one people. Every individual on this earth is a member of 'homo sapiens sapiens', and the geographical variations we see among peoples are simply biological nuances on the basic theme. The human capacity for culture permits its elaboration in widely different and colorful ways. The often very deep differences between those cultures should not be seen as divisions between people. Instead, cultures should be interpreted for what they really are: the ultimate declaration of belonging to the human species."

Richard E. Leakey, and Rodger Lewin, *Origins: What new discoveries reveal about the emergence of our species and its possible future*. (New York: Dutton, 1977.)

In general terms, the writings of Shoghi Effendi offer a thorough and

extended exposition on the concept of the oneness of humanity. A brief summary of the concept, as Bahá'ís view it, can be found in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1938.) pp. 42-43.

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We are not alone in making this proposal. The Commission on Global Governance writes in *Our Global Neighborhood*: "Our recommendation is that the General Assembly should agree to hold a World Conference on Governance in 1998, with its decisions to be ratified and put into effect by 2000."

*The Report of the Commission on Global Governance, Our Global Neighborhood*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1995.) p.351.

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Two commonly used maxims illustrate this principle. "Small is beautiful," a maxim coined in the early '70s as an economic principle, applies equally to governance. Schumacher explains: "In the affairs of men, there always appears to be a need for at least two things simultaneously, which, on the face of it, seem to be incompatible and to exclude one another. We always need both freedom and order. We need the freedom of lots and lots of small, autonomous unities, and, at the same time, the orderliness of large-scale, possibly global, unity and coordination."

E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1973.) p. 65.

"Think globally, act locally," a slogan promoted by environmental and community development activists, captures a perspective in which the need for overall global coordination is carefully balanced against the need for local and national autonomy.

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"Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society... [a system of world governance] seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand,

and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other."

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1974.) pp. 41-42.

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Writing in the 1930s, Shoghi Effendi, who then led the worldwide Bahá'í community, sketched out some of the functions and responsibilities for a future world legislature. Among other things, he wrote: "a world legislature, whose members will, as trustees of the whole of mankind... enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples."

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1974.) p. 203.

This view is shared by such scholars as Jan Tinbergen, winner of the 1969 Nobel prize for Economics, who stated, "Mankind's problems can no longer be solved by national governments. What is needed is a World Government. This can best be achieved by strengthening the United Nations system."

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Human Development Report 1994. Global Governance for the 21st Century*. (New York: Oxford University Press.) p.88.

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Bahá'í International Community. *Proposals to the United Nations for Charter Revision*. May 23, 1955.

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Throughout His writings, Bahá'u'lláh consistently uses the terms "order", "world order" and "new world order" to describe the ongoing and momentous series of changes in the political, social and religious life of the world. In the

late 1860s, He wrote: "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System - the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed."

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*. Translated by Shoghi Effendi and a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992.)

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'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. Trans. Marzieh Gail. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1957.) p. 24.

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'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Divine Art of Living* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944), pp. 109-110.

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Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 62.

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United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), *States*

of Disarray: The Social Effects of Globalization. (London: KPC Group. 1995) pp. 106-109.

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There are many ways that such a Commission, or even the World Legislature itself, might go about determining fair and just borders for all nations. But as

daunting as the task may seem, it is an important part of the process of building a new order. Wrote 'Abdu'l-Bahá "True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns -- the shining exemplars of devotion and determination -- shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the

human race. This supreme and noble undertaking -- the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world -- should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this allembicing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure."

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization. Trans. Marzieh Gail. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1957.) pp. 64-65.

return

According to a recent article in The New York Times, charitable giving in the United States in 1994 rose by 3.6 percent to \$130 billion.

Karen W. Arenson, "Charitable Giving Rose 3.6% in 1994, Philanthropy Trust Says," The New York Times, Thursday, 25 May 1995, sec. A, p.22.

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"Regarding the whole question of an International Language.... We, as Bahá'ís, are very anxious to see a universal auxiliary tongue adopted as soon as possible; we are not the protagonists of any one language to fill this post.

If the governments of the world agree on an existing language, or a constructed, new tongue, to be used internationally, we would heartily support it because we desire to see this step in the unification of the human race take place as soon as possible."

Shoghi Effendi, *Directives of the Guardian*. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.) p.39.

In making this proposal, we wish to call attention to the term "auxiliary." The Bahá'í teachings value and promote cultural diversity, not uniformity. At this point in history, then, we do not envision imposing a single language worldwide. Rather, what we imagine is that peoples and nations would keep their own local and national languages -- while at the same time be encouraged to learn a universal language. Certainly such a universal language should ultimately be taught, as a required subject, in all of the world's schools. But this should in no way detract from legitimate expressions of national and local linguistic and cultural diversity.

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"The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script," wrote Bahá'u'lláh in the late-1800s. "When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he were entering his own home."

Shoghi Effendi, trans., *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1983.) p.250.

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In a "special contribution" to the 1994 Human Development Report, James Tobin, winner of the 1981 Nobel Prize for Economics, observes that "a permanent single currency" would eliminate much if not all of the turbulence currently associated with the huge amount of currency speculation on world markets today. Observing that such a single world currency is probably a long way off, he proposes as an interim measure an "international uniform tax" on spot transactions in foreign exchange.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Human Development Report 1994. A Tax on International Currency Transactions*. (New York: Oxford University Press.) p.70.

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The principle of collective security was put forth by Bahá'u'lláh over a century ago in letters to the kings and rulers of the world: "Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should anyone among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice."

Shoghi Effendi, trans. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. (Wilmette,

Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1976.) p.254.

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The Report of the Independent Working Group on the Future of the United Nations. The United Nations in its Second Half-Century. (Yale University Press Service, 1995.) p. 16.

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Glenview Foundation, The Stassen Draft Charter for a New United Nations to Emerge from the Original, to Serve World Peace and Progress for the Next Forty Years. (Philadelphia: Glenview Foundation. 1985.)

Grenville Clark and Louis B. Sohn, World Peace Through World Law. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966.)

Keith Hindell, "Reform of the United Nations?" in The World Today: Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. (United Kingdom, Feb. 1992.) Vol. 48, No. 2. pp. 30-33.

John Logue, "New World Order Means Reformed UN", World Federalist News, July 1992.

Benjamin B. Ferencz and Ken Keyes Jr., Planethood: The Key to Your Future. (Coos Bay, Oregon: Love Line Books. 1991.)

Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. 1992. An Agenda for Peace: Peace-making and Peace-Keeping. Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council, January 31, New York: United Nations.

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This is not to say that steps to ban such weapons should await the full development and deployment of such a Force. We wholeheartedly support current steps to renew the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to firmly establish a comprehensive test ban, as well as any further efforts to eliminate nuclear, chemical and/or biological weapons. Likewise, stronger efforts must be made to restrict and control conventional weapons such as land mines, which kill indiscriminately.

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Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 106.

return

Mahbub ul Haq, 1994. Senior Advisor to UNDP Administrator. Team Leader of the Group that prepares the UNDP annual Human Development Reports which have brought, in recent years, fresh insights to development theory and practice, including a new concept on human security

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Erskine Childers, ed. Challenges to the United Nations: Building a Safer World. (New York: St. Martin's Press. 1994.) pp. 21-25.

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John Huddleston, The Search for a Just Society. (Kidlington, Oxford: George Ronald. 1989.)

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About 75 years ago 'Abdu'l-Bahá offered the following suggestions for a future world court: "the national assemblies of each country and nation -- that is to say parliaments -- should elect two or three persons who are the choicest of that nation, and are well informed concerning international laws and the relations between governments and aware of the essential needs of the world of humanity in this day. The number of these representatives should be in proportion to the number of inhabitants of that country. The election of these souls who are chosen by the national assembly, that is, the parliament, must be confirmed by the upper house, the congress and the cabinet and also by the president or monarch so these persons may be the elected ones of all the nation and the government. The Supreme Tribunal will be composed of these people, and all mankind will thus have a share therein, for every one of these delegates is fully representative of his nation. When the Supreme Tribunal gives a ruling on any international question, either unanimously or by majority rule, there will no longer be any pretext for the plaintiff or ground of objection for the defendant. In case any of the governments or nations, in the execution of the irrefutable decision of the Supreme Tribunal, be negligent or dilatory, the rest of the nations will rise up against it, because all the governments and nations of the world are the supporters of this Supreme Tribunal. Consider what a firm foundation this is! But by a limited and restricted League the purpose will not be realized as it ought and should."

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. Translated by a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre and by Marzieh Gail. (Great Britain: W & J Mackay Ltd. 1978.) pp. 306-307.

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At the present time, for example, the Court's jurisdiction is limited to 1) cases

which the parties refer to it jointly by special agreement, 2) matters concerning a treaty or convention in force which provides for reference to the Court, and 3) specified classes of legal disputes between States for which they have recognized the jurisdiction of the Court as compulsory.

Europa World Year Book 1994. Vol. I. International Court of Justice. p.22.

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Shoghi Effendi, trans. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1983.) p.260.

"The primary most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time."

'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Secret of Divine Civilization. Trans. Marzieh Gail. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1957.) p.109.

"This same difference is noticeable among animals; some have been domesticated, educated, others left wild. The proof is clear that the world of nature is imperfect, the world of education perfect. That is to say, man is rescued from the exigencies of nature by training and culture; consequently, education is necessary, obligatory. But education is of various kinds. There is a training and development of the physical body which ensures strength and growth. There is intellectual education or mental training for which schools and colleges are founded. The third kind of education is that of the spirit. Through the breaths of the Holy Spirit man is uplifted into the world of moralities and illumined by the lights of divine bestowals. The moral world is only attained through the effulgence of the Sun of Reality and the quickening life of the divine spirit."

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in a Talk delivered in St. Paul on 20 September 1912. The Promulgation of Universal Peace. p.329-330.

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Governments and their partners must bear in mind that material equality is neither achievable nor desirable. Absolute equality is a chimera. At various points along the way, there will nevertheless be the necessity for the redistribution of some of the world's wealth. For, indeed, it is becoming increasingly obvious that unbridled capitalism does not provide the answer either. Some regulation and redistribution is necessary to promote material justice. In this regard, a tax on income is, in principle, one of the fairest and

most equitable means. There must also be a role for the voluntary sharing of wealth -- both at an individual and an institutional level. Equal opportunities for economic advancement and progress, however, must be woven into the very fabric of the new order. Ultimately, the most important regulation on any economic system is the moral regulation that begins in the hearts and minds of people.

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The establishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a commendable first step in the right direction and may be useful in the long run, as one of the tools that could be the basis for funding Agenda 21, if its operational scale is enlarged and its mandate redefined.

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World Conference on Human Rights. Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. 14-25 June 1993. Vienna-Austria.

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A further elaboration of this concept can be found in The Prosperity of Humankind, a statement of the Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information, published in February 1995: "The activity most intimately linked to the consciousness that distinguishes human nature is the individual's exploration of reality for himself or herself. The freedom to investigate the purpose of existence and to develop the endowments of human nature that make it achievable requires protection. Human beings must be free to know. That such freedom is often abused and such abuse

grossly encouraged by features of contemporary society does not detract in any degree from the validity of the impulse itself.

"It is this distinguishing impulse of human consciousness that provides the moral imperative for the enunciation of many of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration and the related Covenants. Universal education, freedom of movement, access to information, and the opportunity to participate in political life are all aspects of its operation that require explicit guarantee by the international community. The same is true of freedom of thought and belief, including religious liberty, along with the right to hold opinions and express these opinions appropriately.

"Since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This trusteeship constitutes the moral foundation of most of the other rights -- principally economic and social -- which the instruments of the United Nations are attempting similarly to define. The security of the family and the home, the ownership of property, and the right to privacy are all implied in such a trusteeship. The obligations on the part of the community extend to the provision of employment, mental and physical health care, social security, fair wages, rest and recreation, and a host of other reasonable expectations on the part of the individual members of society.

"The principle of collective trusteeship creates also the right of every person to expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy the protection of national and international law. Much like the role played by the gene pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment, the immense wealth of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social and economic development of a human race experiencing its collective coming-of-age. It represents a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global civilization. On the one hand, cultural expressions need to be protected from suffocation by the materialistic influences currently holding sway. On the other, cultures must be enabled to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of civilization, free of manipulation for partisan political ends."

Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information, *The Prosperity of Humankind*. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre. 1995.)

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Ibid, p. 85.

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Ultimately, respect for human rights must begin in the family: "Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the

family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, all fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families. Therefore, as strife and dissension destroy a family and prevent its progress, so nations are destroyed and advancement hindered."

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912.* Comp. Howard MacNutt. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1982.) p.157.

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"When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind."

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace.* Comp. Howard MacNutt. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1982.) pp. 174-175.

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"Let it be known once more that until woman and man recognize and realize equality, social and political progress here or anywhere will not be possible. For the world of humanity consists of two parts or members: one is woman; the other is man. Until these two members are equal in strength, the oneness of humanity cannot be established, and the happiness and felicity of mankind will not be a reality. God willing, this is to be so." From a Talk by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Federation of Women's Clubs, Chicago, Illinois on 2 May 1912.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace.* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1982.) p.77.

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"The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting -- force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals -- or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced."

'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in John E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, p. 156., 4th rev. ed., 1976, Wilmette: Bahá'í Books, published by Pyramid Publications for Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

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This principle, that women and girls should receive priority over men and boys in access to education, has been a long-standing principle in the Bahá'í teachings. Speaking in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: "In proclaiming the oneness of mankind [Bahá'u'lláh] taught that men and women are equal in the sight of God and that there is no distinction to be made between them. The only difference between them now is due to lack of education and training. If woman is given equal opportunity of education, distinction and estimate of inferiority will disappear.... Furthermore, the education of women is of greater importance than the education of men, for they are the mothers of the race, and mothers rear the children. The first teachers of children are the mothers. Therefore, they must be capably trained in order to educate both sons and daughters. There are many provisions in the words of Bahá'u'lláh in regard to this.

"He promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes."

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. Comp. Howard MacNutt. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1982.) pp. 174-175.

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Lawrence H. Summers, Vice President & Chief Economist for the World Bank, *Investing in All the People*. 1992. Also, USAID. 1989. *Technical Reports in Gender and Development. Making the Case for the Gender Variable: Women and the Wealth and Well-being of Nations*. Office of Women in Development.

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Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. Translated by a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre and by Marzieh Gail. (Great Britain: W & J. Mackay Ltd. 1978.) p.302.

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The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. As adopted by the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, Kenya, 15-26 July 1985.

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Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. Translated by a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre and by Marzieh Gail. (Great Britain: W & J. Mackay Ltd. 1978.) p.303.

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The interfaith declaration entitled "Towards a Global Ethic," which was produced by an assembly of religious and spiritual leaders from virtually

every major world religion and spiritual movement at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, suggests that it is indeed possible for the world's religions to find much common ground in this regard. The declaration states: "We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic... There already

exist ancient guidelines for human behavior which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the condition for a sustainable world order."

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 12.

return

The Golden Rule, the teaching that we should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated, is an ethic variously repeated in all the great religions:

Buddhism: "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." Udana-Varqa, 5:18.

Zoroastrianism: "That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self." *Dadistan-i Dinik*, 94:5.

Judaism: "What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men. That is the entire Law, all the rest is commentary." *The Talmud, Shabbat*, 31a.

Hinduism: "This is the sum of all true righteousness: deal with others as thou wouldst thyself be dealt by. Do nothing to thy neighbour which thou wouldst not have him do to thee after." *The Mahabharata*.

Christianity: "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." *Luke* 6:31.

Islam: "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." *Sunnah*.

Taoism: The good man "ought to pity the malignant tendencies of others; to regard their gains as if they were his own, and their losses in the same way." *The Thai-Shang*.

Confucianism: "Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you." *Analects*, XV, 23

Bahá'í Faith: "He should not wish for others that which he doth not wish for himself, nor promise that which he doth not fulfill." *Gleanings*.

return

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1938.) p. 202.

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Bahá'u'lláh. *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre.

1978.) p.113.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. Translated by Habib Taherzadeh with the assistance of a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre. 1982.) p.167.

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The Commission on Global Governance writes: "As the world faces the need for enlightened responses to the challenges that arise on the eve of the new century, we are concerned at the lack of leadership over a wide spectrum of human affairs. At national, regional, and international levels, within communities and in international organizations, in governments and in nongovernmental bodies, the world needs credible and sustained leadership.

"It needs leadership that is proactive, not simply reactive, that is inspired, not

simply functional, that looks to the longer term and future generations for whom the present is held in trust. It needs leaders made strong by vision, sustained by ethics, and revealed by political courage that looks beyond the next election.

"This cannot be leadership confined within domestic walls. It must reach beyond country, race, religion, culture, language, life-style. It must embrace a

wider human constituency, be infused with a sense of caring for others, a sense of responsibility to the global neighborhood."

Report of the Commission on Global Governance, Our Global Neighborhood. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1995.) p.353.

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Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Translated by Shoghi Effendi. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1976.) p. 7.

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Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Selected Letters, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 202-03.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), pp. 163-65.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), sec. 225, pp. 283-84.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by `Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 60.

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Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 146.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks: Addresses Given by `Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912 (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 80-81.

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Muhammad-i-Zarandi (Nabil-i-Azam), The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation, translated from the Persian by Shoghi Effendi (1932; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 93.

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The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 147.

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Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 164.

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Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 102.

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The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 123.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 2d. rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 287-88.

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Isaiah 11:9

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The Dawn-Breakers, p. 65.

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Ibid., p. 251.

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Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By (Wilmette, Il: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944), p. 75.

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Quoted in John Ferraby, All Things Made New: A Comprehensive Outline of the Bahá'í Faith (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, revised edition 1975),

p.

199.

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The Dawn-Breakers, p. 463.

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Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 74.

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The Dawn-Breakers, p. 464

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Bahá'u'lláh, The Book of Certitude, 3d ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 234.

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A.L.M. Nicolas, see note 1.

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Shoghi Effendi, "The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh" in World Order, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1972-73), p.7.

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The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 126.

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Ibid., p. 124.

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Ibid., p. 127.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 2d rev. ed.

(Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 193.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í

Publishing Trust, 1938), p. 128.

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Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 46-49.

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46 Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985),

pp. 3-4.

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Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 249-50.

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Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 286-87.

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Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette:

Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 106.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace (Wilmette: Bahá'í

Publishing Trust, 1922. 2nd edition 1982), p. 238.

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The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 105.

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The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 109.

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Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 104.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í

Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 22.

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Such as the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys

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Such as The Hidden Words

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The Hidden Words, p. 9.

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Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 260.

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Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitab-i-qan, 3d ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust,

1982), pp. 199-200.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 2d ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 28.

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`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. 7, pp. 147-48.

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Statement on Bahá'u'lláh: His Life and Work (Bahá'í International Community 1992)

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61 Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 288.

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62 Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 24.

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63 Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 117.

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64 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 136.

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65 Bahá'í World Faith, *Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956), pp. 357-58.

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66 Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Ahd in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 219.

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67 Ibid.

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68 . Ibid., p. 222.

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69 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), para. 121.

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Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), p. 41.

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70 *Kitáb-i-Ahd*, p. 221.

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71 *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 135.

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