THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD

Overcoming Oppression and the Barriers that Divide

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

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Overcoming Oppression and the Barriers that Divide

Despite the achievements of the human race over the past century, ignorance, prejudice, oppression, and injustice continue to define humanity's collective experience, affecting virtually every land and population on earth. Drawing on the Bahá'í teachings and the experience of the Bahá'í community, historically and today, these articles, which span nearly a century, reflect the continuity of the Bahá'í endeavor to realize justice and unity and the evolution of Bahá'í thought over the course of time.

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The Bahá'í Response to Racial Injustice and Pursuit of Racial Unity 1912-1996 (Part 1)

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This is the first of two articles focusing on the American Bahá'í community's efforts to bring about racial unity. This first article is a historical survey of nine decades of earnest striving and struggle in the cause of justice. A second article, to be published in the future, will focus on the profound developments in the Bahá'í world over the past twenty-five years, beginning with 1996, and explore their implications for addressing racial injustice today and in the years to come. Photo: The second Bahá'í race amity convention in America, held in the auditorium of Central High School, Springfield, Massachusetts, 5-6 December 1921

Once again, as the United States finds itself embroiled in racial conflicts and decades-old struggles for racial justice and racial unity, the Bahá'í community of the United States stands ready to contribute its share to the healing of the nation's racial wounds. Neither the current racial crisis nor the current awakening is unique. Sadly, the United States has been here before.[2] The American people have learned many lessons but have also forgotten other lessons about how best to solve the underlying problems facing their racially polarized

society. For decades the country has seen countless efforts by brave and courageous individuals and dedicated organizations and institutions to hold back the relentless tide of racism. Many of these efforts have achieved great outcomes, but the tide has repeatedly rushed back in to test the resolve of every generation after the fall of Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, and the historic election of the first African American president.[3]

During some of America's worst racial crises, the Bahá'í community has joined the gallant struggle not only to hold back the tide of racism but also to build a multiracial community based on the recognition of the organic unity of the human race. Inspired by this spiritual and moral principle, the Bahá'í community, though relatively small in number and resources, has, for well over a century, sought ways to contribute to the nation's efforts to achieve racial justice and racial unity. This has been a work in progress, humbly shared with others. It is an ongoing endeavor, one the Bahá'í community recognizes as "a long and thorny path beset with pitfalls."[4]

As the Bahá'í community learns how best to build and sustain a multiracial community committed to racial justice and racial unity, it aspires to contribute to the broader struggle in society and to learn from the insights being generated by thoughtful individuals and groups working for a more just and united society.

This article provides a historical perspective on the Bahá'í community's contribution to racial unity in the United States between 1912 and 1996. The period of 1996 to the present—a "turning point" that the Universal House of Justice characterized as setting "the Bahá'í world on a new course"[5] and increasing its capacity to contribute to social progress—is still underway. During the past twenty-five years, the Bahá'í community's capacity to contribute to humanity's efforts to overcome deep-rooted social and spiritual ills has advanced significantly, and a subsequent article will focus on the implications of

this distinctive period on the community's ability to foster racial justice and unity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Visit: Laying the Foundation for Racial Unity, 1912-1921

The Bahá'í community's first major contribution to racial unity began in 1912 when 'Abdul'-Bahá, the son of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), visited the United States. His historic visit occurred during one of the worst periods of racial terrorism in the United States against African Americans. According to historians John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, "In the first year of the new century more than 100 Negroes were lynched and before the outbreak of World War 1 the number for the century was 1,100." [6] In 1906, riots broke out in Atlanta, Georgia, where "whites began to attack every Negro they saw."[7] That same year, race riots also occurred in Brownsville, Texas.[8] Two years later, in 1908, there were race riots in Springfield, Illinois.[9] And in 1910, nation-wide race riots erupted in the wake of the heavyweight championship fight between Jack Johnson (Black) and Jim Jeffries (White) in Reno, Nevada, in July of that year.[10]

Racial turmoil prevailed before and after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit. Yet, in this raging period of racial terrorism and conflict, He proclaimed a spiritual message of racial unity and love, and infused this message into the heart and soul of the fledgling Bahá'í community—a community still struggling to discover its role in promoting racial amity. Before His visit to the United States, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent a message to the 1911 Universal Race Conference in London in which He compared humankind to a flower garden adorned with different colors and shapes that "enhance the loveliness of each other."[11]

The next year, in April, 1912, He gave a talk at Howard University, the premier African-American university in Washington D.C. A companion who kept diaries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Western tours and

lectures wrote that whenever ‘Abdu’l-Bahá witnessed racial diversity, He was compelled to call attention to it. For example, His companion reported that, during His talk at Howard University, “here, as elsewhere, when both white and colored people were present, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seemed happiest.” Looking over the racially mixed audience, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had remarked: “Today I am most happy, for I see a gathering of the servants of God. I see white and black sitting together.”[12]

After two talks the next day, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was visibly tired as He prepared for the third talk. He was not planning to talk long; but, here again, when he saw Blacks and Whites in the audience, He became inspired. “A meeting such as this seems like a beautiful cluster of precious jewels—pearls, rubies, diamonds, sapphires. It is a source of joy and delight. Whatever is conducive to the unity of the world of mankind is most acceptable and praiseworthy.”[13] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then went on to elaborate on the theme of racial unity to an audience of Blacks and Whites who had rarely, if ever, heard such high praise for an interracial gathering. He said to those gathered that “in the world of humanity it is wise and seemly that all the individual members should manifest unity and affinity.”[14]

In the midst of a period saturated with toxic racist and anti-Black language, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offered positive racial images woven into a new language of racial unity and fellowship. He painted a picture for his interracial audience: “As I stand here tonight and look upon this assembly, I am reminded curiously of a beautiful bouquet of violets gathered together in varying colors, dark and light.”[15] To still another racially mixed audience, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commented: “In the clustered jewels of the races may the blacks be as sapphires and rubies and the whites as diamonds and pearls. The composite beauty of humanity will be witness in their unity and blending.”[16]

Through His words and actions, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá demonstrated the Bahá’í teachings on racial unity. Several examples stand out. Two Bahá’ís,

Ali-Kuli Khan, the Persian charge d'affaires, and Florence Breed Khan, his wife, arranged a luncheon in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's honor in Washington D.C. The guests were members of Washington's social and political elite. Before the luncheon, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent for Louis Gregory, a lawyer and well-known African American Bahá'í. They chatted for a while, and when lunch was ready and the guests were seated, 'Abdu'l-Bahá invited Gregory to join the luncheon. The assembled guests were no doubt surprised by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's inviting an African American to a White, upper-class social affair, but perhaps even more so by the affection and love 'Abdu'l-Bahá showed for Gregory when He gave him the seat of honor on His right. A biographer of Louis Gregory pointed out the profound significance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's action: "Gently but yet unmistakably, 'Abdul-Bahá has assaulted the customs of a city that had been scandalized a decade earlier by President's Roosevelt's dinner invitation to Booker T. Washington."[17]

The promotion of interracial marriage was yet another example of how 'Abdu'l-Bahá demonstrated the Bahá'í teachings on racial unity. Many states outlawed interracial marriage or did not recognize such unions; yet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá never wavered in his insistence that Black and White Bahá'ís should not only be unified but should also intermarry. Before his visit to the United States, He had first broached the subject in Palestine with several Western Bahá'ís and explored the sexual myths and fears at the core of American racism. His solution was to encourage interracial marriage. Once in the U.S., He demonstrated the lengths to which the American Bahá'í community should go to show its dedication to racial unity when He encouraged the marriage of Louis Gregory and an English Bahá'í, Louisa Mathew. Their marriage was the first Black-White interracial marriage that was personally encouraged by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This demonstration of Bahá'í teachings proved difficult for some Bahá'ís who doubted that such a union could last in a racially segregated society, but the marriage lasted until the end of the couple's lives, nearly four decades later. Throughout this period, Louis and Louisa became a shining example of racial unity.[18]

Race Amity Activities: The Bahá'í Community's Responses to Racial Crises, 1921-1937

Although working endlessly to promote racial unity through inspiring talks and actions, 'Abdu'l-Bahá understood the persistent reality of racism in the U.S. In a letter to a Chicago Bahá'í, He predicted what would happen if racial attitudes did not change: "Enmity will be increased day by day and the final result will be hardship and may end in bloodshed."[19] Several years later, 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeated this warning to an African American Bahá'í that "if not checked, 'the antagonism between the Colored and the White, in America, will give rise to great calamities.'"[20]

Tragically, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's predictions came true. Five years after His visit to the U.S. where He laid the foundation for the American Bahá'í community's future contributions to racial unity, race riots broke out in 1917 in East St. Louis, Illinois, and other cities. Two years later, in 1919, "the greatest period of interracial strife the nation had ever witnessed"[21] rocked the country. From June to the end of the year, there were approximately twenty-five race riots.[22] With the country still in the throes of racial upheaval, 'Abdul-Bahá, frail and worn, gathered the strength to rally the American Bahá'í community for what would become one of its signature contributions to racial amity in the U.S. In 1920, He mentioned the tragic state of race relations in the U.S. to a Persian Bahá'í residing in that country: "Now is the time for the Americans to take up this matter and unite both the white and colored races. Otherwise, hasten ye towards destruction! Hasten ye to devastation!"[23]

That same year, 'Abdu'l-Bahá initiated a plan to address the racial crisis in America. As Louis Gregory wrote in his report on the First Race Amity Convention held in Washington, D.C., May 19 to 21, 1921: " It was following His return to the Holy Land…after the World War that 'Abdu'l-Bahá set in motion a plan that was to bring the races together, attract the attention of the country, enlist the aid of famous

and influential people and have a far-reaching effect upon the destiny of the nation itself."[24] In His message to this first Race Amity Convention, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "Say to this convention that never since the beginning of time has one more important been held. This convention stands for the oneness of humanity; it will become the cause of the enlightenment of America. It will, if wisely managed and continued, check the deadly struggle between these races which otherwise will inevitably break out."[25]

This first race amity convention could not have come at a better time. Ten days later, on May 31 and June 1, a race riot, also known as "the Tulsa race massacre," occurred in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "It has been characterized as 'the single worst incident of racial violence in American history'" when "mobs of white residents, many of them deputized and given weapons by city officials, attacked black residents and businesses."[26] They not only attacked Blacks on the ground but also used private aircrafts to attack them from the air. The attacks resulted in the destruction of the Black business district known as Black Wall Street, "at the time the wealthiest black community in the United States."[27]

One can only imagine what went through the minds of participants in the interracial gathering at that historic first race amity convention in Washington D.C. as the news of the Tulsa race riot swept the nation. Perhaps their minds raced back to a similar but less destructive race riot that had ravaged their own city during the "red summer"[28] two years earlier. Some were probably thankful that they were part of a budding interracial movement dedicated to racial amity.

Louis Gregory reflected this optimism after the first race amity convention when he reported: "Under the leadership and through the sacrifices of the Bahá'ís of Washington three other amity conventions…were held….Christians, Jews, Bahá'ís, and people of various races mingled in joyous and serviceable array and the reality of religion shone forth."[29] He related that "the Washington friends

continued their race amity work in another form by organizing an interracial discussion group which continued for many years and did a very distinctive service, both by its activities and its fame as the incarnation as a bright ray of hope amid scenes where racial antagonism was traditionally rife."[30]

From the year of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921 to 1937, the Bahá'í-inspired race amity movement— a lighthouse of racial hope— cast a sometimes small but powerful beam of light through a thick fog of racism. Notwithstanding setbacks, it made a mighty effort to steady that beam of light. In city after city across the country, brave and courageous peoples of all races and religions joined the movement. In December of 1921, Springfield, Massachusetts, followed Washington D.C. Three years later, New York joined the ranks of race amity workers. That same year Philadelphia— "the City of Brotherly Love" — held its first Race Amity Convention and followed it up six years later (1930) with another one.[31]

In 1927, a year Louis Gregory called "that memorable year for amity conferences,"[32] a race amity conference was held in Dayton, Ohio. The Dayton community hosted a second race amity conference in 1929.[33] According to Gregory, "Race amity conferences at Green Acre, the summer colony of the Bahá'ís in Maine, cover[ed] the decade beginning in 1927,"[34] a decade which he referred to as "this fruitful period,"[35] when Geneva, New York, Rochester, New York, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Boston all contributed their share to the race amity movement.[36] "The friends in Detroit, under the rallying cry, 'New Views on an Old, Unsolved Human Problem,' raised the standard of unity in a conference March 14, 1929."[37] In Atlantic, City, with only one "active Bahá'í worker in the field," not even the opposition of "the orthodox among the clergy…which unfavorably affected the press"[38] could stem the tide of the race amity movement. On April 19, 1931, assisted by the Bahá'ís of Philadelphia, The Society of Friends, and other organizations, close to four hundred people

attended a gathering.[39] Five months later, in October, the Pittsburgh Bahá'ís arranged a conference.[40]

Bahá'ís and their friends and associates in Denver, Portland, Seattle, and Los Angeles all joined hands as they expanded the circle of unity beyond Black and White to include Native Americans, Chinese-Americans, and Japanese-Americans.[41] The Bahá'ís also held interracial dinners and banquets. Such banquets "appeared to give to those who shared them a foretaste of Heaven,"[42] Gregory wrote. One of the last race amity conferences was held in Cincinnati, Ohio, in April of 1935, and was considered one of the most interesting and influential of all. The Bahá'ís…having with one mind and heart decided upon such an undertaking, under the guidance of their Spiritual Assembly—the local Bahá'í governing council—proceeded to work the matter out in the most methodical and scientific way. [In addition] they succeeded in laying under the tribute of service some sixteen others noted for welfare and progress.[43]

The Bahá'í racial amity activities also included three interracial journeys of Black and White Bahá'ís "into the heart of the South." They were inspired by the wishes of Shoghi Effendi, who became of the Head of the Bahá'í Faith after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and was designated the title "Guardian."[44] Interracial teams of two Bahá'í men, Black and White, traveled South in the autumn of 1931, the spring of 1932, and the winter of 1933. "One of the most interesting discoveries of [the 1931 team's] trip was to find the same interest at the University of South Carolina, for Whites, as at Allan University and Benedict College, located in the same City of Columbia, for Colored."[45]

The Most Challenging Issue: Preparing the American Bahá'í Community to Become a Model of Racial Unity

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the American Bahá'í community contributed its share to promoting racial unity and to lessening, to some degree, the relentless forces of racism. They brought people together in

conferences to discuss delicate racial issues and created intimate spaces, such as banquets and interracial dinners in which to break bread, at a time when sitting down and eating together was the prevailing social taboo. These were no small accomplishments. These experiences seeded future interracial meetings and friendships. More work had to be done, however, before the Bahá'í community could move to the next stage of its contribution to racial unity in the larger society. It had to prepare itself to become, at the very least, a work in progress of a model of racial unity.

Foremost among the Guardian's concerns for the United States was racial prejudice and its influence on the American Bahá'í community. In his lengthy letter to the American Bahá'í community, which was published as *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1939), he characterized racism as "the corrosion of which, for well-nigh a century has bitten into the fiber, and attacked the whole social structure of American society" and said it should be "regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution." He told Bahá'ís of both races that they faced "a long and thorny road beset with pitfalls" that "still remained untraveled."[46] Both races were assigned specific responsibilities. White Bahá'ís were to

> make a supreme effort in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem, to abandon once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority, to correct their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race, to persuade them through their intimate, spontaneous and informal association with them of the genuineness of their friendship and the sincerity of their intentions, and to master their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on a part of a people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wounds.[47]

Black Bahá'ís were to "show by every means in their power the warmth of their response, their readiness to forget the past, and their

ability to wipe out every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their hearts and minds."[48] Neither race could place the burden of resolving the racial problem within the Bahá'í community on the other race or to see it as "a matter that exclusively concerns the other."[49]

As well, the Guardian cautioned Bahá'ís that they should not think the problem could be easily or immediately resolved. They should not "wait confidently for the solution of this problem until the initiative has been taken, and the favorable circumstances created, by agencies that stand outside the orbit of their Faith."[50] Rather, Shoghi Effendi encouraged Bahá'ís to believe, and be firmly convinced, that on their mutual understanding, their amity, and sustained cooperation, must depend, more than any other force or organization operating outside the circle of their Faith, the deflection of that dangerous course so greatly feared by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the materialization of the hopes He cherished for their joint contribution to that country's glorious destiny.[51]

The American Bahá'í community now had their specific marching orders. During the 1940s, they engaged in a range of efforts designed to eliminate racism and promote unity among its members and continue their decades-old commitment to promote racial unity in the wider society. In 1940, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í of the United States set the example during its meeting in Atlanta, Georgia — their first meeting in the Deep South. This was timely because the predominantly White Bahá'í community was "far from enthusiastic about putting racial unity into practice."[52] Racially integrated meetings were held for both Bahá'is only and for the general public.[53] "White Bahá'ís were put on notice, even at the risk of their withdrawal from the Faith, that they had to come to terms with the principle of oneness both in their Bahá'í community life and in their approach to the public."[54] Before long, the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Atlanta Bahá'í community mirrored the interracial makeup of the community.[55]

A new generation of Bahá'ís had to be educated about race if the community hoped to play a role in the pursuit of racial justice and racial unity. In a series of articles, a new Race Unity Committee (RUC) began educating the Bahá'í community on "the most challenging issue." The Bahá'í Children Education Committee (CEC) reviewed and recommended to Bahá'í parents a major book on racial attitudes in children. The RUC also suggested Bahá'í books on race relations emphasizing the link between minority history and culture and the work on racial unity. It urged Bahá'í communities to make race unity a topic of consultation at the Nineteen Day Feasts[56]—community gatherings held once a month on the Bahá'í calendar.

As tens of thousands of southern Blacks migrated to northern industrial centers during World War II, racial tensions and conflicts exploded. On June 20, 1943, the worst race riot of the war period broke out in Detroit, leaving death and destruction in its wake.[57]

For decades, the Bahá'ís had been warned that such racial turmoil would continue unless racial justice and racial unity were established. So they continued their work. In the fall of 1944, the *Bahá'í News* claimed, "The past year has reported the most progress in race unity since the movement began."[58] In short, as terrible and destructive as race riots and racial injustice could be, they would not dampen the spirit nor hold back the Bahá'í community's mission of promoting racial justice and racial unity.

Responding to the dynamic nature of racism, however, has always required of the Bahá'ís agility and an ability to read the signs of the time and respond accordingly. During World War II, anti-Japanese racism had, for instance, become widespread, and thousands of Japanese Americans were interned in concentration camps.[59] Conscious of the dangers of rising xenophobic sentiments, Shoghi Effendi, in December 1945, sent a letter through his secretary to the RUC pointing out that "to abolish prejudice against any and every race and minority group, it is obviously proper to include in particular any

group that is receiving especially bad treatment—such as the Japanese-Americans are being subjected to."[60]

A Steady Flow of Guidance on Race Unity: The 1950s and the Turbulent 1960s

In 1953, at the historic All-American Conference celebrating the centenary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, the dedication of the completed Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette, Illinois, and the start of a ten-year plan for the worldwide Bahá'í community to advance its growth and development, Dorothy Baker, a White Bahá'í and veteran race unity worker, had just returned from the Holy Land with a message from the Guardian. The Guardian, she reported, had said

> one driving thing over and over—that if we did not meet the challenging requirements of raising to a vast number the believers of the Negro race, disasters would result. And…that it was now for us to arise and reach the Indians of this country. In fact, he went so far as to say on two occasions that this dual task is the most important teaching work on American shores today.[61]

Over the years, the predominantly White Bahá'í community had accomplished a great deal in promoting race unity conferences, interracial dinners, and other interracial activities, but times were changing. The state of race relations in the Bahá'í community and the wider society required much more radical action. Shoghi Effendi's instructions to bring in "vast numbers" of African-Americans presented a challenge to many White Bahá'ís. Others probably felt they were already doing enough participating in periodic race unity programs. This level of Bahá'í activity would not, however, raise "to a vast number the believers of the Negro race." Shoghi Effendi instructed the Bahá'ís to establish two committees: one to teach African Americans and another to teach Native Americans. He wanted the Bahá'ís "to reach the Negro minority with this great truth in vast numbers. Not just publicity stunts…"[62]

Bahá'ís continued to promote racial unity. In 1957, the National Assembly, with the approval of the Guardian, instituted Race Amity Day, to be "observed on the second Sunday of June beginning June 9, 1957."[63] It was established as an exclusively Bahá'í-sponsored event different from Brotherhood Week and Negro History Week, events sponsored by other organizations in which Bahá'ís had participated. The purpose of Race Amity Day was to "celebrate the Bahá'í teachings of the Oneness of Mankind, the distinguishing feature of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh."[64]

That same year, the Bahá'í Interracial Teaching Committee started holding a race amity meeting in conjunction with the annual observance of Negro History Week. Eighty-three Bahá'í communities in thirty-three states conducted some form of public meeting addressing the concerns of the African-American community. The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History distributed Bahá'í literature to its exclusive mailing list of distinguished African Americans. In turn, the committee gave the association 500 copies of "Race and Man," a Bahá'í publication featuring discussions on race.[65]

As well, in 1957, Americans also witnessed as "segregationists cheered the active opposition of Governor Orval Faubus to the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Not until President Eisenhower sent federal troops to Little Rock in response to the governor's defiance of a court order did the Negro children gain admission to the school."[66] The forces of racial justice and race unity prevailed, however, with the passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act, "the first civil rights act since 1875."[67]

The annual Bahá'í Race Amity Day observances stood out among other "points of light" and hope during the racially volatile period of the 1960s. The decade of the Civil Rights Movement and Black urban rebellion and race riots was also the decade when many predominantly White local Bahá'í communities worked tirelessly to promote racial unity. Years after the first Bahá'í race amity observances, scores of

these communities throughout the country, through interracial picnics, panel discussions, media events, and official proclamations, provided people from diverse racial backgrounds with hope and inspiration that racial unity was possible. By 1960, Race Amity Day observances were increasingly being recognized by government officials. For example, in 1967, eleven mayors and one governor officially proclaimed Race Unity Day.[68] Yet, in July of that same year, "Detroit experienced the bloodiest urban disorder and the costliest property damage in U.S. history," when forty-three people died and over one thousand were injured.[69]

Expanding the Circle of Unity: Multiracial Community Building, 1970s and 1980s

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the American Bahá'í community experienced a remarkable increase in the racial and ethnic diversity of its membership. In the early 1970s, thousands of African Americans in rural South Carolina and many in other southern states joined the Bahá'í Faith.[70] In 1972, the American Bahá'í Northeast Oriental Teaching Committee began reaching out to Asian American populations of the Northeastern States.[71] In 1986, the Interracial Teaching Committee described the great influx of southern rural Blacks as well as other racial groups into the Bahá'í community as an indication of the American Bahá'í community becoming "a truly multiethnic community with fully one-third of its members Black and rural, and a significant percentage from the Native-American, Hispanic, Iranian, and Southeast Asian populations." [72]

Bahá'ís were expanding their circle of community, embracing more and more diverse peoples and knitting them into the fabric of their collective life. In 1985, Milwaukee Bahá'ís, in cooperation with the Midtown Neighborhood Association, a social-service agency, and the Hmong-American Friendship Association, worked to serve the needs of the Hmong people in the neighborhood by opening the Bahá'í Center on weekends for adult English classes and after-school classes

for culture and language for children ages 8 to 13.[73] In their response to the unprecedented waves of Asian immigrants arriving to America during the 1980s, the American Bahá'í community published guidelines to facilitate the integration of Indo-Chinese refugees into the Bahá'í community.

In 1989, the U.S. Bahá'í Refugee Office visited ten cities throughout central California to help integrate refugees into the larger Bahá'í community. The Bahá'í community did not limit its concern to Bahá'í refugees only. For example, the Bahá'ís in Des Moines, Iowa, resolved to adopt all Cambodian refugees in that state as a service goal for the 1989-90 year. The persecution of Iranian Bahá'ís in Iran during the late 1970s forced many Iranian Bahá'ís to seek refuge in the United States where they were assisted by the Bahá'í Persian-American Committee to become part of the increasingly diverse American Bahá'í community. [74]

The Bahá'í community was becoming what Shoghi Effendi had hoped for a half-century ago when he wrote:

> No more laudable and meritorious service can be rendered the Cause of God, at the present hour, than a successful effort to enhance the diversity of the members of the American Bahá'í community by swelling the ranks of the Faith through the enrollment of the members of these races. A blending of these highly differentiated elements of the human race, harmoniously interwoven into the fabric of an all-embracing Bahá'í fraternity, and assimilated through the dynamic process of a divinely appointed Administrative Order and contributing each its share to the enrichment and glory of Bahá'í community life, is surely an achievement the contemplation of which must warm and thrill every Bahá'í heart.[75]

The 1990s: Models and Visions of Racial Unity and the Los Angeles Riots

The American Bahá'í community entered the 1990s with increased commitment to racial justice and racial unity. The Association for Bahá'í Studies held a conference, "Models of Racial Unity," in November of 1990 to explore examples of racial unity. This conference produced a joint project, "Models of Unity: Racial, Ethnic, and Religious," conducted in the spring of 1991 by the Human Relations Foundation of Chicago and the National Spiritual Assembly to "find examples of efforts that have successfully brought different groups of people together in the Greater Chicago area." 76

The next year, the National Assembly published a statement, "The Vision of Race Unity: America's Most Challenging Issue," as the cornerstone of a national race unity campaign. They distributed it to a wide range of people including teachers, students, organizations, and public officials. In April, 1992, several months after the publication of the joint-project report on Models of Unity in Chicago, the National Assembly sponsored a race unity conference at the Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta, Georgia77: "The purpose of this conference is to explore specific actions which may be taken by different groups and institutions to establish racial unity as the foundation for the transformation of our society."78 Several weeks later, Los Angeles exploded into violence in the wake of the not guilty verdict of four White policemen caught on tape beating Rodney King, a Black motorist.79 It seemed that the Bahá'í community's constant efforts to promote racial unity were "water in the sand" of racial turmoil.

The National Assembly sent a message, on behalf of the U.S. Bahá'í Community, to Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley:

> We join you in your appeal to all our fellow-citizens not to be blinded by anger and hate….the American Bahá'í community, faithful to the teachings of its Founder, has worked for the establishment of racial unity in a country blighted by race prejudice that confronts its cherished values, threatens its peace, and poisons the soul of its citizens.80

The National Spiritual Assembly referred to its recently published statement on race, "The Vision of Race Unity," and informed the mayor of its readiness to share its message with "city authorities, private organizations, and individuals who seek such a solution."[81] In addition, the National Assembly presented to the mayor and the city, the Chicago-based study, Models of Unity: Racial, Ethnic, and Religious. Concluding their letter to the mayor, the Assembly left him with this message of hope:

We offer you, Mr. Mayor, our cooperation, and pray that Los Angeles will emerge from its trials more enlightened and dedicated to the realization of the great truth that we are all "the leaves of one tree and the drops of one ocean".[82]

The National Assembly then published a letter to President George H. W. Bush that appeared in several national newspapers. It opens:

> No American can look with indifference upon the tragedy relentlessly unfolding in our cities. Its causes lie beyond a particular verdict or a particular act of oppression. The fires and deaths in Los Angeles are only symptoms of an old congenital disease eating at the vitals of American society, a disease that has plagued our country ever since slaves were brought from Africa to these shores by their early settlers.[83]

The letter described the path of racial progress in American history as a "history of advance and retreat," and, though acknowledging that the solution to the racial problems "is not simple," stated that it is clear that "America has not done enough to demonstrate her commitment to the equality and the unity of races." For this reason, "ever since its inception a century ago the American Bahá'í community has made the elimination of racism one of its principle goals."[84] The National Assembly concluded its letter with an appeal:

> We appeal to you, Mr. President, and all our fellow citizens, not to turn away from this "most vital and challenging issue." We plead for a supreme effort on the part of the public and private institutions, schools, and the media, business and the arts, and most of all to individual Americans to join hands, accept the sacrifices this issue must impose, show forth the "care and vigilance it demands, the moral courage and fortitude it requires, the tact and sympathy it necessitates" so that true and irreversible progress may be made and the promise of this great country may not be buried under the rubble of our cities.[85]

The National Spiritual Assembly then turned to the Bahá'í community. In mid-May 1992, it met in Atlanta with representatives of twenty-nine local Bahá'í assemblies from the surrounding area and members of Local Spiritual Assemblies in fourteen cities in which rioting had taken place to review the Bahá'í communities' responses to the riots and their aftermath and to consult with an international board of advisers on courses of action. The consultation resulted in a "decision to channel all national effort in the coming year into one mission—the promotion of race unity."[86]

For the next four years, Bahá'ís labored on in the diverse and often confusing maze of race relations. They and others were sincere workers in their efforts. Following the long tradition of Bahá'í race unity work, the Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly of Detroit created a task force in 1993 to carry out a faith-based mandate to promote racial unity. Two years later, the task force became a non-profit organization called the "The Model of Racial Unity, Inc." and expanded its membership to include members of the Episcopal Diocese of Detroit and the Catholic Youth Organization. The task force launched its first conference on June 11, 1994, "to promote unity among the diverse populations of Detroit Metropolitan area by bringing together people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds in an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual respect."[87]

A day before the conference, the Detroit Free Press commented: "The Bahá'í Faith Community of Greater Detroit is a main sponsor of the conference, which is an outgrowth of the religion's guiding principles: unity across racial and ethnic lines."[88] The Second Annual Model of Racial Unity Conference in 1995 demonstrated how far the organization had progressed since the first conference. General Motors was now the major sponsor. Other sponsors included the owner of Azar's Oriental Rugs and Mag-Co Co Investigations. Both owners were members of the Metropolitan Bahá'í community—the former, an Iranian American, and the latter, African American.[89]

It was a great honor and tribute to the efforts of the Bahá'í community when Mayor Dennis W. Archer designated May 20, 1995, as "Model of Racial Unity Day." The Third Annual Model of Racial Unity Conference occurred on May 18, 1996.[90] The Bahá'ís attending and participating in that conference and the larger American Bahá'í community would soon be entering a new stage of spiritual guidance on race relations.

Earlier in the year, the House of Justice had advised the Bahá'ís: "With respect to principles, it would assist the friends greatly if the issue of addressing race unity can be formulated within the broad context of the community. The distinctiveness of the Bahá'í approach to many issues needs to be sharpened." Bahá'ís should be "future oriented, to have a clear vision and to think through the steps necessary to bring it into fruition. This is where consultation with the Bahá'í institutions will provide a critical impulse to your own efforts."[91]

Several months later, the 1996 Riḍván Message provided that "clear vision" stating: "The next four years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude…"[92] In 1996, a twenty-five year period of intensive learning commenced during which Bahá'í endeavors worldwide have become increasingly focused on capacity building in local populations to take greater ownership of their spiritual, intellectual, and social

advancement, opening new possibilities in the long-term effort of the Bahá'ís to root out racial prejudice and contribute to the emergence of a society based on racial justice and unity.

Conclusion

The pursuit of racial justice and unity have been defining aspirations of the Bahá'í community of the United States since the earliest days of its establishment in the country. Indeed, for well over a century, it has dedicated itself to racial unity. During periods of racial turmoil, it has contributed its share to the healing of the nation's racial wounds. 'Abdu'l-Bahá provided the example during his visit in 1912 and set in motion a race amity movement in 1921 for the Bahá'í community to build upon. Bahá'ís continued this work for decades with some fits and starts, but always moving forward under the inspired guidance of the Guardian of the Faith and then the Universal House of Justice.

About the Author

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The Bahá'í Response to Racial Injustice and Pursuit of Racial Unity 1996-2021 (Part 2)

By
Emily Lample
Richard Thomas

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 12, 2022

This is the second of two articles focusing on the American Bahá'í community's efforts to contribute to racial unity and justice in the United States. Part 2 explores how developments in the Bahá'í world from 1996 to 2021 have helped foster new capacities in the American Bahá'í community to contribute to social change.
Photo: Panelists of a three-day online symposium held by the U.S. Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs titled Advancing Together: Forging a Path Toward a Just, Inclusive and Unified Society.
Credit: https://news.bahai.org/story/1514/

The quarter century between 1996 and 2021 was a period of mounting racial contention in the United States. Marked by increased police killings of unarmed African Americans, race riots, burning of Black churches in the Deep South, the rise and spread of white supremacy movements, and wide-spread racial polarization, it resembled some of the worst racial strife of the 1960s. Not even the historic election of the first Black president, which many hoped would usher in a post-racial society, could turn the tide.[93]

During that period, the American Bahá'í community's longstanding dedication to racial harmony and justice continued to be expressed in numerous initiatives undertaken by individuals and organizations. These initiatives unfolded amidst a period of profound advancement across the Bahá'í world. In 1996, the worldwide Bahá'í community entered a new stage in its development, propelled by a series of global Plans that successively guided "individuals, institutions and communities" to build the capacity to "[translate] Bahá'u'lláh's teachings into action.[94] In turn, this progress made the possibilities for social transformation more and more visible to those laboring in the

field of service and had implications for the efforts of Bahá'ís to combat racial prejudice and injustice.

In July 2020, for the first time in more than 30 years, the House of Justice addressed the American Bahá'í community, as it had done during other periods of racial turmoil in the United States:

> A moment of historic portent has arrived for your nation as the conscience of its citizenry has stirred, creating possibilities for marked social change. … you are seizing opportunities—whether those thrust upon you by current circumstances or those derived from your systematic labors in the wider society—to play your part, however humble, in the effort to remedy the ills of your nation. We ardently pray that the American people will grasp the possibilities of this moment to create a consequential reform of the social order that will free it from the pernicious effects of racial prejudice and will hasten the attainment of a just, diverse, and united society that can increasingly manifest the oneness of the human family."[95]

In the letter, the House of Justice pointed out the difficult path ahead amidst inevitable setbacks, saying: "Sadly, however, your nation's history reveals that any significant progress toward racial equality has invariably been met by countervailing processes, overt or covert, that served to undermine the advances achieved and to reconstitute the forces of oppression by other means." The "concepts and approaches for social transformation developed in the current series of Plans," explained the House of Justice, could be "utilized to promote race unity in the context of community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society."[96]

The sections below review developments in the US Bahá'í community during the period between 1996 and 2021, exploring their implications for the community's response to racial injustice and the pursuit of racial unity.

1996 – 2006: Building capacity through focus on a single aim

For the Bahá'í world, the Four Year Plan (1996 – 2000), the first in the series of global Plans spanning the quarter century, marked a "turning point of epochal magnitude."[97] The Plan assisted the Bahá'í community to mature in its understanding of transformation—both internally and in the world at large.

First clumsily and then with increasing ability, more and more Bahá'ís from diverse national communities learned to take action within a common framework. While it took more than a decade for new patterns of thought and action to take root across the US, the systematic approach called for by the House of Justice came to be appreciated as a vital facet of the American community's efforts to combat deeply entrenched social ills, especially racism.

In parallel to the processes unfolding in the Bahá'í world, the 1990s and early 2000s saw Bahá'ís in the US continue to participate in a range of race-related activities in the wider society, often taking part in, and sometimes leading, initiatives in support of racial harmony. For example, many local Bahá'í communities participated in annual celebrations in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a leader of the nonviolent civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In June 1965, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States sent a telegram to Dr. King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, supporting the historic march on Montgomery: "YOUR MORAL LEADERSHIP HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTH PRAISEWORTHY HISTORY MAKING FREEDOM IN UNITED STATES. SENDING REPRESENTATION MONTGOMERY AFFIRM YOUR CRY FOR UNITY OF AMERICANS AND ALL MANKIND."[98] This relationship between the annual Martin Luther King Day celebrations and the Bahá'í race unity work has continued through the years. In 2002, the Bahá'í community of Houston was asked to lead and close their local parade, which attracted some 300,000 people to the parade route and was partially broadcast on four national television networks.[99] Similarly, a number of Bahá'í communities participated in interfaith services responding to the burning of Black and multiracial churches.[100]

At the same time, Bahá'ís were initiating their own efforts to promote racial harmony and justice in light of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. The Local Spiritual Assembly of Detroit, Michigan appointed a task force with a mandate to promote racial unity, which for seven years (ending in 2000) promoted and conducted an annual Models of Racial Unity Conference involving Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í speakers from a range of diverse professional, racial, ethnic and religious community groups and associations.[101]

In 1998, the US National Spiritual Assembly launched a national campaign to raise awareness of issues related to race unity in the country. The campaign included a television program called *The Power of Race Unity*, which aired on several national broadcast stations, as well as many local and regional channels, and a document penned by the National Assembly entitled *Race Unity: The Most Challenging Issues*, which was mailed to several thousand homes. It was estimated that 80 percent of local Bahá'í communities in the country hosted activities in support of the campaign, ranging from private viewings of the video to workshops and public discussions about racial unity.[102]

The opening of the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Museum in Charleston, South Carolina, on 8 February 2003,[103] was among the most special developments of the period. The museum honored a dedicated champion who personified the American Bahá'í community's long and unyielding commitment to racial unity and justice. According to one source, this was the "first Bahá'í museum in the world." It honored "both a descendant of a black slave and a white plantation owner" in a city "through whose port an untold number of Africans passed into slavery and whose citizens witnessed the shots that came to symbolize the beginning of the Civil War."[104] It was hailed by one speaker at the dedication as a "beacon of unity" for the world.[105]

Additionally, this decade saw ongoing efforts to tend to the hearts of, and build capacity among, African Americans within the Bahá'í community, especially African-American men, long subject to injustice in the form of harmful stereotypes, police brutality, staggering

community violence, and mass incarceration. Many of these Bahá'ís did not find within the dynamics of their Bahá'í communities the patterns of worship, praise, and mutual support for which they longed. In many cases, their participation faded until they were invited back by the warmth of a series of gatherings known as the Black Men's Gathering.[106]

Between 1987 and 2011, the Black Men's Gathering was dedicated to "soothing hearts" of black Bahá'í men who "had sustained slow-healing wounds" and "cultivating capacity for participation in a world-embracing mission."[107] From the growing numbers of African-American men involved in the process arose melodies of praise and worship resonant with the African-American tradition, and gatherings led to travels to share the message of the Faith throughout many countries in Africa and the Caribbean. In July 1996, for example, more than one hundred Black Bahá'í men from the US, the Caribbean, Canada, and Africa attended the Tenth Annual Black Men's Gathering in Hemingway, South Carolina, at the Louis Gregory Institute. In response to the call of the Universal House of Justice to "be a unique source of encouragement and inspiration to their African brothers and sisters who are now poised on the threshold of great advances for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh,"[108] forty-five of the participants "pledged to visit Africa over the following three years to share Bahá'u'lláh's message with the people there.[109]

In 2004, the editors of a national Bahá'í publication, *World Order* magazine, published a special issue with the following introduction: "We found that the fiftieth anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, the landmark 1954 decision of the United State Supreme Court that started the judicial desegregation of U.S. schools, afforded an opportunity to look at the matter from a number of perspectives." The issue included articles examining the historic decision from the contexts of law, the teaching of history, and psychology, among others, written by Bahá'ís from diverse professional fields, racial and cultural backgrounds, and experience in promoting racial unity."[110]

These highly meritorious efforts carried forward the American Bahá'í community's legacy of dedicated service to the cause of race unity, yet the community had a considerable distance to go in making the shift called for by the House of Justice to an approach focused on systematic *processes* that would build capacity in individuals and groups, and eventually in whole populations, to contribute to the kind of transformation that could ultimately dismantle the disease of racism.

In the country's history, every time racism appeared to have been dealt a major blow—with the end of slavery, or the end of legal segregation, for example—it managed to rear up in a new form. It has proven itself deeply entrenched in American society. For this reason, not withstanding the many activities that Bahá'ís had undertaken to address racial concerns, and their obvious merits and achievements, the ultimate results of such efforts had often been limited in their effect. As the Universal House of Justice noted, such efforts have often been characterized by "a cyclical pattern, with fits and starts," presented with fanfare while failing to elicit universal participation.[111] Activities, often accompanied by great enthusiasm and energy, would reach a peak and then, after a period of time, lose momentum and atrophy. For this reason, developing the capacity for collective, systematic action needed to receive a greater share of the attention of the American community. The groundwork for such an advance was more firmly laid in the next decade.

2006 – 2016: Unlocking the "society-building powers of the Faith"

During the second decade, through two consecutive Five Year Plans, the Universal House of Justice guided the worldwide Bahá'í community to explore how Bahá'í teachings can be applied at the grassroots to give rise to a new kind of community. As the House of Justice itself described in 2013:

> Bahá'ís across the globe, in the most unassuming settings, are striving to establish a pattern of activity and the corresponding administrative structures that embody the principle of the oneness of

> humankind and the convictions underpinning it, only a few of which are mentioned here as a means of illustration: that the rational soul has no gender, race, ethnicity or class, a fact that renders intolerable all forms of prejudice … that the root cause of prejudice is ignorance, which can be erased through educational processes that make knowledge accessible to the entire human race, ensuring it does not become the property of a privileged few. Translating ideals such as these into reality, effecting a transformation at the level of the individual and laying the foundations of suitable social structures, is no small task, to be sure. Yet the Bahá'í community is dedicated to the long-term process of learning that this task entails, an enterprise in which increasing numbers from all walks of life, from every human group, are invited to take part.[112]

Much of the development witnessed during these years had long-term implications for the American Bahá'í community's approach to racial justice and unity. This section will focus on two developments in particular. First, significant progress was made in learning to channel the energies of youth toward social progress. Second, the Bahá'í community, for which the betterment of society is a primary aim, evolved in its approach to, and understanding of, social transformation. As experience accumulated, the community also came to understand better the relationship between its own growth and development and its participation in the life of society at large.

Youth at the Vanguard

Regarding the first development, in December 2005, the House of Justice drew attention to the latent potential of young people ages 12 to 15, referring to them as "junior youth" and noting that they "represent a vast reservoir of energy and talent that can be devoted to the advancement of spiritual and material civilization."[113] The junior youth spiritual empowerment program began to take off in diverse settings around the world and showed great promise in preparing adolescents to contribute to social change. At an age when intellectual, spiritual, and physical powers rapidly develop, junior youth in the program were

assisted to explore the social conditions around them, to analyze the constructive and destructive forces operating in their lives, and to develop the tools needed to combat negative social forces such as materialism, prejudice, and self-centeredness.[114]

In the US, the junior youth spiritual empowerment program was established in neighborhoods representing a range of racial and ethnic diversity—some on indigenous lands, some in primarily Latino areas, others in predominantly African-American locations, and some in the most diverse neighborhoods in the country, comprising immigrants from all parts of the world. Through the program, young people in each of these contexts developed the capabilities necessary to contribute to the betterment of their communities. In an unjust social system that has tended to exclude racial and ethnic minorities from the American promises of equity and economic opportunity, in which forces of materialism distract those not benefitting from the system with harmful vices and mindless consumerism, the junior youth program, little by little, planted the seeds of possibility for change.

Central to the program is an educational curriculum that enhances participants' intellectual capacities, helps build moral structure, and cultivates spiritual qualities and perception. The texts of the program seek to address the root causes of prejudice. For example, the text *Glimmerings of Hope* presents the story of a junior youth whose parents are killed in civil strife between two different ethnic groups. In the stories that follow, he learns that, even in the face of very painful and difficult circumstances, people have choices to make; they can opt for hope and love or let themselves fall prey to forces of hatred and division. In *Observation and Insight,* as a young girl learns to observe her physical environment and the social conditions of her village, she comes to question the prejudice in her community and is helped to think about ways to combat prejudice, both within herself and in the world around her.

As the junior youth program began to advance in the US, it also highlighted the distinctive role that youth play, not only in nurturing

those younger than them, but in all facets of community life. The spiritual empowerment of the population between ages 15 and 30 became a central focus of this period. As more and more youth engaged in the sequence of courses offered by training institutes, they were assisted to apply what they learned in the context of community transformation. Foundational to the efforts was the concept of a "twofold moral purpose," that is, "to attend to one's own spiritual and intellectual growth and to contribute to the transformation of society."[115] In 2013, the Universal House of Justice called for a series of worldwide youth conferences. In the US, approximately 5,800 young people of varied backgrounds, including roughly 2,000 youth of indigenous, Asian, African-American, and Latino heritages, attended.[116] [117]

Contributing to Social Transformation

Regarding the second process, the work unfolding at the grassroots in numerous societies naturally drew members of the Bahá'í community into closer contact with diverse populations—comprising individuals, families, and organizations with whom they worked side by side—on city blocks in major urban centers and in neighborhoods, villages, and towns.

A new pattern emerged. Whereas many Bahá'ís were accustomed to bringing people one by one into their existing faith community—which has its own culture, habits, and ways of doing things—Bahá'í communities were now learning to take the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to whole populations, creating the possibility for such populations to investigate the Bahá'í teachings and apply them for the progress of their own people. To approach the masses of humanity in such a manner required a substantial shift in orientation for many in the Bahá'í community.

The Universal House of Justice on numerous occasions helped the Bahá'í world expand its vision and clarify its sense of mission,

cautioning the community not to close in on itself or to separate itself from the world at large:

> A small community, whose members are united by their shared beliefs, characterized by their high ideals, proficient in managing their affairs and tending to their needs, and perhaps engaged in several humanitarian projects—a community such as this, prospering but at a comfortable distance from the reality experienced by the masses of humanity, can never hope to serve as a pattern for restructuring the whole of society. That the worldwide Bahá'í community has managed to avert the dangers of complacency is a source of abiding joy to us. Indeed, the community has well in hand its expansion and consolidation. Yet, to administer the affairs of teeming numbers in villages and cities around the globe—to raise aloft the standard of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order for all to see—is still a distant goal.[118]

During this period, American Bahá'ís established the basic elements of Bahá'í community building activities in an increasing number of localities across the country. Those communities experienced, to varying degrees, the multiplication of devotional meetings open to all inhabitants, spiritual education classes for children, groups seeking to empower adolescents and older youth, and courses designed to develop the capacity of individuals to become active contributors to the betterment of the world around them. Critically, Bahá'ís learned to open these activities to the wider society. As they did so, some Bahá'ís whose backgrounds had afforded them relative freedom from exposure to prevalent injustices became cognizant of the reality faced by many of their fellows, with whom they were working for meaningful change.

Efforts in a predominantly African-American community, for instance, led to a tight fellowship between a growing number of residents and two Iranian-American Bahá'ís who had moved into the neighborhood. Members of the community came together weekly to pray and speak with one another about their lives, their struggles, and their aspirations for their children and grandchildren. A growing number of residents

also studied courses of the training institute and offered classes for the spiritual education of children. Out of the rhythm of action and reflection that characterized these activities, there also emerged efforts to address local needs, with residents themselves taking the lead. The person responsible for cooking for children's classes, for example, had faced challenges finding dignified employment. As he engaged in the progress of the community, he was inspired to prepare homecooked meals as a small business—an enterprise that was greatly valued in a locality with no grocery store nearby. Similarly, conversations in the community led to the formation of an organization dedicated to providing affordable eyeglasses to neighbors; at the writing of this article, more than 90 pairs of glasses had been distributed through this effort.[119] The united and spiritually uplifted community forged through such activities offered a stark contrast to negative portrayals of the neighborhood in the media. Though nascent, this and many other examples demonstrate the deep wells of capacity, creativity, and desire for progress that exist in the masses of the country, the potentialities of which can be released when individuals and populations become spiritually empowered.

With such promising efforts underway, the Universal House of Justice helped members of the US Bahá'í community see the implications of what was being learned through efforts to combat the effects of racism. A letter written on its behalf to an individual believer in 2011 explained:

> Only if the efforts to eradicate the bane of prejudice are coherent with the full range of the community's affairs, only if they arise naturally within the systematic pattern of expansion, community building, and involvement with society, will the American believers expand their capacity, year after year and decade after decade, to make their mark on their community and society and contribute to the high aim set for the Bahá'ís by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to eliminate racial prejudice from the face of the earth.[120]

That same year, as those organizing the Black Men's Gathering considered next steps, the Universal House of Justice offered

encouragement to extend their efforts to many others in their local communities, drawing upon what was being learned in expansion and consolidation. A letter on its behalf explained that "the time has now come for the friends who have benefited from the Gathering to raise their sights to new horizons" and encouraged participants to "Let the well-prepared army you have assembled advance from its secure fortress to conquer the hearts of your fellow citizens," for what was needed was "concerted, persistent, sacrificial action, cycle after cycle, in cluster after cluster, by an ever-swelling number of consecrated individuals."[121] The same ethos of loving support, the spiritual devotion, and the dedication to service that had characterized the activities of the Black Men's Gathering for over two decades could be extended locally to bring more people into circle of unity drawn by Bahá'u'lláh—including neighbors, co-workers, families, and friends. Toward this lofty objective, participants of the Gathering could find in the methods and approaches of the Plan being strengthened during this period the tools necessary to address the challenges of racism in the country. As was explained in the same letter:

> The experience of the last five years and the recent guidance of the House of Justice should make it evident that in the instruments of the Plan you now have within your grasp everything that is necessary to raise up a new people and eliminate racial prejudice as a force within your society, though the path ahead remains long and arduous. The institute process is the primary vehicle by which you can transform and empower your people, indeed all the peoples of your nation.[122]

In 1938, in *Advent of Divine Justice*, Shoghi Effendi noted that the US Bahá'í community was too small in number and too limited in influence to produce "any marked effect on the great masses of their countrymen," but that as the believers intensified efforts to remove their own deficiencies, they would be better equipped for "the time when they will be called upon to eradicate in their turn such evil tendencies from the lives and hearts of the entire body of their fellow-citizens."[123] During the ten-year period between 2006 and 2016, the number of people, particularly young people, drawing insight from the teachings of

Bahá'u'lláh with the aim of effecting the transformation of society grew, as did their capacity to begin contributing to profound social change. The national Bahá'í community had laid the groundwork for new possibilities to address racial injustice and pursue racial harmony—possibilities that began to manifest in the final five years of this twenty-five-year period.

2016 – 2021: Envisioning the movement of populations

The beginning of the most recent Five-Year Plan (2016 – 2021) coincided with an upsurge in racial turmoil in the US. Heart-wrenching incidents of racism continued to make national news during these years, including the fatal shootings of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old African-American boy in Florida, by a Hispanic-American private citizen in 2012, and of Michael Brown, an unarmed young African-American man with his hands in the air, by police in Missouri in 2014.[124] On 17 June 2015, the country was shocked by the horrific mass shooting of nine African Americans in Charlestown, South Carolina, during Bible study at one of the oldest African-American churches in the South, by a 21-year-old self-identified white supremacist.[125]

As the country geared up for a new presidential election in 2016, voices of racism on the national stage became more overt. In his farewell speech in January 2017, President Obama acknowledged the harsh reality of racism that still plagued the country. "After my election, there was talk of a post-racial America. Such a vision, however well-intended, was never realistic. For race remains a potent and often divisive force in our society."[126] That same year, groups of white supremacists and neo-Nazis held a Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where they fought with anti-racism counter-protesters. Dozens were injured and one person was killed when a man drove into the anti-racism protesters.[127]

Racially motivated acts of terror continued alongside entrenched social and economic injustice. In 2020, the *Washington Post* reported, "The

black-white economic divide is as wide as it was in 1968." And in January 2021, a National Public Radio investigation found that, since 2015, police officers had fatally shot at least 135 unarmed black men and women nationwide; in at least three-quarters of these shootings, the officers were white.[128]

Meanwhile, in those settings where developments had gone the furthest, the American Bahá'í community could see new models of community life emerging and glimpses of transformation at the grassroots. These lessons offered hope for genuine advancement in the community's pursuit of race unity at the local and national levels.

Most notable, of course, were advances at the grassroots, where, in certain neighborhoods and city blocks, substantial numbers of local inhabitants became engaged in Bahá'í activities. Youth, in particular, took their place at the forefront of service, engendering hope and energy in their communities. Though nascent and modest in their scope, such experiences multiplied across the country, representing the first stirrings of the spiritual empowerment of populations.[129]

A neighborhood surrounding a historically Black university in the Carolinas became home to exactly such a movement. In the US, it was legal to deny access to higher education solely on the basis of skin color as recently as the 1950s. Colleges and universities like this one, founded within that context to serve African-American populations, hold special significance. In 2016, what started as a small group of friends comprising Bahá'ís and their neighbors extended in five short years to embrace scores of youth, junior youth, and families. Cohorts of African-American university students, some the first in their families to attend college, spearheaded the emergence of dynamic community life that addressed both the spiritual and intellectual needs of children, youth, and adults. African-American and Latino junior youth groups formed and were increasingly empowered to undertake service projects that sought to address the needs of their community. Noticing that many children were assessed as having low levels of literacy, for example, the junior youth created a small lending library, wrote their own simple

stories for the children, and set a regular time each week to read to them. At the same time, their families became active participants in community life. The parents of the junior youth in the program, for instance, brought neighbors together in community gatherings in which they could share a meal and discuss what they would like to see on their block. Devotional gatherings multiplied, and neighbors gathered together to pray, reflect, and share experiences, questions, and concerns. As participation grew and activities multiplied, social action initiatives emerged. Among them was a vaccination clinic.[130] The dynamic being experienced generated not only hope but also the first stirrings of the release of the potential of a population. Similar patterns were emerging, to varying degrees, in region after region in the United States.

While experience at the grassroots took root in a growing number of communities, the US National Spiritual Assembly initiated various actions to galvanize the entire national community to play its part in the advancement of racial justice and unity. These lines of action were, in part, laid out in a series of letters to the US Bahá'í community, calling attention to the "pivotal juncture in our nation's history" during which Bahá'ís would be called to intensify their efforts to eliminate prejudice and injustice from society. The National Assembly drew the attention of the American Bahá'ís to their "twofold mission," which is "to develop within our own community a pattern of life that increasingly reflects the spirit of the Baha'i teachings" and "to engage with others in a deliberate and collaborative effort to eradicate the ills afflicting our nation." In pursuing this mission, the Bahá'ís had inherited "a priceless legacy of service spanning more than a century, originally set in motion by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself," as well as "the framework of action given to us in the current Five Year Plan." The more that the latter is understood, the Assembly asserted, "the better we can appreciate that it is precisely suited to the needs of the times."[131] Bahá'ís were directed to deepen their "understanding of the forces at work in our society and the nature of our response as Bahá'ís—especially as outlined in the current set of Plans." In their search "for answers and for a way forward," the American people "are daily treated to a cacophony of competing voices" resting on "faulty foundations" and are longing for some

"credible source" to which they can turn "for insight and hope."[132] In response, the Bahá'í community was guided to engage with "specific populations mentioned numerous times by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice for the unique and vital contribution they will make to the creation of the new social order envisaged" in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.[133]

The National Spiritual Assembly also pursued ways, within the offices of its National Center, to give further attention to questions of racial justice and race unity in the context of already occurring work. Permanent and seasonal schools made race relations one of their central issues of study and discussion for several years. The Assembly's Social Action Desk—which focuses on the emergence of social action in communities across the country—directed its attention to efforts at the grassroots that were addressing aspects of racial injustice. Furthermore, a national media project collected and told stories of community life characterized by building across racial and cultural divides through the pursuit of the aims of the Five Year Plan.[134]

In the nation's capital, the US Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs allocated an increasing number of staff to participation in the national discourse on race through attendance at numerous conferences, workshops, and roundtables. Bahá'í representatives met with leading thinkers and organizations working to eradicate racism. In its contributions to the complex and polarizing discourse, the Office sought ways to offer novel perspectives based on the Bahá'í teachings, seeking insights into questions relating, for example, to the perceived tension between the pursuit of unity and the pursuit of justice and to the relationship between means and ends as they relate to social change. Its contributions included the opening of new forums that fostered genuine consultation and common understanding among diverse individuals and organizations.

In May 2021, the Office brought together prominent national voices and social actors in the race discourse for a three-day symposium, *Advancing Together: Forging a Path Toward a Just, Inclusive and*

Unified Society.[135] Held exactly 100 years after the first race amity conference called for by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the event reflected the growing collaboration of the Bahá’í community with likeminded individuals and groups working to overcome racial disparities and promote justice.

Finally, as tensions heated up in the country in the summer of 2020, the National Spiritual Assembly issued a public statement addressing the current realities of race that ran in the *Chicago Tribune* and several newspapers across the country. It began:

> “The Bahá’ís of the United States join our fellow-citizens in heartfelt grief at the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others whose lives were suddenly taken by appalling acts of violence. These heartbreaking violations against fellow human beings due only to the color of their skin, have deepened the dismay caused by a pandemic whose consequences to the health and livelihood of people of color have been disproportionately severe.”[136]

As the Bahá’í community’s efforts to contribute to racial unity were advancing with newfound capacity at the grassroots and national levels, the Baha’i Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland was breaking new ground in the examination of race in the academic sphere. As “an endowed academic program that advances interdisciplinary examination and discourse on global peace,”[137] the Bahá’í Chair, held by Dr. Hoda Mahmoudi, focused on “Structural Racism and the Root Causes of Prejudice” as one of the central themes of its work. Among its initiatives was the creation of a dynamic, ongoing space where experts and scholars from many disciplines—including Public Health, Sociology, History, Communications, Psychology, Technology, Government and Politics, and the Arts—brought ground breaking research from their diverse fields into a collective effort to better understand the impact of race and racial discrimination on society in pursuit of a more peaceful and equitable future.[138] Applying Baha’i ideals concerning human dignity, human achievement, and human excellence, the Chair introduced into discussions on race and racial

discrimination a spiritual perspective, highlighting humanity's shared destiny. By 2021, the work initiated by the Chair nearly a decade before had garnered substantial support and high regard in the field. Dr. Mahmoudi and her colleague at the University of Maryland, Dr. Rashawn Ray, had, by 2021, initiated an ambitious project to bring together the perspectives of some of academia's most well-respected and thought-provoking social scientists to analyze racism in America in a volume entitled, *Systemic Racism in America: Sociological Theory, Education Inequality, and Social Change*. Edited by Drs. Mahmoudi and Ray, the volume is scheduled to be published by Routledge Publishing later this year.

This period also witnessed countless initiatives undertaken by individuals and groups of Bahá'ís. One such initiative was the work of the Bahá'í-inspired organization, National Center for Race Amity (NCRA). Established in 2010 at Wheelock College in Massachusetts, the NCRA attracted experts on issues of racial discrimination and promoters of racial amity to its annual Race Amity Conferences and Race Amity Observations/Festivals not only in Boston but in more than a hundred other localities. By the second half of the decade, its efforts gave rise to a number of noteworthy outcomes. In 2015, for example, the Massachusetts Legislature had established an annual Race Amity Day, to be celebrated on the second Sunday of June. The following year, similar efforts by the NCRA resulted in Senate Resolution 491 passed on 10 June 2016, "Designating June 12, 2016, as a national day of racial amity and reconciliation."[139] And in 2018 the NCRA produced the film *An American Story: Race Amity and The Other Tradition.* As one of a number of individual initiatives across the US, the NCRA had an example of the continuity of the American Baha'i community's century-long response to racial injustice and the pursuit of racial unity.

As the period of 2016 to 2021 came to a close, the American Bahá'í community could see that its learning through the series of global Plans enhanced its efforts to contribute to the cause of racial justice at different levels of society.

Conclusion: Forging a Path to Racial Justice

The identity and mission of the American Bahá'í community, fundamentally shaped by the hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is intertwined with the nation's struggle to transcend the crippling legacy of racism and its current manifestations. At each stage of its development, the Bahá'í community's long-term commitment to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh for the betterment of the world and to dismantle the insidious social ill of racism has required the development of new capacities.

Over the past quarter century, as American Bahá'ís continued to work for race unity in numerous ways, the entire Bahá'í world was set on a new path of learning about its own growth and development and its efforts to contribute to social transformation. The Bahá'í community in the United States, by the end of the period, had advanced its collective efforts to contribute to racial justice and unity at all levels of society. It had made strides in learning to build a new dynamic of community life at the grassroots—a dynamic in which individuals, families, and, in some instances, segments of a population became empowered to take ownership of the transformation of their own communities. While many of the developments described are modest and nascent, they hold promise for the long-cherished hope that the American Bahá'ís will play an increasing share in efforts to eradicate the blight of racism from their society.

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Spatial Strategies for Racial Unity

By
June Manning Thomas

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Lack of unity among people of various races, ethnicities, and classes is a major problem for human society. Many nations face such disunity, which can cause social conflict, lack of empathy for "others," discrimination, and exploitation. Bahá'ís think of such problems as symptoms; the illness is absence of the unity of the human race. One subset of the unity that is necessary is racial unity. As the term is used here, racial unity focuses on unity among various racial and ethnic groups.

Eliminating individual prejudice is a necessary, but insufficient, part of promoting racial unity. Human beings have embedded racial disunity within geographic space, where it is hard to change and is reinforced by political, economic, and social boundaries. Thus, individual people may believe themselves free of racial prejudice, but they may face no or weak testing of this belief if they are isolated in geographic circumstances that solidify racial disunity. Spatial geography can reinforce systemic racial discrimination.

This is a difficult problem, but throughout its history the Bahá'í Faith has always championed racial unity, even in difficult circumstances. Direct guidance from the Head of the Faith, in each period of Bahá'í history, has consistently counseled the Bahá'ís to abandon prejudice against different races, religions, ethnicities, and nationalities. In addition, the Bahá'í community has purposefully aimed to increase diversity within its own religious community by inviting people of diverse races, ethnicities, and nationalities into its ranks. The approach that the worldwide Bahá'í community now uses builds on these historic principles and strategies, while extending beyond them to offer lasting social transformation for all people in a community. It offers the world a process that can help promote racial unity, even in situations of geographic disunity. Considering how to accomplish this requires strategic thinking.

The Bahá'í Plans and Spatial Unity

The worldwide Bahá'í community's dedication to the principle of racial unity dates back to the founding of the religion. Bahá'ís have held fast to key principles related to the unity of humanity, in general, and to racial unity, specifically, while learning to develop flexible new strategies that recognize contemporary challenges. They have done so within the framework of global plans that guide the growth and development of the Bahá'í community worldwide.

Since its birth in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century, the Bahá'í Faith has given rise to a religious community with significant capacity to unite people across traditional barriers of race, class, nationality, gender, and creed. Its cardinal teaching is the oneness of all humanity. Bahá'í administrative institutions have paid special attention to the issue of racial disunity in North America; much guidance on the subject relates to that continent. This has been true ever since the head of the Faith at that time, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, visited North America in 1912. Through both word and deed, He emphatically encouraged interracial fellowship and disavowed traditional norms of racial segregation and discrimination. He urged people to overcome racial barriers through

means such as intermarriage and multiracial meetings, and He praised the beauty of such diversity. These were remarkable exhortations for that time, when interracial marriage was illegal in many American states and Jim Crow laws discouraged free association between people of different racial backgrounds.[140] The principles He enunciated for North America also pertained to the world with all its various forms of prejudice and social conflict.

Following His visit, in letters sent to the North American Bahá'í community and later published collectively as *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, Abdu'l-Bahá presented a visionary spatial strategy for unity of the world's peoples. He asked North American Bahá'ís to travel first to other states and provinces in their own countries and then to a long list of countries, territories, and islands in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe, spreading the unifying teachings of the Bahá'í Faith to peoples of diverse race and ethnicity. He also placed great importance on teaching America's indigenous populations. His vision was to "establish the oneness of the world of humanity."[141]

When leadership of the worldwide Bahá'í community passed to Shoghi Effendi, the grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in 1921, he continued to emphasize interracial fellowship as a path to racial unity, even when custom discouraged such fellowship. Starting in the 1920s, his letters to North American Bahá'ís addressed these issues, with his most forceful communication being the book-length 1938 letter *The Advent of Divine Justice*. In that work, he laid out principles for the success of a global plan for the growth and development of the Bahá'í community. This Seven Year Plan covered the years 1937 through 1944 and encouraged North American Bahá'ís to travel to other North, Central, and South American states, provinces, territories, and countries—many of them mentioned in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of the Divine Plan*—to share with peoples of all races, nationalities, and ethnicities the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'ís were encouraged to reach out in particular to "the Negro, the Indian, the Eskimo, and Jewish races. … No more laudable and meritorious service can be rendered …"[142] Among the three major

requirements for success of that plan was freedom from racial prejudice, a necessary precondition in that momentous spiritual endeavor to share the Faith with diverse people.[143] The assumption in the two subsequent global plans that Shoghi Effendi initiated, the second Seven Year Plan (1946-53) and the Ten-Year Crusade (1953-63), was that freedom from racial prejudice would continue to be important as the geographic scope of the Faith expanded to the entire world.[144] Notably, each global plan aimed to increase the number of nationalities, tribes, ethnicities, and races represented within a faith that could then shelter its members from the pernicious influences of division, prejudice, and materialism. As "pioneers" spread the Bahá'í teachings, thus increasing the Faith's reach and diversity, Shoghi Effendi illustrated detailed global maps showing the increasing number of tribes, ethnicities, and peoples who were joining the Bahá'í Faith worldwide.[145]

Since its first election in 1963, the worldwide governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, has continued to champion the central principles of racial unity and diversity. Between 1964 and 1996, it launched five global plans that reached the world's diverse peoples in various ways, such as by sending travelers to various countries.[146] As time passed, however, it became increasingly obvious that the ability of the Bahá'í community to effectively contribute to constructive social change and new models of social organization was limited. One reason was that, despite its wide geographic spread, the Bahá'í community was still relatively small in number. The other was the lagging moral and spiritual state of the world's people in the face of rapid social, scientific, and technological developments and of a rampant materialism.

Place and the Institute Process

In a new series of global plans initiated in 1996 with the call for a "network of training institutes," the worldwide Bahá'í community began to approach expansion in a different way.[147] One innovation was

the creation of training institutes. These “centers of learning” aim to build human resources and improve communities through a spiritually-based training program designed for different age groups, ranging from children to adults.[148] They embody a form of distance education that can reach even remote areas of the globe. By 1999, these centers of learning had made “significant strides in developing formal programmes and in putting into place effective systems for the delivery of courses.”[149] The program involves direct education as well as participatory study circles open to youth and adults, with all activities open to people of all faiths, races, and creeds. The Universal House of Justice calls the efforts for capacity building for advancing community building and propelling social change the “institute process.” After a few years of reflective learning, the worldwide Bahá’í community adopted, from among several options, the curriculum that first arose from the Ruhi Institute in Colombia.

As the Universal House of Justice learned more about the institute process and as Bahá’ís gained more experience with Ruhi educational materials, they began to focus their efforts on neighborhoods and villages.[150] The Universal House of Justice sent messages between 2010 and 2016 that described salutary experiences in several such receptive locations. It advised the world’s Bahá’ís to look for “smaller pockets of the population” that would benefit from the institute process. It defined such pockets: “in an urban cluster, such a centre of activity might best be defined by the boundaries of a neighbourhood; in a cluster that is primarily rural in character, a small village would offer a suitable social space for this purpose.”[151]

In such places, the role of the institute would be both to nurture the population spiritually and to enable the building of capacity and community. The means for doing so were deeply participatory: to “enable people of varied backgrounds to advance on equal footing and explore the application of the teachings to their individual and collective lives.”[152] By 2013, the Universal House of Justice could report clear evidence for the power of “community building by

developing centers of intense activity in neighbourhoods and villages." In 2016, the Universal House of Justice reported that, because of such strategies, the Teachings of the Faith were influencing people in many different spaces: "crowded urban quarters and villages along rivers and jungle paths."[153]

All of this was an effort to support salutary transformation in the lives and fortunes of the world's people. In 2015, the Universal House of Justice described the following: "A broader cross section of the population is being engaged in conversations, and activities are being opened up to whole groups at once—bands of friends and neighbours, troops of youth, entire families—enabling them to realize how society around them can be refashioned. … Prevailing habits, customs, and modes of expression all become susceptible to change. … Qualities of mutual support, reciprocity, and service to one another begin to stand out as features of an emerging, vibrant culture among those involved in activities."[154]

Addressing Racial Unity through Institutes

In 2010, the Universal House of Justice bemoaned that "prejudices of all kinds—of race, of class, of ethnicity, of gender, of religious belief—continue to hold a strong grip on humanity." It noted, however, that its current global plans could "build capacity in every human group, with no regard for class or religious background, with no concern for ethnicity or race, irrespective of gender or social status, to arise and contribute to the advancement of civilization." It expressed the hope that the process set in place by these plans would steadily unfold to "disable every instrument devised by humanity over the long period of its childhood for one group to oppress another."[155]

Indeed, institute-related activities began to bring into collaboration members of diverse faiths, creeds, and ethnicities, as whole villages, cities, and neighborhoods around the world studied unifying spiritual principles and turned away from separations by race, ethnicity, caste, or class. In 2018, the Universal House of Justice reported on results "from

country to country." "As the work in thousands of villages and neighbourhoods gathers momentum," it wrote, "a vibrant community life is taking root in each." The House of Justice then explained that, as this happens, a "new vitality emerges within a people taking charge of their own development. Social reality begins to transform."[156]

The Universal House of Justice sent special assurances to North American believers about the effectiveness of the institute process. Steady promotion of the institute process "will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi … when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society."[157] In this letter and in many others, the Universal House of Justice affirmed the potential benefits of the institute process as a tool for racial unity.

The North American community needed such assurance. The United States, especially, continues to experience problems of racial disunity, characterized by lingering racial segregation, social and economic lags for minority-race people, and political/cultural confrontation. Racial prejudice continues to be a problem ingrained in society and in its geographic places. Metropolitan areas in the United States demonstrate spatial inequality, implanted by historic federal and state policies or by ongoing discrimination and exclusionary zoning. Efforts to resolve problems falter: "Any significant progress toward racial equality has invariably been met by countervailing processes, overt or covert, that served to undermine the advances achieved and to reconstitute the forces of oppression by other means."[158]

Not just in the United States, but in other countries, place-based action in small geographic areas could encounter such built-in racial disunity. Many metropolitan areas and cities around the world contain sectors or neighborhoods set aside for specific racial, ethnic, or national groups and habitually marginalize the poor. Spatial segregation by race, ethnicity, or income level persists, often oppressing the disadvantaged.

How, then, could the current plan's institute process, an educational initiative based in discrete neighborhoods or localities—some of them defined by racial exclusion—promote racial unity?

Consider two hypothetical families as examples. The first family lives in a modern metropolitan area. That family lives a life of relative prosperity, is not a "minority," and holds no antagonism toward people of minority races—although its everyday life is isolated by race and income level. Only families of its own, comfortable income bracket live in its section of the city, because of historic circumstances or municipal laws limiting access. Because of longstanding exclusionary practices, the city where this family lives is home to few minority-race people. Schools are similarly homogeneous, and the family's children have no friendships with diverse people. How might this family help promote racial unity?

The second family lives in the same metropolitan area. That family is of a minority race and has low income. It lives in an isolated neighborhood, housing families with very similar characteristics to its own. Like the first family, this family also has no antagonism toward other racial groups. Its most challenging issue is not overcoming its own individual prejudices, but surviving in a hostile environment. Its children go to inferior schools; its adults suffer from underemployment or unemployment; and the public services it receives are grossly inferior to the norms for its nation. How might this family make sense of the concept of racial unity, while hemmed in by the geographic proof of disunity?

The Universal House of Justice has explained that different circumstances call for different approaches. Both families and the neighborhoods they live in contain people who can benefit from the institute process, but the utility of the process may manifest itself differently in the two neighborhoods. The specific approach to racial unity would vary as well. Here are four of several possible approaches:

Become free from racial prejudice

The first principle is individual freedom from racial prejudice. The Bahá'í Writings offer much guidance on exactly what this means, but they refer to both attitudes and actions. What binds this guidance is a fundamental recognition of our common humanity and an unwillingness to prejudge people because of race, color, or other exterior characteristics. The Bahá'í teachings also counsel action. In 1927 Shoghi Effendi gave specific spatial advice; he told Bahá'ís to show interracial fellowship "in their homes, in their hours of relaxation and leisure, in the daily contact of business transactions, in the association of their children, whether in their study-classes, their playgrounds, and club-rooms, in short under all possible circumstances, however insignificant they appear."[159] Bahá'í institutions have continually confirmed the importance of mirroring forth freedom from racial prejudice in both attitude and action.

Both the family of comfortable means and the family of circumscribed means should treat others without racial prejudice, but their charges differ. Although Shoghi Effendi noted that both blacks and whites should make a "tremendous effort," he called on whites to "make a supreme effort in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem." Blacks, in turn, were to show "the warmth of their response" when whites did reach out.[160] In conditions of geographic isolation, a majority-race family may need to make special efforts to help promote racial unity. This might require seeking diverse friendships, associations, and social activities, as a matter of general principle and as a service to its own children. It is important to replace racism with "just relationships among individuals, communities, and institutions or society that will uplift all and will not designate anyone as 'other.' The change required is not merely social and economic, but above all moral and spiritual."[161]

Reach out to minority peoples

This, too, is a principle enshrined within Bahá'í history and widely assumed in the present activities of the global community.[162] This

principle applies to both families in our hypothetical examples. Assume they are all Bahá'í. The more privileged family might consider how to help greater numbers of minority people gain access to the capacity-building potential inherent in the institute process. This would require some form of access and communication; fortunately, a range of possibilities exists. In a letter, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States recommended that Bahá'ís consider homefront pioneering into communities predominantly populated by African-Americans, Native Americans, or immigrants.[163] Alternatively, such a family might steer toward mixed-race neighborhoods when it makes its next move from one domicile to another. Another strategy would be to befriend and engage minorities in their own locality, or to reach across municipal boundaries and associate with people who live in areas segregated from their own. This may require a concerted, conscious effort to overcome the geographic boundaries that exist and to offer genuine friendship. The second family, living in a high-minority, low-income area, could find it easier because of location to offer neighbors local opportunities for collaboration as part of the institute process, although that family, too, may face challenges of agency and receptivity.

Utilize the institute process as a matrix for racial unity

The institute process can help build community as a part of a process of social transformation. Both hypothetical neighborhoods could benefit; usefulness of the institute process is not dependent on the socio-economic status or racial characteristics of any geographic area. The institute process can support racial unity in part because it allows people to converse on related topics in a warm and loving atmosphere, and because it allows them to walk together along several paths of service to humanity.[164] This process would work best as a tool for racial unity, of course, with diverse participants. For the two families that we have described, both in homogeneous areas, it could be difficult to arrange activities for racially diverse participants, dampening the ability of the institute process to support racial unity. Even so, the

spiritual principles enshrined within the institute curriculum are a useful foundation for raising consciousness in people about the importance of racial unity, since those principles include such virtues as respecting the nobility of human beings, valuing kindliness and generosity, seeking justice, and nurturing the life of the soul as opposed to materialistic pursuits. If more people of privilege understood and acted on such principles, this would help counteract self-righteousness, prejudice, and lack of empathy, shortcomings that pose major barriers for racial unity. Likewise, understanding such principles could be of tangible, even life-saving importance for a minority-race family living in a low-income area experiencing social disintegration. Indeed, a main protection against pernicious influences in such a situation may be spiritual education for themselves and for their surrounding neighbors, giving rise to a process of social transformation.

Aim toward social and economic development

We have already mentioned several benefits that could come from engagement in the institute process, including elevation of spiritual dialogue, the education of children, the nurturing of junior youth, and the promotion of moral conduct. All of this could lead to various forms of social action. Built into the institute process is the idea that groups of people can raise up protagonists for social action from within their own communities. This happens by nurturing individuals' capacity and then enhancing collective capacity as the community consults on possibilities for action that address complex needs. These needs could range from health and welfare to water safety, the provision of food, or neighborhood beautification. Although this level of collective action is still, in some nations, only in embryonic form, in other nations the institute process has led to a flowering of social and economic development initiatives that are borne out of a deep understanding of the needs of local inhabitants of all faiths, races, and ethnicities, joined together in unified action.

Such action could take place in a wide variety of neighborhoods of various economic means. This characteristic would be of particular

importance, however, to the hypothetical low-income family. From their perspective, a necessary aspect of "racial unity" could indeed be support for their movement toward sustenance and survival. The training institute could offer short-term support from visiting helpers, teachers, or study circle tutors. The aim, however, would be for residents to arise to become tutors within their own neighborhoods, becoming indigenous teachers and accompanying growing numbers of their fellow residents to contribute to the betterment of their community. The institute process is "not a process that some carry out on behalf of others who are passive recipients—the mere extension of the congregation and invitation to paternalism—but one in which an ever-increasing number of souls recognize and take responsibility for the transformation of humanity."[165] People living in a particular place could begin to reshape their destinies as they engaged growing numbers of friends and neighbors in collective action.

Furthering the Racial Unity Agenda

The struggle for the unity of humanity is a long-term one that requires much concerted action along the way. Members of the Bahá'í Faith have continued to advance international, national, and local plans and efforts designed to further such unity. On the specific matter of racial unity, both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi provided unifying spiritual guidance within the framework of visionary, international plans designed to bring the world's people into one human family. They also addressed such matters as how to change both attitudes and actions in order to overcome racial prejudice and help bring about unity. The Universal House of Justice has supported and advanced these strategies.

This worldwide governing body has now offered humanity a potent tool in the form of the institute process, an educational strategy that can help prepare people to build up their communities and contribute their share to the betterment of humanity. The Universal House of Justice has also turned the attention of Bahá'ís to the challenge of helping to bring about such social transformation within small *portions* of nations,

such as villages or neighborhoods that are part of cities or metropolitan areas. This article concerns one of the dilemmas connected with efforts to advance unity, particularly racial unity, in such places: society has segmented people and communities by divisive lines that have cemented disunity. This poses a spatial problem that needs thoughtful action in response.

We used two hypothetical (but realistic) examples to serve as thought experiments, efforts to think through the implications of geographic space for race unity action within the framework of the institute process. The examples were just that; the point is that people in many places face difficulties of various kinds in promoting a race unity agenda in contemporary times. The challenge is to assess our own situations and to take appropriate action. We do know, based on experience from around the globe, that the institute process offers a powerful tool for social transformation and for bringing about several forms of social unity, including racial. It is also capable of raising up individual protagonists who can begin to reshape themselves and their communities in myriad positive ways, a matter of great importance particularly to neighborhoods suffering the consequences of historic racial inequality.

Study circles, a fundamental element of the institute process, have an essential function in what the Universal House of Justice sees as a process of community building starting with spiritual empowerment and moral education, extending to social action at a small scale, and ultimately expanding to include progressively complex community-building projects. The experience that is being gained opens the possibility for the greater influence of spiritual principles in important matters of public discourse, such as racial unity, the environment, health, and other areas of concern. In such ways, the process of implementing Bahá'u'lláh's vision, furthered by the institutions of His Faith, is advancing.

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A Vision of Peace
Stories from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

By
Bahá'í World News Service

TUESDAY JANUARY 16, 2018

Ditalala—a village named "peace."

The sun rises in the Congolese village of Ditalala, and the aroma of freshly brewed coffee fills the air. For generations, the people of this village have been drinking coffee, which they grow themselves, before heading out to work on their farms.

Over the past few years, this morning tradition has come to take on a deeper significance. Many families in the village have been inviting their neighbors to join them for coffee and prayers before starting the day.

"They've transformed that simple act of having a cup of coffee in the morning," says a recent visitor to Ditalala, reflecting on her experience. "It

was truly a community-building activity. Friends from the neighboring houses would gather while the coffee was being made, say prayers together, then share the coffee while laughing and discussing the issues of the community. There was a sense of true unity."

Neighbors enjoy a morning coffee together in Ditalala.

In Ditalala, villagers prepare for the day by gathering for prayers.

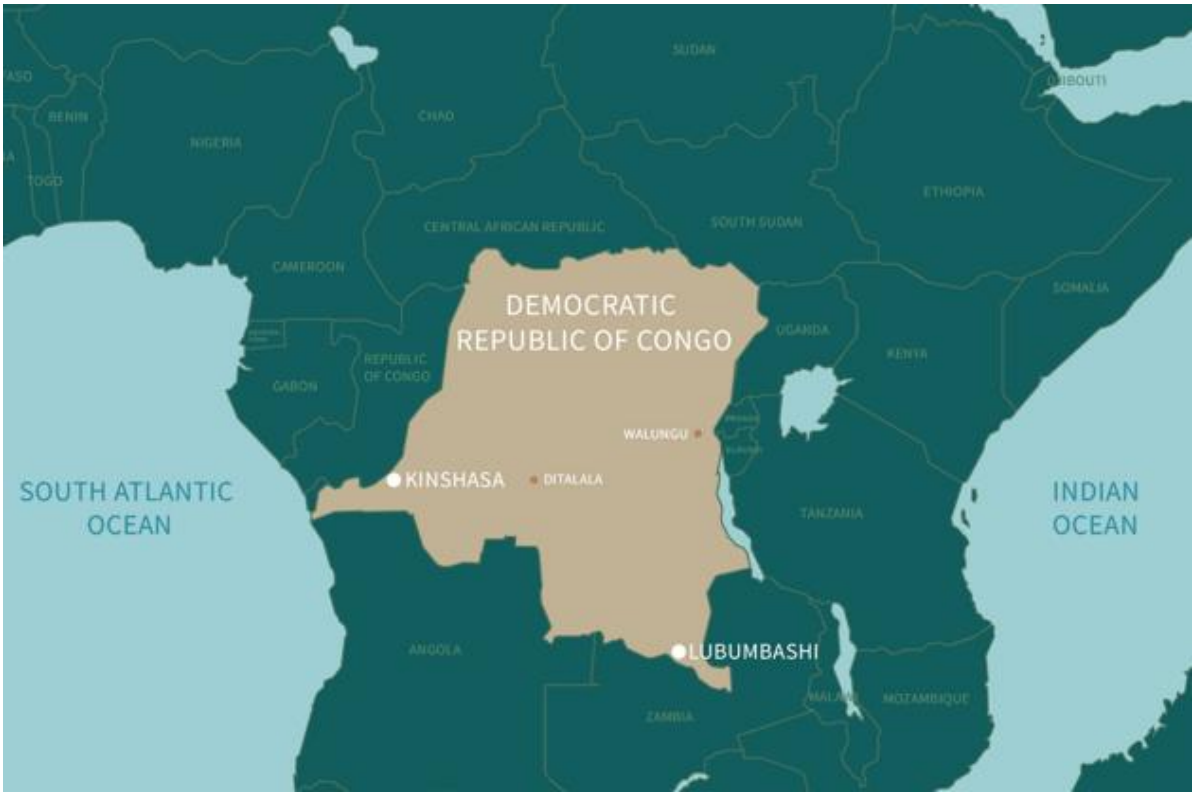
The central African nation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has experienced, for over a century, a series of violent struggles. The most recent war from 1998–2002 is estimated to have claimed over 5.4 million lives, making it the world's deadliest crisis since World War II. For the last two years, it has been the country with the highest number of people displaced by conflict—according to the United Nations, approximately 1.7 million Congolese fled their homes due to insecurity in the first six months of 2017 alone.

Yet, there are communities throughout the country that are learning to transcend the traditional barriers that divide people. Inspired by Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, they are striving for progress both material and spiritual in nature. They are concerned with the practical dimensions of life, as well as with the qualities of a flourishing community like justice, connectedness, unity, and access to knowledge.

"What we are learning is that when there are spaces to come together and discuss the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in relation to the challenges facing their community, people will come and consult about what we can do together to find solutions to our problems," reflects Izzat Mionda Abumba, who has been working for many years with educational programs for children and youth.

"When everyone is given access to these spaces, there is nothing that separates us—it's no longer about who are Bahá'ís and who are not Bahá'ís. We are all reading these writings and in discussing them we find the paths to the solutions for whatever we are doing. Inspiration comes from these writings and directives," he says.

The story of this country is a remarkable one. The process which is unfolding seeks to foster collaboration and build capacity within all people —regardless of religious background, ethnicity, race, gender, or social status—to arise and contribute to the advancement of civilization. Among the confusion, distrust, and obscurity present in the world today, these burgeoning communities in the DRC are hopeful examples of humanity's capacity to bring about profound social transformation.



A path to collective prosperity

The village of Walungu is in South Kivu, a province on the eastern side of the country, bordering Rwanda and Burundi. In recent years, a spirit of unity and collaboration has become widespread among the people of Walungu. They pray together in different settings, bringing neighbor together with neighbor, irrespective of religious affiliation. This growing devotional character has been complemented by a deep commitment to serving the common good.

At the heart of Walungu's transformation has been the dedication of the village to the intellectual and spiritual development of the children.

Walungu is a remote area of the country. Years ago, the community was not satisfied with the state of formal education available for their children. In response, a group of parents and teachers established a school in the village with the assistance of a Bahá'í-inspired organization that provides teacher training and promotes the establishment of community-based schools.

Distinct from traditional educational institutions, community schools, such as the one in Walungu, are initiated, supported, and encouraged by the local community. Parents, extended family, other members of the community, and even the children have a deep sense of ownership and responsibility for the functioning of their school.

When the school opened in 2008, it was comprised of only one grade taught by a single teacher. After a year, the community was able to add another grade and employ a second teacher. Gradually, the school grew, adding more students, grades, and teachers. Today, it is a full primary school with over 100 students.

A teacher presents a lesson in a community school in Walungu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

A student at a community school in Walungu, Democratic Republic of Congo

Children in class at a community school in Walungu, Democratic Republic of Congo

However, the community faced certain challenges as the school began to grow larger. They did not have the funds to pay the teachers a salary or take care of the school. Realizing that something needed to be done to support the school financially, they called a meeting with all the parents and others involved. At the meeting, the director of the school suggested that he could teach them how to weave baskets, and that if they could sell the baskets in the market they would have some funds that could be used to pay the school fees. Sixty-seven parents signed up, happy at the prospect of learning a new skill and being able to support their children's education themselves. To this day, all of them are still weaving baskets, which are sold in the markets of the surrounding villages.

Basket-weaving has remained a collective activity—typically, the parents gather to work on them together, sometimes teaching each other new weaving techniques. And these gatherings have become something more. They are a space to talk about spiritual and profound matters as well.

“The women and men are not coming only to weave,” explains Mireille Rehema Lusagila, who is involved in the work of building healthy and vibrant communities. “They begin with a devotional meeting, they read holy writings together. They are improving their literacy, teaching each other how to read and write. The people there have told me that this activity is helping them not only to progress in a material sense but also on a spiritual level.”

Members of the community in Walungu weave baskets and sell them in the markets to raise funds for the functioning of their community school.

Towards unity, youth lead the way

Along the eastern border of the country in the Kivu region, young people are taking ownership of the development of the next generation. In the village of Tuwe Tuwe, there are 15 youth working with some 100 young adolescents and children, helping them to develop a deep appreciation for unity and navigate a crucial stage of their lives.

For several years, youth have been at the vanguard of transformation in this community. In 2013, a group of young Bahá'ís and their friends returned from a youth conference with a great desire to resolve the tension and hostility between their villages.

At the conference, the group studied themes essential to a unified community, such as the importance of having noble goals, the idea of spiritual and material prosperity, the role of youth in serving and improving their localities, and how to support each other in undertaking meaningful action.

In reflecting on the experience, Mr. Abumba, who travels often in the region to support Bahá'í-inspired educational programs, shares a story about how these young people became a force for unity.

"When these youth returned to their respective communities they saw that hostilities were increasing between their two villages because of conflict over their agricultural fields. The youth asked themselves: 'what can we do to find a solution and help the adults understand that we should live in harmony?' And they decided to take action together," says Mr. Abumba.

"The idea they came up with was to organize a football match involving the youth of both villages and to hold it in a field between the villages, in the hopes that the parents would come and watch. For them, it was not about who would win or lose the match. Their goal was to bring a large number of people from both villages together to the same place and to try to give a message about how to live in unity."

These young people prepared for the match—they bought a football and created the teams of each village with members of different tribes. Finally, the moment came. Quite a big crowd from both villages turned up because it was a Sunday. Those watching were impressed by the way the youth played for the joy of the game.

"Then at the end of the match, the youth spoke to the crowd," explains Mr. Abumba. "They said 'You have seen how we played and how there was no conflict between the youth of one village and the youth of the other village.

And we believe that our villages are capable of this, of living like the children of one same family.' Then the chiefs of the villages took the stage and told those gathered that it was time to turn a new page and start to live and work together.

"In these villages, there are different tribes who are often in conflict," Mr. Abumba concludes. "The people there are drawing on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to find ways to address these deep-rooted problems. And the Bahá'í-inspired educational programs are giving youth in particular a voice to be a force for positive change in their communities."

A village named 'Peace'

A remote village in the central part of the country, Ditalala is connected to the closest town by a 25 kilometer path, sometimes travelled on foot, sometimes via off-road vehicle.

Susan Sheper, who has lived in the DRC since the 1980s, recalls that on her first visit to Ditalala 31 years ago, some Bahá'ís had come to meet her at the train and walk with her on the five-hour journey by foot to the village. "We got off the train and were just enveloped by this group of singing, happy Bahá'ís, and then they said to us, 'Can you walk a little bit?'"

And with that Mrs. Sheper was on her way, with an escort of singing Bahá'ís, walking 25 kilometers through the night.

"It was an extraordinary experience," Mrs. Sheper recalls, "and they never stopped singing, they would just move from one song to the next. You know, they have that experience of having to walk long distances, and it's the singing that keeps you going because your feet just move to the rhythm."

Music infuses every aspect of life in the village of Ditalala.

Although at that time there was a vibrant Bahá'í community in the village, which used to be called Batwa Ditalala, there were distinct barriers between different groups, including the Bahá'ís.

"So flash forward 31 years, and I went back to Batwa Ditalala," says Mrs. Sheper. "And one of the things I learned very quickly was that it was no longer called Batwa Ditalala."

The term Batwa refers to the Batwa people, who are one of the main "Pygmy" groupings in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They have been marginalized and exploited because of discrimination against them based on their hunter-gatherer way of life and their physical appearance. This has created a complex reality of prejudice and conflict wherever they live in close proximity to settled agricultural populations.

"But today, those barriers have been so broken down by Bahá'u'lláh's teachings of oneness and the elimination of prejudice, they no longer call

the village Batwa Ditalala. They just call it Ditalala," Mrs. Sheper explains.

The word *ditalala* means peace in the local language—and the village itself has been transformed by a vision of peace.

"The people there told me that there used to be very distinct divisions between them in the village, but that because of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings they don't see themselves as different tribes anymore, they see themselves as being united," Mrs. Sheper relates. "They told me that life is much better when there is no prejudice."

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings have reached almost everyone in Ditalala and their influence is evident in many dimensions of the lives of the population. Today, over 90 percent of the village participates in Bahá'í community-building activities, ranging from coffee and prayers in the mornings to spiritual and moral education classes for people of all ages.

Ditalala's chief often supports the activities of the Bahá'í community. He encourages the community to gather for consultation, a central feature of decision-making for Bahá'ís.

Singing at a community gathering in Walungu

Chiefs in the village of Ditalala, Democratic Republic of Congo

The people have also undertaken a number of endeavors to improve their social and material well-being, including agricultural, maternal healthcare, and clean water projects; constructing a road; and establishing a community school.

Weaving work in Ditalala

A luminous community

Throughout the DRC, tens of thousands of people have responded to the message of Bahá'u'lláh. The celebrations of the 200th anniversary of His birth in October were extraordinarily widespread—countless numbers participated in the festivities held across the country. It is estimated that as many as 20 million people saw the television broadcast of the national commemoration, attended by prominent government and civil society leaders.

The country has also been designated by the Universal House of Justice as one of two that will have a national Bahá'í House of Worship in the coming years.

Amidst all of its recent developments, what stands out so vividly about the community is that it is moving forward together.

The podcast associated with this Bahá'í World News Service story, can be found here[166].

A peaceful, persistent response to injustice

FRIDAY JULY 21, 2017

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Thirty years ago, the Bahá'í community of Iran embarked on a remarkable endeavor. Denied access to formal education by the country's authorities after their numerous appeals, they set up an informal program of higher education in basements and living rooms throughout the country with the help of Bahá'í professors and academics that had been fired from their posts because of their faith. This gradually came to be known as the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE).

Since its inception, BIHE has helped educate thousands of individuals, many of whom have been accepted into nearly 100 universities around the world to pursue graduate studies. Many BIHE graduates that complete their post-graduate studies abroad will return to Iran to serve their communities.

Thanks to advances in technology, BIHE's students are now taught by professors from across the globe. Those who offer their expertise and knowledge to the education of Bahá'í youth in Iran, have witnessed first-hand the students' high ideals and commitment to the pursuit of knowledge.

"The Bahá'í response to injustice is neither to succumb in resignation nor to take on the characteristics of the oppressor," explained Diane Ala'i, representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations in Geneva, quoting a letter from the Universal House of Justice.

“This,” she said, “is the fundamental definition of constructive resilience.”

“Of course, the Bahá’í s are not the only ones that have responded non-violently and positively to oppression, but they are finding a different way of doing that, which is more focused on their role in serving the community around them together with others,” said Ms. Ala’i.

Despite efforts by the Iranian authorities to disrupt BIHE’s operation by raiding hundreds of Bahá’í homes and offices associated with it, confiscating study materials, and arresting and imprisoning dozens of lecturers, it has grown significantly over the past three decades. It relies on a variety of knowledgeable individuals both in and outside of Iran to enable youth to study a growing number of topics in the sciences, social sciences, and arts. Overall, not only has BIHE survived thirty years, it has thrived.

Studying at BIHE is not easy. Because it’s not a public university, there is no funding available, and many students hold down full-time jobs. It is common to travel across the country to go to monthly classes in Tehran. Sometimes, students will have to commute from a home on one side of the city to the other in the middle of the day, because these are the only spaces available to hold classes. Despite these logistical challenges, students meet high academic standards.

“I have talked to BIHE students who said when their teacher was arrested and put in jail and all their materials were confiscated, they would get together for class just the same,” said Saleem Vaillancourt, the coordinator of the Education is Not a Crime campaign, which brings attention to the issue of denial of education to the Bahá’í s in Iran. “These students continued studying together, despite the fact that they didn’t have a teacher. This was their attitude, it didn’t seem remarkable to them. They just said this is what we have to do, because they had a commitment to the process.”

Universal education is a core belief of the Bahá'í Faith, and when the authorities in Iran sought to deny Baha'i students this critical and fundamental right, the Bahá'í community pursued a peaceful solution —never for a moment conceding their ideals, never surrendering to their oppressor, and never opposing the government. Instead, for decades, it has been seeking constructive solutions, a show of its longstanding resilience.

In Iran, persecution of the Bahá'ís is official state policy. A 1991 memorandum approved by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei states clearly that Bahá'í s "must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Baha'is."

Other forms of persecution torment the Bahá'í s in Iran as well. An open letter dated 6 September 2016 to Iran's President from the BIC draws his attention to the economic oppression faced by the Bahá'í s there. The letter highlights the stark contradiction between statements espoused by the Iranian government regarding economic justice, equality for all, and reducing unemployment on the one hand, and the unrelenting efforts to impoverish a section of its own citizens on the other.

"The Bahá'í community in Iran wasn't going to let itself go quietly into the night. It wasn't going to allow itself to be suffocated in this way," said Mr. Vaillancourt.

A distinctly non-adversarial approach to oppression fundamentally characterizes the Bahá'í attitude towards social change. The Bahá'í response to oppression draws on a conviction in the oneness of humanity. It recognizes the need for coherence between the spiritual and material dimensions of life. It is based on a long-term perspective characterized by faith, patience, and perseverance. It at once calls for obedience to the law and a commitment to meet hatred and persecution with love and kindness. And, ultimately, this posture has at its very

center an emphasis on service to the welfare of one's fellow human beings.

"I think we see in the world today the breakdown of communities that people would not have thought could happen so easily. We've come to realize that living side by side is not enough. We need to live together and know one another, and the best way to know one another is to start working for the betterment of society," said Ms. Ala'i.

"As the Bahá'ís in Iran have begun to do this in a more conscious way, other Iranians have come to know their Bahá'í neighbors and understand that much of what they had heard about the Bahá'ís from the government and clergy were lies. As they have become more involved in the life of the communities where they live, the Bahá'ís have witnessed an immense change in the attitude of other Iranians towards them."

The Bahá'í response to oppression is not oppositional and ultimately strives toward higher degrees of unity. Its emphasis is not only on collective action, but on inner transformation.

This strategy is a conscious one employed by the Bahá'í community. Going beyond the tendency to react to oppression, war, or natural disaster with apathy or anger, the Bahá'í response counters inhumanity with patience, deception with truthfulness, cruelty with good will, and keeps its attention on long-term, beneficial, and productive action.

The Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education embodies all of these elements.

"BIHE is an extraordinary achievement," commented Mr. Vaillancourt. "Perhaps the least known, longest-running, and most successful form of peacefully answering oppression that history has ever seen. It sets the best example I know of for this particular Bahá'í attitude to answering persecution or answering the challenging forces of our time,

where we try to have an attitude, posture, and response of constructive resilience.”

Listen to the podcast episode associated with this Bahá’í World News Service story.

Identity and the Search for a Common Human Purpose

By
Matt Weinberg

FRIDAY APRIL 21, 2006

At the heart of human experience lies an essential yearning for self-definition and self-understanding. Developing a conception of who we are, for what purpose we exist, and how we should live our lives is a basic impulse of human consciousness. This project—of defining the self and its place in the social order—expresses both a desire for meaning and an aspiration for belonging. It is a quest informed by ever-evolving and interacting narratives of identity.

Today, as the sheer intensity and velocity of change challenges our assumptions about the nature and structure of social reality, a set of vital questions confront us. These include: What is the source of our identity? Where should our attachments and loyalties lie? And if our identity or identities so impel us, how—and with whom—should we come together? And what is the nature of the bonds that bring us together?

The organization and direction of human affairs are inextricably connected to the future evolution of our identity. For it is from our identity that intention, action, and social development flow. Identity determines how we see ourselves and conceive our position in the world, how others see us or classify us, and how we choose to engage with those around us. "Knowing who we are," the sociologist Philip Selznick observes, "helps us to appreciate the reach as well as the limits of our attachments."[167] Such attachments play a vital role

in shaping our "authentic selves" and in determining our attitudes toward those within and outside the circle of our social relationships. Acting on the commitments implied by these attachments serves to amplify the powers of individuals in effecting societal well-being and advancement. Notions of personal and collective identity can thus exert considerable influence over the norms and practices of a rapidly integrating global community.

As we have many associational linkages, identity comes in a variety of forms. At times we identify ourselves by our family, ethnicity, nationality, religion, mother tongue, race, gender, class, culture, or profession. At other times our locale, the enterprises and institutions we work for, our loyalty to sports teams, affinity for certain types of music and cuisine, attachment to particular causes, and educational affiliations provide definitional aspects to who we are. The sources of identification which animate and ground human beings are immensely diverse. In short, there are multiple demands of loyalty placed upon us, and consequently, our identities, as Nobel laureate Amaryta Sen has noted, are "inescapably plural."[168]

But which identity or identities are most important? Can divergent identities be reconciled? And do these identities enhance or limit our understanding of and engagement with the world? Each of us on a daily basis, both consciously and unconsciously, draws upon, expresses, and mediates between our multiple senses of identity. And as our sphere of social interaction expands, we tend to subsume portions of how we define ourselves and seek to integrate into a wider domain of human experience. This often requires us to scrutinize and even resist particular interpretations of allegiance that may have a claim on us. We therefore tend to prioritize which identities matter most to us. As the theorist Iris Marion Young stresses: "Individuals are agents: we constitute our own identities, and each person's identity is unique…A person's identity is not some sum of her gender, racial, class, and national affinities. She is only her identity, which she herself has made by the way that she deals

with and acts in relation to others…"[169] The matrix of our associations surely influences how we understand and interpret the world, but cannot fully account for how we think, act, or what values we hold. That a particular identity represents a wellspring of meaning to an individual need not diminish the significance of other attachments or eclipse our moral intuition or use of reason. Affirming affinity with a specific group as a component of one's personal identity should not limit how one views one's place in society or the possibilities of how one might live.

While it is undoubtedly simplistic to reduce human identity to specific contextual categories such as nationality or culture, such categories do provide a strong narrative contribution to an individual's sense of being. "Around the world," the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah writes, "it matters to people that they can tell a story of their lives that meshes with larger narratives. This may involve rites of passage into womanhood and manhood; or a sense of national identity that fits into a larger saga. Such collective identification can also confer significance upon very individual achievements."[170] Social, cultural, and other narratives directly impact who we are. They provide context and structure for our lives, allowing us to link what we wish to become to a wider human inheritance, thereby providing a basis for meaningful collective life. Various narratives of identity serve as vehicles of unity, bringing coherence and direction to the disparate experiences of individuals.

In the wake of extraordinary advances in human knowledge, which have deepened global interchange and contracted the planet, we now find ourselves defined by overlapping identities that encompass a complex array of social forces, relations, and networks. The same person, for instance, can be a Canadian citizen of African origin who descends from two major tribes, fluent in several languages, an engineer, an admirer of Italian opera, an alumnus of a major American university, a race-car enthusiast, a practitioner of yoga, an aficionado of oriental cuisine, a proponent of a conservative political

philosophy, and an adherent of agnosticism who nevertheless draws on insights found in the spiritual traditions of his forebears. One can simultaneously be a committed participant in local community affairs such as improving elementary-level education and an ardent supporter of transnational causes like human rights and environmental stewardship. Such juxtapositions of identity illustrate how individuals increasingly belong to multiple "communities of fate" in which long-existing spatial boundaries are being entirely redrawn and reconceptualized.[171] Modernity has transformed identity in such a way that we must view ourselves as being not only in a condition of dependence or independence but also interdependence.

The recasting of longstanding narratives of identification and affiliation is giving rise to widespread anxiety, grievance, and perplexity. In the eyes of many, the circumstances of daily life lie beyond their control. In particular, "the nation-state…that preeminent validator of social identity—no longer assures well-being," the anthropologist Charles Carnegie avers.[172] Other established sources of social cohesion and expressions of collective intention are similarly diminished in their efficacy to ground the actions of populations around the planet, resulting in a sense of disconnection and alienation. The philosopher Charles Taylor attributes such disruption of customary social patterns to the "massive subjective turn of modern culture," involving an overly atomistic and instrumental view of individual identity.[173] This exaggerated individualism accompanies the dislocation from historic centers of collectivity that is a repercussion of the centrifugal stresses of globalization. Against this kaleidoscope of change, including the major migrations of peoples, the international nature of economic production, and the formation of communities of participation across territorial borders through the means of modern communications, the concept of citizenship, as membership in a confined geographic polity, is in need of reformulation.

Our connections to others now transcend traditional bounds of culture, nation, and community. The unprecedented nature of these connections is radically reshaping human organization and the scale and impact of human exchange. But globalization has been with us a long time; the movement of peoples, goods, and ideas is an inherent feature of human history and development. Virtually every culture is linked to others by a myriad ties.[174]

Culture is neither static nor homogeneous. Anthropological and sociological research reveals that cultures cannot be seen as fixed, indivisible wholes. The various manifestations of "social belonging" exhibit a "constructed and pliable nature."[175] Cultural resiliency has much to do with heterogeneity, assimilation of outside ideas, and the capacity to adapt. "We should view human cultures as constant creations, recreations, and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between 'we' and the 'other(s)'," the political scientist Seyla Benhabib emphasizes.[176] The multifarious processes of integration now at work are serving to accentuate and accelerate such social, economic, and cultural interchange. Under these conditions, Benhabib adds, presumed lines of cultural demarcation are increasingly "fluid, porous and contested."[177] To perceive cultures, then, as objects of stasis, immune from the complex dialogues and interactions of human existence, is a fundamental epistemological and empirical error. As Appiah maintains: "Societies without change aren't authentic; they're just dead."[178]

Often, the insistence that the essence of cultural distinctiveness is its putative immutability emerges from a sincere desire to preserve and honor the power of an existing collective narrative. What is at issue here is a legitimate fear that valued identities may be lost or overwhelmed by unfamiliar external forces. Although an advocate of cultural rights designed to prevent such unwanted change, the theorist Will Kymlicka notes that "most indigenous peoples understand that the nature of their cultural identity is dynamic…"[179] From this vantage point, Kymlicka believes that globalization

"provides new and valued options by which nations can promote their interests and identities."[180] This suggests that a balance must be sought between the requirements of self-determination and the possibility of defining an aspect of self-determination as participation in the construction of a broader collectivity. Participation of this kind by a diverse array of cultures and peoples offers the promise of enriching the entire fabric of civilized life.

Recognition of the reality of globalization, however, does not mean that the current inequities associated with the process—how resources, opportunities, and power are distributed—should go unchallenged. And perhaps more important, the exhausted ideologies and intellectual frameworks that allow such inequities to persist must also be directly confronted.[181] It is here where the insights provided by diverse human traditions and value systems can engage with the constructive phenomena of contemporary change to open new frontiers of identity—frontiers offering a peaceful and just future.

In 1945, aware of the imminent test of the first atomic weapon, Franklin D. Roosevelt warned: "Today we are faced with the pre-eminent fact that, if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships—the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together and work together in the same world, at peace."[182] Clearly, the perceptions that human beings hold of themselves and each other matter. In a world convulsed by contention and conflict, conceptions of identity that feed the forces of prejudice and mistrust must be closely examined. Assertions that certain populations can be neatly partitioned into oppositional categories of affiliation deserve particular scrutiny. The notion of civilizational identity as the predominant expression of human allegiance is one such problematic example.[183] For Amartya Sen, such thinking leads to "conceptual disarray" that can undermine international stability.

To view the relationships between different human beings as mere reflections of the relations between civilizations is questionable on both logical and pragmatic grounds. First, civilizations themselves are not monolithic in character; indeed, their vast internal diversity is among their distinguishing features. Second, as we have seen, reducing personhood to a "singular affiliation" denies the essential variety and complexity of human experience.[184] Of most concern, argues Sen, is the danger that assigning "one preeminent categorization" to human beings will exacerbate and harden conceptions of difference between peoples.[185] This presumption of a "unique and choiceless identity," that people are what they are because they have been born into a certain ethnic, cultural, or religious inheritance, is an "illusion" that underlies many of the "conflicts and barbarities in the world."[186] "Reasoned choice," Sen believes, must be used to examine the intrinsic merit of our antecedent associations as well as the broader social ramifications of identity.[187]

"A tenable global ethics," Kwame Anthony Appiah concurs, "has to temper a respect for difference with a respect for the freedom of actual human beings to make their own choices."[188] For this reason, there exists an intimate relationship between cultural diversity and liberty. A sustainable and authentic expression of collective development must be a freely chosen path pursued by the members composing the group in question; current generations cannot impose their vision of what a desirable form of life is upon future generations. Existing mores, practices, and institutions can inform, validate, and even ennoble the human condition, but cannot or should not foreclose new moral or social directions for individuals and communities. Indeed, collective learning and adjustment are defining characteristics of social evolution. Because our perceptions and experiences change, our understanding of reality necessarily undergoes change. So too, then, do our identities change. "The contours of identity are profoundly real," Appiah states, "and yet no more imperishable, unchanging, or transcendent than other things

that men and women make."[189] At the same time, "if we create a society that our descendants will want to hold on to, our personal and political values will survive in them."[190]

Significant portions of the world's peoples, we know though, are deprived of the autonomy necessary to develop a plan of life or a corresponding identity that can inspire and assist them to realize life goals. The widespread subordinate social position of women and minorities restricts the latitude of their self-determination; members of these groups are frequently denied, in a systematic way, the chance to fully explore their individual potential and to contribute to the processes of cultural, social, and moral advancement. Constructions of identity can therefore be quite tenuous for marginalized groups or individuals whose personal characteristics fall outside received categories of classification. This can be especially true for persons of mixed ethnic, racial, or religious descent. Concepts of race and nation can serve as powerful instruments and symbols of unity, but can also lead to the isolation, dispossession, and "symbolic dismemberment" of minorities.[191] In this regard, Charles Carnegie's call for a "new consciousness of belonging" seems vital.[192]

The prevalent stance that identity is about difference is untenable. Perceiving identity through the relativistic lens of separation or cultural preservation ignores compelling evidence of our common humanity and can only aggravate the forces of discord and disagreement now so pervasive in the world. The only alternative to this path of fragmentation and disunity is to nurture affective relationships across lines of ethnicity, creed, territory, and color—relationships that can serve as the warp and woof of a new social framework of universal solidarity and mutual respect. A one-dimensional understanding of human beings must be rejected. As Amartya Sen underscores: "The hope of harmony in the contemporary world lies to a great extent in a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity, and in the appreciation that they

cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division."[193] This is an appeal for imagination in creating new ways of being and living; for a new vision of human nature and society—one that recognizes the unmistakable shared destiny of all peoples. The resolution of the problems now engulfing the planet demands a more expansive sense of human identity. As articulated by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century ago: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."[194]

The crucial need of the present hour is to determine the conceptual and practical steps that will lay the foundations of an equitable and harmonious global order. Effectively addressing the crises now disrupting human affairs will require new models of social transformation that recognize the deep interrelationship between the material, ethical, and transcendent dimensions of life. It is evident that such models can emerge only from a fundamental change in consciousness about who we are, how we regard others who enter our ambit—no matter how near or distant, and how we collectively design the structures and processes of social life, whether local or global.

Such observations lead to yet more questions. In a world of pluralistic identities and rapidly shifting cultural and moral boundaries, is a common understanding of human purpose and action possible? Can a genuine cosmopolitan ethic, one that fully embraces human diversity, emerge from the multiple experiences and perceptions of modernity?

A basis of an affirmative Bahá'í response to these questions can be found in Bahá'u'lláh's exhortations to the world's peoples to "set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you,"[195] and to "let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self."[196] For Bahá'ís, though, such a perspective is not simply a matter of belief or hopeful aspiration, but is grounded in experience.

A conviction of the practicality of world unity and peace, coupled with an unwavering dedication to work toward this goal, is perhaps the single most distinguishing characteristic of the Bahá'í community. That this community is now representative of the diversity of the entire human race, encompassing virtually every national, ethnic, and racial group on the planet, is an achievement that cannot be casually dismissed. The worldwide Bahá'í community, as an organic whole, eschews dichotomies prevalent in public discourse today, such as "North" and "South," and "developed" and "underdeveloped." Bahá'ís everywhere, irrespective of the degree of material well-being of their nations, are striving to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the process of building unified patterns of collective life. In this undertaking, every member of the community is a valued participant. In this respect, the roots of Bahá'í motivation and the formation of Bahá'í identity have a long history.

In the early part of the twentieth century, 'Abdu'l-Bahá—Bahá'u'lláh's son and appointed successor—urged the some 160 Bahá'í inhabitants of a small village in a remote part of Iran who were experiencing persecution to "regard every ill-wisher as a well-wisher.… That is, they must associate with a foe as befitteth a friend, and deal with an oppressor as beseemeth a kind companion. They should not gaze upon the faults and transgressions of their foes, nor pay heed to their enmity, inequity or oppression."[197] And further, they should "show forth love and affection, wisdom and compassion, faithfulness and unity towards all, without any discrimination."[198] But apart from enjoining upon them an attitude of remarkable forbearance and amity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not address these followers as simple rural people with narrow parochial concerns. Rather, He affirmed their innate dignity by speaking to them as citizens of the world who had the capacity and the power to contribute to the advancement of civilization:

> O ye beloved of the Lord! With the utmost joy and gladness, serve ye the human world, and love ye the human race. Turn

> your eyes away from limitations, and free yourselves from restrictions, for … freedom therefrom brings about divine blessings and bestowals…
>
> Therefore, so long as there be a trace of life in one's veins, one must strive and labour, and seek to lay a foundation that the passing of centuries and cycles may not undermine, and rear an edifice which the rolling of ages and aeons cannot overthrow—an edifice that shall prove eternal and everlasting, so that the sovereignty of heart and soul may be established and secure in both worlds.[199]

In short, the perceptions, preferences, and assumptions of the denizens of this small, isolated village were radically transformed. Their identity had been remade. They no longer were concerned just with local matters, and even though they were far removed from the mainstream of intellectual and cultural exchange, they regarded themselves as "servants" of the "entire human race," and as protagonists in the building of a new way of life. They understood their "ultimate sphere of work as the globe itself."[200] That the broader Iranian Bahá'í community achieved, over the course of three generations, levels of educational advancement and prosperity well beyond the general population, even under conditions of severe religious discrimination, underscores the capacities that can be released when the moral and spiritual dimensions of human consciousness are awakened and purposively channeled.[201] For those interested in apprehending the sources and mechanisms of individual and community empowerment, it would be difficult to find a more compelling example of social transformation than the case of the Iranian Bahá'ís.

In response to Bahá'u'lláh's call for the creation of a universal culture of collaboration and conciliation, Bahá'ís drawn from almost every cultural and religious tradition "have achieved a sense of identity as members of a single human race, an identity that shapes

the purpose of their lives and that, clearly, is not the expression of any intrinsic moral superiority on their own part…"[202] It is an accomplishment "that can properly be described only as spiritual—capable of eliciting extraordinary feats of sacrifice and understanding from ordinary people of every background."[203]

So it is clear that from a Bahá'í perspective, a universal identity is a vital precursor to action that is universal in its effects—to the "emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture."[204] In emphasizing our global identity, Bahá'u'lláh presents a conception of life that insists upon a redefinition of all human relationships—between individuals, between human society and the natural world, between the individual and the community, and between individual citizens and their governing institutions.[205] Humanity has arrived at the dawn of its maturity, when its "innate excellence" and latent creative capacities can at last find complete expression.[206] Accordingly, new social forms and ethical precepts are enunciated in the Bahá'í teachings so that human consciousness can be freed from patterns of response set by tradition, and the foundations of a global society can be erected.

Bahá'u'lláh thus speaks to the reshaping and redirection of social reality. That all individual action and social arrangements must be informed by the principle of the oneness of human relationships, gives rise to a concept of moral and social order that safeguards personal dignity while deepening human solidarity. In recognition of this central insight, the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Bahá'í community, urges all to "embrace the implications of the oneness of humankind, not only as the inevitable next step in the advancement of civilization, but as the fulfillment of lesser identities of every kind that our race brings to this critical moment in our collective history."[207]

From the basic principle of the unity of the world's peoples are derived virtually all notions concerning human welfare and liberty. If the human race is one, any assertion that a particular racial, ethnic, or national group is in some way superior to the rest of humanity must be dismissed; society must reorganize its life to give practical expression to the principle of equality for all its members regardless of race, creed, or gender; each and every person must be enabled to "look into all things with a searching eye" so that truth can be independently ascertained[208]; and all individuals must be given the opportunity to realize their inherent capabilities and thereby foster "the elevation, the advancement, the education, the protection and the regeneration of the peoples of the earth."[209]

In the Bahá'í view, social origin, position, or rank are of no account in the sight of God. As Bahá'u'lláh confirms, "man's glory lieth in his knowledge, his upright conduct, his praiseworthy character, his wisdom, and not in his nationality or rank."[210] This emphatic declaration of the essential moral and spiritual worth of every human being is echoed in an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh's to a devoted follower: "Verily, before the one true God, they who are the rulers and lords of men and they that are their subjects and vassals are equal and the same. The ranks of all men are dependent on their potential and capacity. Witness unto this truth are the words, 'In truth, they are most honored before God who are most righteous.'"[211] Hence, embedded in the Bahá'í understanding of human identity is a fundamental expectation of justice and equality of opportunity, as well as an imperative of striving for greater moral awareness and responsibility.

It must be stressed that the "watchword" of the Bahá'í community is "unity in diversity."[212] Oneness and diversity are complementary and inseparable: "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 inherent diversity that distinguishes unity from homogeneity or

uniformity."[213] Just as integration of the differentiated components of the human body makes possible the higher function of human consciousness, so too is global well-being dependent on the willing give and take, and ultimate collaboration, of humanity's diverse populations.[214] Acceptance of the concept of unity in diversity implies the development of a global consciousness, a sense of global citizenship, and a love for all of humanity. It induces every individual to realize that, "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" and has a responsibility to the whole.[215] It further suggests that if a peaceful international community is to emerge, then the complex and varied cultural expressions of humanity must be allowed to develop and flourish, as well as to interact with one another in ever-changing forms of civilization. "The diversity in the human family," the Bahá'í writings emphasize, "should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord."[216] More than creating a culture of tolerance, the notion of unity in diversity entails vanquishing corrosive divisions along lines of race, class, gender, nationality, and belief, and erecting a dynamic and cooperative social ethos that reflects the oneness of human nature.

The ideology of difference so ubiquitous in contemporary discourse militates against the possibility of social progress. It provides no basis whereby communities defined by specific backgrounds, customs, or creeds can bridge their divergent perspectives and resolve social tensions. The value of variety and difference cannot be minimized, but neither can the necessity for coexistence, order, and mutual effort. "The supreme need of humanity," 'Abdu'l-Bahá underscores, "is cooperation and reciprocity. The stronger the ties of fellowship and solidarity amongst men, the greater will be the power of constructiveness and accomplishment in all the planes of human activity."[217] Diversity by itself cannot be regarded as an "ultimate good."[218]

Unity, in contrast, "is a phenomenon of creative power."[219] To foster a global identity, to affirm that we are members of one human family is a deceptively simple but powerful idea. While traditional loyalties and identities must be appreciated and recognized, they are inadequate for addressing the predicament of modernity, and consequently, a higher loyalty, one that speaks to the common destiny of all the earth's inhabitants, is necessary. And so, in our quest for solutions to the problems that collectively confront us, a first step must involve relinquishing our attachment to lesser loyalties. Yet, while Bahá'u'lláh is saying that at this moment in human social evolution a global identity is vital, an inherent aspect of such a universal identity is recognition of the spiritual reality that animates our inner selves.[220] To be sure, a global identity grounded in awareness of our common humanness marks a great step forward from where humanity has been, but a strictly secular or material formulation of global identity is unlikely to provide a sufficient motivational basis for overcoming historic prejudices and engendering universal moral action. Establishing a global milieu of peace, prosperity, and fairness is ultimately a matter of the heart; it involves a change in basic attitudes and values that can only come from recognizing the normative and spiritual nature of the challenges before us. This is especially so given that the vast majority of the world's peoples do not view themselves simply as material beings responding to material exigencies and circumstances, but rather as beings endowed with spiritual sensibility and purpose.

In light of ongoing social turmoil and the upheavals of the last century, it is simply no longer possible to maintain the belief that human well-being can arise from a narrow materialistic conception of life. The persistence of widespread human deprivation and despair speaks to the shortcomings of prevailing social theories and policies. Fresh approaches are required. A just social polity, Bahá'ís believe, will emerge only when human relations and social arrangements are infused with spiritual intent, an intent characterized by an all-embracing standard of equity, unconditional love, and an ethos of

service to others. Addressing practical challenges through a spiritual lens is no easy task, but it is to this objective that Bahá'ís are firmly committed. Through recognition of the centrality of spiritual values and the deeds they inspire, "Minds, hearts and all human forces are reformed, perfections are quickened, sciences, discoveries and investigations are stimulated afresh, and everything appertaining to the virtues of the human world is revitalized."[221] The power of a spiritually-actuated identity in furthering human betterment cannot be overestimated, for those "whose hearts are warmed by the energizing influence of God's creative love cherish His creatures for His sake, and recognize in every human face a sign of His reflected glory."[222]

It is still regrettable that the identity of certain individuals or groups emerges from a shared experience of oppression—from being the victims of systematic discrimination or injustice. In addressing this dimension of human identity, Bahá'u'lláh speaks forcefully and repeatedly about the rights and dignity of all human beings, and the indispensability of creating mechanisms of social justice, but He also explains that spiritual oppression is the most serious of all: "What 'oppression' is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth… should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?"[223] From this standpoint, it is in the displacement of a transcendent understanding of life by an ascendant materialism that we find the source of the disaffection, anomie, and uncertainty that so pervades modern existence. All forms of oppression ultimately find their genesis in the denial of our essential spiritual identity. As Bahá'u'lláh earnestly counsels us: "Deny not My servant should he ask anything from thee, for his face is My face; be then abashed before Me."[224]

These words tell us that we must choose who we wish to be; we must "see" with our "own eyes and not through the eyes of others."[225] We must create our own sense of self and belonging. To have such power of choice affirms human nobility and is a sign of

divine grace. Our different senses of identity consequently become fully realized through the development of our spiritual identity; they each provide a means for achieving our basic existential purpose—the recognition and refinement of the spiritual capacities latent within us. Through the tangible expression of such capacities—compassion, trustworthiness, humility, courage, forbearance, and willingness to sacrifice for the common good—we define a path of spiritual growth. In the end, though, whether we have attained our spiritual potential is enshrouded in mystery: "the inner being, the underlying reality or intrinsic identity, is still beyond the ken and perception of our human powers."[226]

Connected with the idea of spiritual identity, then, is the inalienable sanctity of every human soul; that a unique destiny has been bestowed upon each of us by an all-loving Creator—a destiny which unfolds in accordance with the free exercise of our rational and moral powers. As Bahá'u'lláh indicates, "How lofty is the station which man, if he but choose to fulfill his high destiny, can attain!"[227] This promise of new vistas of accomplishment for both the individual and society, is, for Bahá'ís, a source of enduring confidence and optimism. The forces now buffeting and recasting human life, Bahá'u'lláh attests, will serve to release the "potentialities inherent in the station of man," thereby giving impetus to "an ever-advancing civilization."[228]

The Bahá'í belief in the spiritual nature of reality, and its underlying unity, sheds new light on the question of religious identity. In stressing 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,"[229] Bahá'u'lláh is confirming a basic intuition that the truth underpinning the world's great religions is in essence one. This explicit rejection of exclusivity and superiority, which have so dominated religious thinking and behavior, and suppressed impulses to reconciliation and unity, clears the ground for a new ethos of mutual understanding. For indeed, to believe that one's

system of belief is somehow superior or unique, has only led humankind to misery, despair, and ruin. In warning His followers never to assume what their own spiritual end might be, Bahá'u'lláh plants the seeds of humility and spiritual maturity so necessary for the creation of a world of tolerance and tranquility. In recognizing the divine origin of the world's great religions, and that they have each served to unlock a wider range of capacities within human consciousness and society, the Bahá'í Faith does not and cannot make any claim of religious finality, but rather a claim of paramount relevance to humanity's current spiritual and social plight. Its role as a reconciler and unifier of religions is clearly anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh: "A different Cause…hath appeared in this day and a different discourse is required."[230]

Bahá'u'lláh clarifies that a moral logic pervades the fabric of human life, and that it is through observance of spiritual principles that the individual can realize the divinely intended goal of his or her existence. As beings capable of spiritual and moral development, our autonomy and welfare are not only determined by the laws and constraints of the natural world, but also by an objective spiritual world that is integrally related to it. To follow a moral path is not only to carry out the duties that we have to those around us, but is the only means for realizing true happiness and contentment. Our obligations to God, our inner selves, our family, and the wider community give definition to who we are and what our aims should be. For Bahá'ís, fulfillment of these obligations to the Divine will and to our fellow human beings ensures the emergence of a stable and progressive society. Moreover, by honoring such responsibilities, the nobility and rights of others are protected. In this sense, it is the requirement of individuals' being able to meet primary spiritual and moral obligations that safeguards human rights.[231]

The Bahá'í teachings explain that moral insight is both transcendentally and dialogically derived. The values and ideals that bind human beings together, and give tangible direction and meaning

to life, find their origins in the guidance provided by the Founders of the world's great religious systems. At the same time, it is human action in response to such guidance that gives real shape to social reality. Bahá'u'lláh makes clear that all such action must be consultatively-inspired and directed. Given that human life has a "fundamentally dialogical character," it is through interchange that individuals and the communities they compose are able to give definition to their identities and their long-term goals.[232] Consultation can lead to the creation of new social meanings and social forms that reflect what is reasonable and fair for society to achieve. But any such process of collective deliberation and decision-making, the Bahá'í writings insist, must be devoid of adversarial posturing as well as dispassionate and fully participatory in spirit. It is through discourse which is inclusive and unifying that the religious impulse finds expression in the modern age.

Clearly, there can never be an absolutely objective or static understanding of what constitutes concepts such as social equity, human security, power, "the common good," democracy, or community. There is an evolutionary aspect to social development—a dynamic process of learning, dialogue, and praxis in which social challenges and solutions are constantly redefined and reassessed. There are always multiple understandings of particular social questions and these diverse perspectives each typically contain some measure of validity. By building a broader framework of analysis that encompasses not only material and technical variables but the normative and spiritual dimensions of various social issues, new insights can emerge that enrich dialogues previously locked into narrow conceptual boundaries. A unifying sense of identity can obviously play an important role in facilitating and sustaining such a consultative path.

In many ways, the struggle to understand our identity is tied up with the question of meaning in modern life. Increasingly, calls are being made for rooting meaning and identity in community, but when the community is religiously, morally, and culturally pluralistic in

character it is challenging for diverse voices to find common ground. It is here where the Bahá'í concepts of unity in diversity and non-adversarial dialogue and decision-making can offer a potent alternative vision of social advancement. Engaging in a cooperative search for truth will no doubt lead to the discovery and implementation of shared perspectives and values. Such open moral dialogue within and among variegated communities can lead to a process of action, reflection, and adjustment resulting in genuine social learning and progress.[233] As Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes, "No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation."[234]

Meaning emerges from an independent search for truth and a chosen freedom grounded in social experience and social participation—a participation that leads to the enlargement of the self. Participation creates new identities and new solidarities. In Bahá'í communities around the globe, patterns of fellowship, knowledge-building, and collaboration among diverse peoples are giving rise to a new human culture. Bahá'ís have found that encouraging new modalities of association and participation is key to promoting meaningful social development and effective local governance that is democratic in spirit and method. Hence, Bahá'u'lláh's statement that fellowship and sincere association "are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations."[235]

Human beings are social beings. The self, therefore, cannot evolve outside of human relationships. Indeed, the self develops principally through endeavors that are participatory in nature. Virtues such as generosity, loyalty, mercy, and self-abnegation cannot be manifested in isolation from others. The Bahá'í teachings affirm that the essential arena of moral choice is the autonomous person. But this autonomy is exercised within a broader social context, as well as an all-encompassing spiritual reality that informs the nature of that social context. The Bahá'í teachings thus offer a social conception of human identity in which the inner aspirations of the self are aligned

with the goals of a just and creative global polity. In this way, the Bahá'í community is able to reconcile "the right" with the "good."[236]

Individual well-being is intimately tied to the flourishing of the whole. It is a reciprocated benevolence, founded on the ideals of service and selflessness, rather than utilitarian self-interest, that underlies the Bahá'í idea of social life. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good."[237] While preservation of "personal freedom and initiative" is considered essential, so too must the relational aspect of human existence be recognized. The "maintenance of civilized life," the Universal House of Justice explains, "calls for the utmost degree of understanding and cooperation between society and the individual; and because of the need to foster a climate in which the untold potentialities of the individual members of society can develop, this relationship must allow 'free scope' for 'individuality to assert itself' through modes of spontaneity, initiative and diversity that ensure the viability of society."[238]

Given the social matrix of human reality, the quest for true self-determination and true identity involves finding one's place within a moral order, not outside it. But in the Bahá'í view, such "ordered liberty" concerns the awakening of the soul to the capacities of integrity, kindness, and sincerity that lie within it. And spiritual growth of this kind must be fostered by the community in which the individual is embedded. Any conception of "the good"—an equitable society promoting the development of individual potential—must recognize the necessity of imbuing the concept of duty into society's members. In this respect, laws and ethical standards are intended not to constrain but to liberate human consciousness so that a moral ethos can come into being. To a great degree, then, the emergence of the citizen devoted to a moral praxis results from the collective voice of the community. Although a path of social virtue and service must be freely chosen, the community must strive to cultivate and

empower this voice.[239] The ultimate expression of this spiritually motivated moral voice is a culture where action flows not from externally imposed duties and rights but from the spontaneous love that each member of the community has for one another. From our shared recognition that we are all sheltered under the love of the same God comes both humility and the means for true social cohesion.

This spiritually-based conception of social life goes beyond notions of mutual advantage and prudence associated with the idea of the social contract. While the principle of self-interested, rational exchange implied by the social contract indisputably represents an advance over coercion as a basis for social existence, there surely exists a step beyond exchange. As the philosopher Martha Nussbaum states, the pursuit of "individual ends" must "include shared ends."[240] Social cooperation, as manifested through a "global society of peoples," she argues, cannot be based on seeking mutual advantage, but can only result from recognizing that "a central part of our good is to live in a world that is morally decent, a world in which all human beings have what they need to live a life with dignity."[241] Yet, Nussbaum's thoughtful critique of current social forms falls short in outlining a pathway for mediating among divergent identities and value systems so that unity on a global scale becomes a realistic possibility. For without a genuine, transcending love emanating from the heart of human consciousness and motivation, it is unlikely that contending peoples and cultures can come together to form a harmonious and interdependent whole. Under the pluralism of the social contract, however enlightened that pluralism may be, disunity reigns.[242]

Bahá'u'lláh instead offers a covenant of universal fellowship, a spiritually-empowered ethic of deep and abiding commitment, as the basis for collective life. As a result of this covenant of oneness, in the deprivation and suffering of others we see ourselves. Such a frame of reference opens the door to critical reflection and real social

transformation. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire, and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life.”[243]

The Bahá’í concept of an inhering human diversity leading to higher forms of unity suggests that we can and must move beyond a liberal construction of pluralism that is unable to provide an overarching vision of human development. But rather than engaging in a quixotic quest to overcome the innumerable evils at work in society or right the “countless wrongs afflicting a desperate age,” Bahá’ís are devoting their energy to building the world anew.[244] As we have seen, recognizing the essential spiritual character of our identity is a defining feature of this project. Further, at this moment in our collective evolution, the appropriate locus for action is the globe in its entirety, where all members of the human family are joined together in a common enterprise of promoting justice and social integration. Here, it should be noted that the Bahá’í teachings envision social and political development unfolding in two directions: upward beyond the nation-state and downward to the grassroots of society. Both are vital and interlinked. In this regard, the Bahá’í community offers its own unique system of governance as a model for study.[245]

Bahá’u’lláh provides us with a potent new moral grammar that allows us to appreciate and nurture human diversity while expanding our horizons beyond the parochial to a solidarity encompassing the boundaries of the planet itself. By extending human identity outward to embrace the totality of human experience, Bahá’u’lláh offers a vision of a comprehensive good that recognizes and values the particular while promoting an integrating framework of global learning and cooperation. His summons to unity articulates an entirely new ethics and way of life—one that flows from a spiritual understanding of human history, purpose, and development. He also gives us new tools that allow us to negotiate among our diverse perceptions and construct unified modes of living without resorting

to adversarial means and the culture of protest that heretofore have characterized even the most advanced democratic polities. He exhorts us to "flee" from "dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy…"[246]

By redefining human identity, the Bahá'í teachings anticipate the moral reconstruction of all human practices—a process that involves the remaking of individual behavior and the reformulation of institutional structures. It entails the internalization of spiritual concepts so that the theory, assessment, and reformation of social affairs reflect the ideals of altruism, moderation, reciprocity, and justice. When society draws upon the spiritual mainspring of human identity and purpose, truly constructive avenues of social change can be pursued. "Among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces," 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms "will be that the human world will adapt itself to a new social form…and human equality will be universally established."[247]

In our very longing for a world free from violence and injustice, lie the seeds of hope. But such hope can only be sustained by the certitude conferred by faith. As the Universal House of Justice assures us: "The turmoil and crises of our time underlie a momentous transition in human affairs…That our Earth has contracted into a neighbourhood, no one can seriously deny. The world is being made new. Death pangs are yielding to birth pangs. The pain shall pass when members of the human race act upon the common recognition of their essential oneness. There is a light at the end of this tunnel of change beckoning humanity to the goal destined for it according to the testimonies recorded in all the Holy Books."[248]

Altruism and Extensivity in the Bahá'í Religion

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In this paper, first presented at an international conference held in Raziejowice, Poland, in 1989, Wendy M. Heller and Hoda Mahmoudi explore altruism as a major component of social change.

Human history abounds with examples of oppression and injustice inflicted by one group on another. Over the centuries, ideologically sanctioned patterns of prejudice, distrust, and suspicion have given rise to norms of exclusiveness, aggression, and violence toward those outside one's own social group. Ironically, religion, which has the potential to transcend other group affiliations in uniting people into a community, has itself been the cause of some of the most bitter, violent, and seemingly unsolvable conflicts between peoples. Yet, even while religion has often been used to justify prejudice and hostility against other groups, religious scriptures have furnished inspiring appeals to altruism and enduring exhortations to embrace the "other".

Despite the pattern of group divisiveness, human history also contains examples of acts that defy this pattern: individuals who risk their lives to save others, who refuse to collaborate in acts of oppression even though in doing so they set themselves apart and risk ostracism or even death. Yet, in spite of the high cultural regard for valiant individual examples of moral heroism, societies have generally been slow to promote altruistic behavior as a model to be emulated; they have not

deliberately encouraged the development of "altruistic personalities" able to transcend self-interest and group affiliation. However, it is precisely in those examples of altruistic acts that a glimmer of hope can be discerned for a solution to the monumental dysfunction that plagues human societies today, as well as solid evidence that human nature is not innately and incorrigibly aggressive and egocentric—that human beings are genuinely capable of selflessness and extensive behavior toward all people, regardless of the group to which they belong. This article will examine some of the ways in which the Bahá'í Faith combines the unifying function of religion with altruism in its aspiration to develop an altruistically oriented global society.

Located in over two hundred countries, the Bahá'í Faith has recently been identified as the second most widely distributed religion (geographically) after Christianity.[249] Although the Bahá'í Faith originated in nineteenth-century Írán, the vast majority of its multiracial and multicultural membership is now located in other countries, especially in the Third World, with the largest national community being in India. The Bahá'í religion has no clergy; its community administration is conducted by elected councils of nine members at the local, national, and international levels. The Bahá'í teachings are contained in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'ís accept these works as authoritative texts and the definitive model for belief and behavior, as well as the blueprint for social transformation and for the global social order that is the religion's ultimate goal.[250]

Bahá'ís aim to transform civilization by transforming themselves and their own social institutions on the basis of principles contained in the Bahá'í scriptures. Both altruism and extensivity—a pattern of personal commitment and responsibility that embraces diverse groups of people[251]—are fundamental components of Bahá'í belief and practice, a factor that has important implications for the global society Bahá'ís are attempting to construct.

The social change envisioned by Bahá'ís involves interrelated and interactive processes of individual and structural transformation. Individual transformation embodies more than a profession of belief; it is viewed as a process of acquiring distinctive personal characteristics and demonstrating them in social interactions as well as in working, together with other Bahá'ís, to develop the emerging Bahá'í social institutions.

In the Bahá'í view, spiritual life is not separated from the realm of social relations but integrated with it. The Bahá'í teachings shift the primary focus of religious practice from individual salvation or enlightenment to the collective progress of humanity as a whole.[252]

Those teachings address social conditions and global problems as directly related to the individual's spiritual life: issues of world peace, the equality of men and women, harmony between science and religion, the equitable distribution of wealth and resources, and the elimination of prejudice are, for Bahá'ís, inseparable from religious belief and practice.

Such an emphasis on collective progress has important implications for the relationship of individual entities—whether individual persons, nations, or other groups—to the larger society of which they form a part. As Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1936, that relationship is essentially based on the principle of the subordination of "every particularistic interest, be it personal, regional, or national, to the paramount interests of humanity…."[253]

This principle, in turn, is based on the idea that, in a world of inter-dependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected.

Yet, the interests of humanity as a whole are not conceptualized in terms of a vague abstraction that could be appropriated by a particular

dominant group and interpreted as identical with its own interests, but rather as a complex dynamic relationship between the parts and the whole, in which the viability of the whole is served by ensuring the well-being of all its individual parts, an enterprise for which all share responsibility.

This conception is demonstrated at its most basic in the relationship of the individual person and society. Although that relationship is, as Shoghi Effendi has stated, "essentially based on the principle of the subordination of the individual will to that of society," a complex balance is sought between individual freedom and responsibility, in which the individual is neither suppressed nor excessively exalted. Cooperation between society and the individual is stressed, as is the fostering of "a climate in which the untold potentialities of the individual members of society can develop…."[254]

Such a relationship, as it is envisioned, "must allow 'free scope' for 'individuality to assert itself' through modes of spontaneity, initiative and diversity that ensure the viability of society." Thus, even while the will of the individual is subordinated to that of society, "the individual is not lost in the mass but becomes the focus of primary development…."[255] The fulfillment of individual potential is to be sought not in pursuing self-centered desires but in contributing to the well-being of others, and "the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good."[256]

As Farzam Arbab has noted, this shift of emphasis to the progress of humanity is also reflected in the importance given to specific qualities that Bahá'ís are enjoined to acquire, qualities that promote prosocial behavior and lead to unity: for example, justice is stressed more than charity, and the acquisition of attitudes conducive to human solidarity is valued over simple tolerance. Even the qualities of love and of detachment from the material world are conceived of as active and social rather than passive and inwardly directed:

> …the social dimension is also enhanced through the expansion of the meaning of most qualities to include a social vision. Love includes the abolition of social prejudices and the realization of the beauty of diversity in the human race. Detachment from the world is not taught in a way that leads to idleness and to the acceptance of oppression: it is acquired to free us from our own material interests in order to dedicate ourselves to the well-being of others. To this expansion of the meaning of almost all qualities is also added a constant endeavor to acquire social skills, to participate in meetings of consultation, to work in groups … to reach and carry out collective decisions.[257]

Thus, he concludes, the Bahá'í path of spiritualization "should not be confused with one that defines goodness passively and produces a human being whose greatest virtue is not to harm anyone; it is a path to create social activists and agents of change."[258]

Altruism is a major component of that desired social change and figures prominently in the Bahá'í texts. Many scriptural exhortations delineate altruistic norms explicitly, holding in high regard those who "nurture altruistic aims and plans for the well-being of their fellow men…"[259] and urging individuals to "be ready to lay down your lives one for the other, and not only for those who are dear to you, but for all humanity."[260]

Other teachings reflect values and attitudes that, as Oliner and Oliner report in The Altruistic Personality, are conducive to an altruistic orientation. These include a sense of unity with and responsibility toward others beyond one's own social group, a strong family orientation, emphasis on relationship rather than on status, generosity, trustworthiness, appreciation of diversity, as well as ethical values of justice and caring.

Unity and interdependence, and their link to helping behavior, are prominent themes in the Bahá'í texts, often expressed through organic metaphors, as in this passage from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

> The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light is these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony…. So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.[261]

Explaining this metaphorical reference, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes that because all humans are interconnected and mutually dependent, they must "powerfully sustain one another" by caring for each other:

> Let them at all times concern themselves with doing a kindly thing for one of their fellows, offering to someone love, consideration, thoughtful help. Let them see no one as their enemy, or as wishing them ill, but think of all humankind as their friends; regarding the alien as an intimate, the stranger as a companion, staying free of prejudice, drawing no lines.[262]

The theme of inclusiveness is emphasized in every aspect of Bahá'í individual and community life, beginning with the fundamental teachings of the oneness of humanity and the unity of religion. The Bahá'í teachings view divine revelation not as a static, unique event, but as a continuing process that is the central feature of human history. The spirit that inspired all the founders of the great religions of the past, the Manifestations of God, is recognized as one and the same. Their original teachings contain the same basic, unchanging spiritual and ethical precepts, prominent among which are the teachings that promote altruism. The tenets that change from one religious dispensation to another are the social laws and practices, which apply those precepts in specific forms. Thus, religious truth is understood to be relative, progressive, and developmental.

Such a perspective implies more than tolerance for the equality of individual religions as separate entities to be respected in a pluralistic society. It redefines the nature of their relationship to one another and thus sets new terms for a definition of identity based on connection rather than separation. Unlike religious groups who define themselves by their distinction from other groups based on the claim that their founder was the sole or the final source of truth or that their practices are the only correct form of worship, the Bahá'í religious tradition accepts all the great spiritual teachers as equals. Bahá'ís are expected to revere Buddha, Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad, as well as Bahá'u'lláh, recognizing in them all the same spirit of the mediator between God and humanity. Thus, although the body of teachings composing the Bahá'í religion itself cannot accurately be called eclectic, the Bahá'í religious tradition includes all of the previous dispensations, which are viewed as "different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion, Divine and indivisible, of which it [the Bahá'í Faith] itself forms but an integral part."[263]

From the Bahá'í perspective, the principle of the unity of religion and progressive revelation restores the unific role of religion in society, providing a basis for resolving long-standing, apparently unbridgeable divisions among religious communities as well as a resolution of the dilemma posed by the existence of numerous religions, each claiming divine origin. For Bahá'ís, the principle removes any pretext for disunity deriving from religious affiliation; in fact, all religious conflict is forbidden. The Bahá'í writings direct Bahá'ís to "love… all religions and all races with a love that is true and sincere and show that love through deeds…";[264] to exert their efforts so that "the tumult of religious dissension and strife that agitateth the peoples of the earth may be stilled, that every trace of it may be completely obliterated."[265] "That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief," Bahá'u'lláh writes, "should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion."[266] Affirming the preeminence of the principle of religious inclusiveness and unity, the Bahá'í writings

go so far as to state that if religion becomes the cause of division and disunity, it is better to have no religion at all.[267]

Closely linked to the principle of the unity of religion is the distinguishing feature of the Bahá'í dispensation: the principle of the oneness and wholeness of humanity. The full equality of all members of the human species and their close relationship to one another requires that Bahá'ís regard people from all racial, religious, ethnic, class, and national backgrounds as members of one global family. Rather than offering mere "symbols of internationalism" in the hope that these might, as Allport suggested, "provide mental anchorage points around which the idea of world-loyalty may develop,"[268] the Bahá'í religion begins with the underlying principle of world loyalty and human unity, which is itself the anchorage point, "the pivot," according to Shoghi Effendi, "round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve…."[269]

The extension of the individual's personal commitments and relationships to include the diverse groups composing humanity is repeatedly urged in Bahá'í texts in the strongest terms possible—that is, as no less than a divine commandment:

> In every dispensation, there hath been the commandment of fellowship and love, but it was a commandment limited to the community of those in mutual agreement, not to the dissident foe. In this wondrous age, however, praised be God, the commandments of god are not delimited, not restricted to any one group of people; rather have all the friends been commanded to show forth fellowship and love, consideration and generosity and loving-kindness to every community on earth.[270]

Far from being an abstract principle removed from the real social conditions, the unity of humankind must be lived in practice, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá told a gathering in Europe in 1912:

> Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone…
>
> When you meet a [stranger]… speak to him as to a friend; if he seems to be lonely try to help him, give him of your willing service; if he be sad console him, if poor succor him, if oppressed rescue him… what profit is there in agreeing that universal friendship is good, and talking of the solidarity of the human race as a grand ideal? Unless these thoughts are translated into the world of action, they are useless.[271]

Although the Bahá'í writings speak of the absolute equality of all, the intent is not sameness or conformity to a dominant culture, nation, race, class, or any other group. In theory and in practice, cultural and racial diversity is valued in the Bahá'í community. Along with the expression of the ideal, a conscious awareness exists that effort is necessary to break down age-old barriers of prejudice and separation. The cultivation of friendships with people of different backgrounds is repeatedly encouraged, but perhaps the most notable evidence of the Bahá'í commitment to interracial unity is the attitude toward interracial marriage, which is actively welcomed and encouraged in the Bahá'í writings.

In consonance with the prosocial orientation of the Bahá'í teachings, the ideal Bahá'í personality, as implied in the Bahá'í scriptures, is other centered, extensive, and altruistic. In one passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes altruism itself the touchstone for a new definition of true human nature:

> …man should be willing to accept hardships for himself in order that others may enjoy wealth; he should enjoy trouble for himself that other may enjoy happiness and well-being. This is the attribute of man….
>
> He who is so hard-hearted as to think only of his own comfort, such an one will not be called man.

> Man is he who forgets his own interests for the sake of others. His own comfort he forfeits for the well-being of all. Nay, rather, his own life must he be willing to forfeit for the life of mankind.[272]

Although personal transformation is seen as a lifelong process, according to the Bahá'í texts, the foundations of altruistic behavior can be developed in childhood. Children are believed to be born with the capacity for good or bad behavior; during the course of their development they can be influenced by their social interactions, especially in the family. Thus, the development of the prosocial individual begins with the training and socialization of children. The Bahá'í writings urge parents to

> teach [children] to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.[273] So crucial is the teaching of prosocial behavior that training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning.[274]

However, teaching children lofty ideas is not considered sufficient on its own. Emphasis is repeatedly placed upon behavior rather than profession of belief—on deeds, not words. Thus, the most powerful method by which children can be taught a prosocial orientation is the model of parents whose actions reflect the ideal personality characteristics.

The impact of modeling on children has received significant support in the literature on altruism and prosocial behavior. Mussen and Eisenberg-Berg write, "A substantial proportion of the individual's helping and sharing responses is acquired through observation and imitation of a model's behavior without direct reinforcements."[275] Yarrow, Scott, and Waxler conclude that "generalized altruism would appear to be best learned from parents who do not only try to inculcate the principles of altruism, but who also manifest altruism in everyday

interactions."[276] The role of parental influence in fostering the development of the altruistic personality has been further underscored by Oliner and Oliner in *The Altruistic Personality*, their study of rescuers of Jews during World War II.[277]

Another area of related emphasis is parental discipline. The Bahá'í writings state that, "It is incumbent upon every father and mother to counsel their children over a long period, and guide them unto those things which lead to everlasting honour."[278] The development of good character and behavior in children, however, is to be encouraged through the love, understanding, and wise guidance of the parents, using reason rather than force. Bahá'í texts strongly discourage the use of physical punishment or verbal abuse of children, stating that, "it is not… permissible to strike a child, or vilify him for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse."[279]

The Bahá'í view on parental discipline is supported by contemporary social psychologists. Hoffman, as well as others, suggests that the use of physical power or material resources to control a child's behavior (power assertion) is least effective in developing consideration for others. Power-assertion techniques of discipline promote in children aggressive behavior, self-centered values, and an unwillingness to share with other children.[280] In contrast, the disciplinary technique of induction—reasoning and explanation based on the impact of the child's behavior on others—encourages prosocial behavior.[281]

Bahá'í child socialization aims to develop a prosocial orientation in children, who are encouraged to recognize themselves as members of a community that begins with the family and extends to include all of humanity. They are encouraged to develop a sense of personal spiritual responsibility to act toward others with empathy and compassion as well as justice and equity, and to sacrifice their own material self-interests for others in need. As adults, Bahá'ís are expected to make a commitment to continue internalizing such patterns until they become

the foundation of the personality itself. Spiritual development is seen as an infinite process of self-transformation—that is, a continual, conscious refining of one's behavior in the crucible of social interaction. The cultivation of spiritual, altruistic qualities remains the aim and central focus of life for the adult Bahá'í.

In light of recent research, it is noteworthy that both the ethical principles of justice and of caring, important motivators of altruistic behavior (see Oliner and Oliner, The Altruistic Personality), are emphasized in the Bahá'í writings, where they are not viewed as contradictory or exclusive but as inseparably connected. Even when the ethic of justice is enjoined, it is usually as a practice to be performed out of concern for others. Justice is presented as the practice of equity, often linked with "safeguard[ing] the rights of the downtrodden…."[282] The Bahá'í conception of justice means that all have a right to receive care.

Well over half a century before Carol Gilligan called attention to the complementarity of the "masculine" ethic of justice and the "feminine" ethic of caring,[283] 'Abdu'l-Bahá had written: "The Kingdom of God is founded upon equity and justice, and also upon mercy, compassion, and kindness to every living soul. Strive ye then with all your heart to treat compassionately all humankind…." He then qualified this statement, asserting that oppression must be opposed: "Kindness cannot be shown the tyrant, the deceiver, or the thief, because, far from awakening them to the error of their ways, it maketh them to continue in their perversity as before."[284]

The Bahá'í teachings recognize that the transformation of individuals into altruistic persons cannot take place outside the social context, which must provide a matrix for that transformation. Recent research has drawn attention to the importance of group norms in motivating moral behavior, whether directly, as a response to the social expectations as such, or indirectly, as internalized personal norms.[285]

The findings of Oliner and Oliner, outlined in The Altruistic Personality, further emphasize the importance of the "normocentric" orientation in motivating the altruism of rescuers of Jews during World War II.

Such findings imply that, while altruistic qualities must be fostered in individuals, a social framework must also be provided within which extensivity and altruism are valued and represent the norms of the group itself. The creation of such a society is inseparable from the development of individual altruistic personalities, for, so long as groups value egocentrism, unfettered individualism, status seeking, dominance, and a materialistic orientation, altruism will remain an exception to the rule, and the altruistic personality will appear as deviant in comparison to the rest of the group. In Bahá'í society, this situation is reversed:

> Altruism is not an aberrant behavior contrary to convention because the normative expectations (which individuals are ultimately expected to internalize) are altruistic. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to describe in its entirety the social order Bahá'ís envision and to which they are committed. However, they believe that much of it will be the fruit of the process of integration of now isolated or even hostile races, groups, and nations who, as they come together and unite in the same cause, become transformed and help transform each other, and bring to the rising institutions of a new World Order the richness of different cultures and of different social thought and experience.[286]

Thus, in the Bahá'í view, it is through the individual practice as well as the institutionalization of the principle of unity in diversity that human society can evolve to an unprecedented level of cohesion and cooperation, and transcend the limitations implicit in the current state of separation and competitiveness. While the Bahá'í conception of unity in diversity should not be construed as merely a version of liberal pluralism, the safeguarding and encouraging of diverse elements within

the Bahá'í community is a major institutional principle. It is embedded within Bahá'í institutions through practices that require the participation and support of the entire Bahá'í community because they apply at all levels of administrative and community functioning—local, national, and international.

Most prominent of these practices is consultation, a group decision-making process whose goal is to reach solutions to problems by consensus. Bahá'í consultation encourages the open and frank expression of diverse views on the topic under discussion in an atmosphere of love and respect that also allow the "clash of differing opinions" that can strike the "shining spark of truth".287

Each member of the consultative group has an equal right of expression, and no blocs, factions, or any subdivision of the group are permitted. Inseparable from the Bahá'í consultative process is the development of sensitivity and respect for the different voices whose expressions of opinion may not fit into conventional or dominant cultural modes of communication. Since the group attempts to work toward consensus on an issue, voting only as a last resort, the process does not necessarily require reduction to duality: alternatives need not be narrowed down to the two poles "for" and "against". Instead, the consultative process itself, drawing on the interactive contributions of all its diverse members, is looked to as the creative source of new solutions.

Consultation is regarded both as a method for generative decision making and conflict resolution as well as an instrument for reinforcing the unity of a diverse group. It is the method by which the Bahá'í administrative institutions conduct the affairs of the Bahá'í community, but Bahá'ís are also encouraged to use consultation in all aspects of their lives, whether in the family, neighborhood, or workplace.

Another way in which Bahá'í administrative institutions are structured to implement unity in diversity involves practices intended to ensure the participation of minority ethnic populations. (The definition of what

constitutes a “minority” is left to the discretion of the national institution in each country.) “To discriminate against any race, on the ground of its being socially backward, politically immature, and numerically in a minority”, is considered to be “a flagrant violation of the spirit” of the Bahá’í teachings.[288] In principle, protecting the “just interests of any minority element within the Bahá’í community” and ensuring that all have the opportunity to contribute their perspectives to collaborative efforts of the group, is considered so important that representatives of minority populations “are not only enabled to enjoy equal rights and privileges, but they are even favored and accorded priority.”[289] Bahá’í communities are instructed that it is their duty to ensure that “Bahá’í representative institutions, be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these divers elements, racial or otherwise, as possible.”[290]

One way in which the principle is practiced is the minority tie rule of Bahá’í elections. In the course of elections for Bahá’í administrative institutional membership—elections conducted without nominations or campaigning and decided by plurality vote—if voting results in a tie between persons, one of whom represents a minority, “priority should unhesitatingly be accorded the party representing the minority, and this for no other reason except to stimulate and encourage it, and afford it an opportunity to further the interests of the community.”[291]

In addition to its direct effect in increasing minority representation on Bahá’í administrative institutions, the practice of this rule heightens the sensitivity of the group to its minority membership and reaffirms the group commitment to valuing and encouraging minority participation. For the individual believer, conceding a tie vote to the minority representation becomes a concrete opportunity to practice sacrifice of self-interest for the other within a context of social approval.

Whether applied in community administration, in the family, in education, or in the economy, the Bahá’í principles and practices are

viewed as catalysts whose application will ultimately bring about social transformation leading to the development of an altruistic global society. Such a society, in the Bahá'í context, begins with the individual striving daily toward personal transformation—the deliberate internalization of spiritual teachings incorporating altruistic, extensive values as personal norms. The Bahá'í teachings strive to imbue individuals with an inclusive orientation transcending, though not suppressing, other group loyalties and valuing the well-being of the entire planet and all its inhabitants. Throughout the Bahá'í writings, the vision imparted to the individual is that of a peaceful, just, and caring civilization whose foundation rests on the cornerstone of the unity of all human beings, a unity that is to be consolidated and protected by institutions which reflect and promote the principles of unity, equity, and altruistic service as normative expectations.

FROM THE VOLUME ARCHIVES

The Baha'i Faith and Problems of Color, Class and Creed

By
Elsie Austin

SATURDAY JANUARY 1, 1944

In some future age when history is no longer written to advance the prestige and power of particular groups and nations, perhaps historians will be able to state frankly how much of the tragedy and chaos of our world has been due to the efforts of men and women who distorted civilization and humanity by deliberately provoking animosity and division over the outward differences of men.

This age has brought us certainly to the peak of disunity and bitterness over the colors of men's skins, their types of work and their paths to God. It is as if the whole human race has been agitated and forced to a showdown over the retention of old ideas of division and the adoption of new ideas of unity and cooperation.

The terrific pressure of conflicting social forces are making it increasingly difficult today for white or colored peoples to avoid the extremes of social reaction. The swollen hatreds and fanatic efforts of those who champion the old ways have, indeed, forced many to bitter acceptance of hate and division as the chief instrumentalities which must govern the development and power of peoples. For colored and white, the importance of rejecting decisively such an idea is superseded only by the urgency of finding and using the kind of faith and effort which are needed for the individual and social victories for enlightenment so essential to this period.

It is not that colored peoples need this, or that, white peoples need that. It is rather that all men, all races, all classes, all creeds and all nations are in need of new balance and new direction for this day.

There are many established and familiar causes and purposes at work today attempting through various types of programs to meet this need for balance and direction. They have taken the best of the old knowledge and techniques and are attempting a revised use of them on either the inner life or the outer life of men. Some are making a bona fide effort to teach the efficacy of the ageless spiritual standards of brotherhood, justice and cooperation, but their efforts are weakened, first, by their failure to meet the complex needs of a complex period, and second, by their fatally compromising use of "accepted patterns of action" which in themselves accent the long embroidered differences of race, creed and class among men.

Others have discarded the spiritual and are concerned mainly with the correction of outer practices of prejudice and division. Their stress is upon the practice of brotherhood and cooperation which come as a matter of law and enforced compliance. The practice of brotherhood, however, is something more than a matter of law. It involves the use of inner discipline which uproot and destroy the hidden jealousies, the secret fears, inner suspicions, greeds and enmities of men. For it is these inner motives which, if undestroyed, sooner or later find a way to make mockery of law and social compliance.

There is in the world today, however, a new Faith which is meeting the desperate need of all peoples for balance and direction. It is the Baha'i World Faith, now barely one hundred years old, but already spanning the continents of the world with a membership which embraces all the known races, classes and creeds of humanity. Baha'u'llah, Founder of this Faith, in a matchless revelation of spiritual teachings and laws gives through religion the desired balance for humanity. It is religion which trains man inwardly and outwardly. In giving the foundations of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah without compromise goes to the heart of the of life. The Baha'is have no rituals, or ceremonies or select group whereby worship may become a formal gesture. Their way of expression of belief is their constant endeavor to work it into the patterns, the standards, the customs of life.

It is in terms of this Oneness of Mankind that the Baha'i world functions with entirely new patterns of effort and achievement for the creative ability and capacity of its individuals. There are no special groups. There is only mankind. Therefore Baha'is do not work and achieve and live in terms of the old hatreds, greeds, and conceits. An individual who accepts the mighty standard of responsibility which Baha'u'llah has established cannot preserve the old jealousies and prides. "All men are created to carry forward an ever advancing civilization." Each man, then, whatever his background and his measure of capacity, has both a destiny and a mission in life which taxes his best. He must prepare to express that best and to give it with full under standing that it is related to the best of every other man.

There are great differences of religious background among the followers of Baha'u'llah, but there is also difference of perspective in interpreting those differences and living with them. The great faiths of the past are not destroyed or belittled. They are connected and unified and those interpretive elements in them which have been the source of conflict and dissension are exposed in their imaginative and superstitious falsity. There is unqualified recognition of the unity of God's Divine Messengers who have come at various ages of mankind with an ever increasing measure of Truth for the enlightenment and progress of men. In concentrating upon the ever growing measure of Truth and the unity of its Bringers, men achieve true spiritual maturity, for they lift faith and worship above the realm of contentions and confusions over the outward names, forms and systems of religion.

Upon the subject of racial differences the Baha'is have achieved a balance which deserves the study and attention of all peoples. The age-old tensions, superstitions, and cultivated enmities in terms of racial differences are certainly not easy to lose. They have been worked into all the experiences of men with such elaborate detail that they come out unconsciously in thought and action patterns. But these scars and wounds of the past are somehow removed and healed by the loving power in the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. That recognition and concentration upon Oneness captures the heart and clears the mind. The

common destiny of men, their potentialities for development as given by Baha'u'llah call forth such inspiration and ambition among His followers that, in setting themselves to another goal, they pass by and forget the old emphases. In the Baha'i community racial differences become normal differences. They are no more a cause for strife, fear, and separation than the color of eyes and hair. In the effort and training for better character, better minds and better achievement each man forgets his skin color and that of his neighbor. The Baha'i pattern is indeed a new and tremendously potential guide for group relationships of men. There is no strained and obvious effort to love white people or colored peoples. There are only people who are learning together the courtesy, cooperation and regard required for an enlightened and progressive society of human beings. Humanity is one soul in many bodies. It is one thing to say this philosophically. It is another to feel it as a heart experience and as a necessary law of life.

Colored or white we need the sort of belief that gives every man the power to give his neighbor deserved faith and credit. Baha'u'llah's searching analysis deserves careful thought and unreserved acceptance. Said He, "The well being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity be firmly established. So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth."

Colored or white, the world faith of Baha'u'llah offers us the needed purpose and direction for our times. In its creative Truth lies the one path wherein we all may find understanding and will to pass by and be done with the outmoded fallacies, the consuming greed, the shameful injustices and accumulated vengeance which has corrupted our past and crippled us all.

FROM THE VOLUME ARCHIVES

The Races of Men
Many or One

By
Louis Gregory

In this article, first published in The Bahá'í World Volume III, 1928-1930, Louis Gregory explains that there is absolutely no proof to establish the superiority of one racial group over another.

Scientific Aspects

The world today is making many discoveries in the realm of phenomena. The greatest of these concerns man himself, the laws which relate to his being and those which govern his relations with his fellow beings. Although many glooms and shadows still sway the minds of men, yet two great lights are shining with increasing splendor. One is science and the other religion. Through these luminous orbs men are coming to know each other better than they have ever known through past ages.

A century or more ago men with few exceptions accepted the dogma of eternal division and separation between various human stocks, which were regarded as distinct human species. This gave to any one of them the right by virtue of its material might to a station of inherent superiority conferred by Divine Power.

A few men of genius saw differently. One of these rare souls was Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence. It is altogether remarkable that writing at a time when special privilege was enthroned and human slavery was sanctioned by the laws of all lands, he should have declared it to be self-evident that all men were created free and equal. Was this statement an accident? Was it not his intention to imply that all white men were equal?

No, that the great principle declared by the American Commoner was not on his part fortuitous is indicated by a further statement as well as by his personal attitude toward Benjamin Banneker, the Negro astronomer, who was his contemporary and by him was appointed as one of the surveyors of the site of the city of Washington. Writing about his colored scientist to one of his foreign friends, President Jefferson said:

"We have now in the United States a Negro, the son of a black man born in Africa and a black woman born in the United States, who is a very respectable mathematician. I procured him to be employed under one of our chief directors in laying out the new federal city on the Potomac, and in the intervals of his leisure while on the work, he made an almanac for the same year which he has sent me in his own handwriting… I have seen elegant solutions of geometrical problems by him. Add to this that he is a worthy and respectable member of society. He is a free man. I shall be delighted to see these instances of moral eminence so multiplied as to prove that the want of talents observed in them is merely the effect of their degraded condition and not proceeding from any difference of the structure of the parts upon which intellect depends."

Were Thomas Jefferson living today he might be classed with the school of modern scientists known as the cultural anthropologists. A hundred years ahead of his time he saw and proclaimed a great truth.

The scientific world today records numberless thinkers of like convictions and among the great naturalists a decided and irresistible trend toward the law of one humanity and the equality of all races.

Of old the human family was arbitrarily divided into five races, so-called, growing out of the existence of five habitable continents. Men in their fancies associated a difference race with each continent. But scientific minds, even in the middle of the last century, did not agree upon this. Charles Darwin, perhaps the most famous of them all, records in his "Origin of Species," the views of a dozen scientists

whose classifications of humanity into races in no two cases agree and cover divisions of race varieties ranging from two to sixty-three! Darwin himself freely admits the illusory and imaginary nature of these divisions of mankind, and declares that the way supposedly different races overlap and shade off into each other completely baffles the scientific mind in constructing a definition of race.

Because the term “races” continues to be used as designating distinct stocks or divisions of the human family, we shall here employ it. But it must be understood that its use is popular and colloquial rather than scientific and accurate. Definition implies a limitation. Logically it must be both inclusive of the thing defined and exclusive of all else. The difficulty arises, when we attempt to define race as a limited portion of the human family upon the basis of distinct physical characteristics, that the description invariably applies with equal accuracy to no inconsiderable number of other people not sought to be included in the said category. The divisions of mankind upon the basis of physical features are due to fancy rather than reality. Attempts to describe with any degree of accuracy those designated by such terms as Aryan, Mongolian, India, African, Malay, Nordic, Hebrew, negro, invariably result in cross divisions, because all these groups overlap, and even when we select the most divergent types, as human beings they show vastly more points in common than signs of difference. The term “race” as applied to all mankind has a scientific and logical basis, but no so in its limited sense.

The historical records of mankind cover a very small portion of the vast period during which this earth has been populated. Yet even during that brief period the peoples of each continent have emigrated to other continents, associating with others and invariably mixing their blood. It is now universally known that the products of such admixtures are equally virile and fertile. This is a further indication that all races possess the same potentialities. Asiatics and Australians, Europeans and Africans, North and South Americans, to the ethnologist all present signs of admixture, a process through which all have been broadened and made more rugged and strong. All the so-called races of mankind

are mixed races, the mixing being a process which continues more rapidly today than in past cycles and ages.

It is also seen that among the various ethnic groups denominated races, each at some time during the brief period of recorded history, has been in the ascendency. Each has in turn led the civilization of the world and each has at the time of its greatest success assumed that its superiority was fixed.

“Is not this great Babylon which I have built and must it not endure forever?”

The attitude of mind expressed by the words of an ancient king who came to grief through pride is as old as human error and as modern as the latest fashion show. Those who see the common humanity of all groups relieve themselves of a great burden imposed by thoughts of preference. For while it is true that some peoples at various times have advanced further than others, to the eye of reality this implies no inherent incapacity, but only lack of development.

In appearance the child is inferior to the adult, but the future may unfold another story. Wisdom looks with reverence upon the child who has that within his being the unfolding of which may make him the ruler of his kind.

The history of mankind unfolds an endless panorama of change. The most favored of races and nations have often lost their high estate. The most ill-favored of one cycle have sometimes in another period become the salt of the earth. To those who see humanity as one, apparent inequalities have no essential permanence.

However much opinions and emotions and customs may dominate human thoughts, the scientific world of today which reaches conclusions upon the basis of facts, is entirely agreed that there is no proof to establish the superiority of one racial group over another.

The backwardness of races and nations is due to poverty, ignorance, oppression, unfavorable environment, and similar conditions, all of which are subject to removal and change, releasing the forces of true manhood for ascent to the highest plane.

It is perhaps of greatest interest here to let those who speak with authority express their own convictions upon the basis of provable facts.

Sir Arthur Keith, the great English anthropologist, says:

> "The expression high and low does not apply to races."

Dr. Gordon Munroe, lecturer in Tokyo University, Japan:

> "Modern anthropologists despair of finding distinctive races and are now generally agreed that difference of race is too illusive for scientific observation. Racial difference is mythical, though each individual – as a distinct expression of cosmic thought – differs in some degree from all his fellows, even to the skin of his finger tips.
>
> "Nothing betrays the darkness of ignorance more than the arrogant assumption that pigmentation of skin brands its owner with obscurity of moral perception or darkened intellect, or in any way implies the co-existence of inferior physical traits… Like all exhibitions of prejudice, that of classification by skin color is illogical and inconsistent.
>
> "It is sounding a discrepant note against the harmony of the spheres to call human color inferior or unclean. Not by darkness of skin but by darkness of soul shall humanity be judged in future ages."

Dr. George A. Dorsey in his book, "Why We Behave Like Human Beings":

"All human beings have skin pigment; it is the amount that counts. But high and low skin color is as sound biology as grading planets by color would be sound astronomy: Venus highest because whitest!

"There is no known fact of human anatomy or physiology which implies that capacity for culture or civilization or intelligence or capacity for culture inheres in this race or that type.

"We have no classification of men based upon stature, skin color, hair form, head form, proportions of limbs, etc., so correlated that they fit one race and one only.

"Nature is not so prejudiced as we are. She says there is a human race, that all human beings are of the *genus homo species sapiens*. She draws no color line in the human or other species."

Prof. G. H. Esterbrook of Colgate University, considering the question of racial inferiority in a recent number of the inferiority in a recent number of the "American Anthropologist," states that "there is no scientific basis for any such deduction.

"Again and again" he writes, "we have seen the case of a race or nation being despised, outcast, or barbarian in one generation and demonstrating that it is capable of high culture the next."

Prof. E. B. Reuter, University of Iowa: "The doctrine of racial inequality is pretty well discredited in the world of scholarship, but in the popular thought of America it is firmly fixed."

Dr. W. E. Burghardt Dubois, Editor of "The Crisis": "The increasingly certain dictum of science is that there are no 'races' in any exact scientific sense; that no measurements of human beings, of bodily development, of head form, of color and hair, of physiological

reactions, have succeeded in dividing mankind into different recognizable groups: that so-called ‘pure’ races seldom if ever exist and that all present mankind, the world over, are ‘mixed’ so far as the so-called racial characteristics are concerned.”

Prof. Edwin Grant Conklin, Chair of Biology, Princeton University: “With increasing means of communication as a result of migration and commercial relations, there is no longer complete geographical isolation for any people and the various races of mankind are being brought into closer and closer contact.

“Man is now engaged in undoing the work of hundreds of centuries, if in the beginning, ‘God made of one blood all nations of men,’ it is evident that man is now making of all nations one blood.”

Prof. Franz Boaz of Columbia University, in his recent book, “Anthropology and Modern Life”: “What we nowadays call a race of man consists of groups of individuals in which descent from common ancestors cannot be proved.

“If we were to select the most intelligent, imaginative, energetic and emotionally stable third of mankind, all races would be represented. The mere fact that a person is a healthy European or a blond European would not be proof that he would belong to this élite. Nobody has ever given proof that the mixed descendants of such a select group would be inferior.”

These are but a few quotations from scientific sources to illustrate the modern trend. Even a superficial inquiry into the question of human unity and the potential equality of all groups discloses a wealth of thought based upon factual values.

To conclude that people because uneducated cannot be educated, is a rash presumption indeed. When Julius Caesar conquered Britain he found the most revolting forms of savagery, including the practice of

cannibalism; yet these people in part form the background of one of the most enlightened nations of today.

It is quite easy to imagine a Roman statesman of two thousand years ago saying, “Rome is the Eternal City! All other peoples from their inherent incapacity for rule must forever be her servitors and slaves!”

But what can intelligence tests prove of inherent capacity unless those subjected to them have had equal advantages in the way of environment and preparation? Where dollars are spent upon the education of one race and pennies upon that of another, obviously all such tests are misleading.

In a recent number of the “American Anthropologist,” Dr. G. H. Esterbrook remarks the extreme difficulty of measuring the intelligence of groups other than ourselves due to differences of culture, customs and language. This he illustrates by certain tests applied in the Philippine Islands in which it appeared that “the Filipinos were three years behind Americans in verbal tests (obviously due to the Spanish speaking natives being under the disadvantage of grappling with English), practically equal to the Americans in nonverbal tests and actually ahead of them in certain forms of mathematical ability.”

Apropos of the intelligence tests a question which may not be impertinent is, what value has intelligence in the absence of moral stamina? In the application of the intelligence tests what test is applied to determine this necessary concomitant of success?

The belief current in some circles that a long period of time, perhaps a thousand years, must elapse before people deprived of civilization can truly respond to its urge is unfounded in fact. Orientals whose background is different in numberless ways from that of the West appear in numbers at many of our great universities and with equal readiness with American youth acquire the arts and sciences. Youth taken from the African jungles with an age-long heritage of savagery have not only held their own in schools with students of light hue, but

have ofttimes won high honors. The writer has met many native Africans whose virtues, attainments and polish do credit to the human race. It is clearly our duty to encourage people of all races to the end of making their contributions to the symposium of world culture.

Religious and Spiritual Aspects

The nineteenth century saw human slavery, as an institution sanctioned by law, banished from all civilized communities. The twentieth century sees the evolution of a new kind of freedom, one of which liberates minds from hoary superstitions and ancient dogmas, one which vibrates with the consciousness of a common humanity. Men now see as never before that class tyranny brings unhappiness to the aggressor no less than to the victim.

The spread of the social sciences is bringing enlightening contacts among people of all races and nations. All the races of mankind, no matter how delayed their development in some cases may be, with encouragement, opportunity, sympathy and understanding, may attain the heights.

The colored philosopher and educator, the late Booker Washington, in his autobiography, recalled that during his boyhood he sometime engaged in wrestling. On such occasions he observed that if he threw another boy to the ground, if he held him there he would be compelled to stay down with him; but if he arose the other boy would also rise. So his motto was, “All men up! No one down!” Such is the true philosophy of life.

Among the early white settlers of America was at least one group that regarded the red aborigines as being worthy of the treatment of men. In Pennsylvania under the guidance of William Penn, white and red men entered into a bond of mutual trust that was not to be sundered as long as the sun should give light. This colony was thus saved from the bloodshed which disgraced most of the others. It seems a natural sequence that today the largest school supported by the American

government for the training of Indians should be on the soil of Pennsylvania, a commonwealth through upholding its standards of justice to men of all races.

In the memoirs of General U. S. Grant he relates how once when visiting the outposts of his army on Southern soil, a call was raised, "Make way for the commanding general of the army, General Grant!" To his surprise he saw himself surrounded by Confederate soldiers who had raised this call. Although these men were a part of an army with which his own was constantly fighting, yet these troops saluted him and made no attempt to capture him or do him bodily harm.

It had so happened that for some days the outposts of the two armies, Federal and Confederate, had touched each other and the soldiers on both sides, free from rancor, had become entirely friendly, exchanged what they possessed of the comforts of life as well as its amenities and were accustomed to salute each other's officers when they appeared. In the early days of the great war a similar condition of friendliness appeared among the soldiers of the contending armies in France.

If men engaged in deadly conflict can pause long enough to discover and act upon the basis of their common humanity, certainly the forces of peace should strive for the means of making it durable, and in this nothing is more desirable than a farewell to class tyranny and the banishment of what the sociologist calls the superiority complex from all the world. The light of science powerfully aids this.

Among the youth of the world there is a great and continuous awakening to the need of friendliness and co-operation among all races and nations. Recently, among many incidents of a similar nature, the writer had the pleasure of mingling with an inter-racial and inter-national group of students made up of representatives of John Hopkins University, the University of Maryland, the University of Delaware, Morgan College and Howard University.

Their faces shone with happiness as from the standpoint of biology, sociology, anthropology and genetics they discussed, almost without dissenting voice, the potential equality of all races and the desirability of their mingling freely without prejudice in all the activities and amenities of life.

With the usual naïveté, charm and courage of youth, they seemed to care nothing about what their elders, who were wrapped up in the traditions of the past, might think of their present acts and attitudes. And they had summoned to their gathering three modernist and learned scientists to confirm them in their thoughts. Thus the orb of science beams with increasing brilliancy upon a growing world of thought and discovery.

This light of science is but the reflection of a far "greater and more glorious Light" that has appeared with majestic splendor in the world today. This second light is Religion pure and undefiled from the Throne of God, or Temple of Manifestation.

The Bahá'í Revelation is the divine intervention in human affairs. Its ideals, teachings and principles will remove the superstitions that pall, the hatreds that blight, the prejudices that becloud, and that preparation for the slaughter that now threatens the existence of all humanity.

Clearer than the deductions of science, weightier than the might of princes, wiser than the councils of statesmen, kinder than the hearts of philanthropists, and sweeter than the songs of seraphs is the Voice of God, calling all mankind to the unity of the human family, the oneness of the world of humanity. This is the true guidance of all men in their relationship with their fellows, whether they be of the same race or nation of others. The great law of universal well-being and happiness is set forth with a simplicity, purity, majesty and power which leaves no one in doubt.

"Verily the words which have descended from the heaven of the will of God are the source of unity and harmony for the world. Close your eyes

to racial differences and welcome all with the light of oneness."

Those who move in the direction of the Divine Will as expressed by the Manifestation of God, His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh, have the mightiest confirmation to support their efforts and are assured of victory, no matter how difficult the way may seem. A distinguished Southern educator who heard the Servant of God, His Holiness 'Abdu'l-Bahá, address the Lake Mohonk Peace Conference in 1912, quotes Him as opening His luminous address by saying:

"From time immemorial we have been taught the Unity of God, the Unity of God, the Unity of God! But in this day the divine lesson is the unity of man, the unity of man, the unity of man!"

Dr. Samuel C. Mitchell declared that from listening to this holy man whom he recognized as a Prophet, he had decided for himself never again to draw a vertical line upon his fellow-men. The great horizon line which covers all mankind, is sufficient for him. How happily does this illustrate the power and penetration of the Creative Word, that it should raise up from a single utterance one who has declared and reechoed it upon many platforms.

'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "God has made mankind one family: no race is superior to another…God is the Shepherd of all and we are His flock. There are not many races. There is only one race."

Although the Sun of Truth is still largely hidden, "veiled by its own splendor," yet its rays are penetrating the remotest corners of the earth, creating in souls a consciousness which binds all hearts together. Common sense and reason are explaining away the barriers of color which are caused by adjustment of people to climatic states over long periods of time. Scientists in many fields of research are thrilled by the discovery of a common human heritage which they sometimes boldly declare in words similar to those found in the sacred text. Statesmen, national and international, are making the Divine Spirit the foundation upon which they are striving to build a new social structure with justice

to all, while in growing numbers people who take religion seriously are finding heart balm through their helpful interest in other people's affairs.

Some years ago the venerable Bishop of Georgia, Rt. Rev. Atticus G. Haygood, amazed his followers by boldly declaring in his book, "Our Brother in Black," that no attainment of the white race was impossible for the colored.

Governor Charles Aycock of North Carolina inaugurated a policy of large expenditure for education that would help white and black upon this basis:

"We hold our title to power by the tenure of service to God, and if we fail to administer equal and exact justice to the Negro we shall in the fullness of time lose power ourselves, for we must know that the God who is love, trusts no people with authority for the purpose of enabling them to do injustice."

Although the strongholds of prejudice seem invincible, the clouds of superstitions lower, the veils of ignorance overshadow and the resources of rancor prepare for the strife, yet upon the plane of being the Sun of Truth is radiant and will remove in time all dust from minds and all rust from hearts, to the end that the true Glory of God and the brightness of man may appear in the unity of the world. The shadows of the sunset and the glory of the dawn are both revealed in the Words that follow from the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

"It is very strange to see how 'illusion' has taken possession of the hearts of men while 'Reality' has no sway whatsoever. For example – *racial difference* is an optical illusion! It is a figment of imagination, yet how deep-seated and powerful its influence! No one can deny the fact that mankind *in toto* are the progeny of Adam; that they are offshoots of one primal stock, yet the optical illusion has so radically misrepresented this plain truth that they have divided and subdivided

themselves into so many tribes and nations… Although many intelligent men amongst them know that this racial difference is an optical illusion, yet they all confess their inability to stand firm before its uncanny, invisible power.

"The world of humanity is like unto one kindred and one family. Because of the climatic conditions of the zones through the passing ages colors have become different. In the torrid zone on account of the intensity of the effect of the sun throughout the ages the dark race appeared. In the frigid zone on account of the severity of the cold and the ineffectiveness of the heat the white race appeared. In the temperate zone the yellow, brown and red races came into existence. But in reality mankind is one race. Because it is one race unquestionably there must be union and harmony and no separation or discord.

"The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are the breaths of the Holy Spirit which create men anew. Personal amity, both in private and public, is emphasized and insisted upon.

…Bahá'ís believe that mankind must love mankind; that universal amity must be practiced; that dead dogmas must be thrown away; that we are at the threshold of the Era of Interdependence; that we must forget prejudice and that universal love must become the dominant note of the twentieth century… The tree of humanity is one and is planted by God. The origin is one and the end must also be one."

Thus it is clearly establish through both religion and science that the only race is the human race. The illuminati of all groups today, upon the basis of divine principle of the oneness of humanity, are working to build a new order in the world. Their ranks are widening day by day and among them are included all branches of the human family. They have crossed the borderland of separation and view with delight the world of unity. With reverence and appreciation they perceive the

descent of heavenly guidance. In the sacred books of the past this divine favor is pictured as the Holy City.

The cities of the world today present to the gaze of the traveler striking contrasts between old and new. In days of yore the construction of homes was in the nature of a castle. Each house was defended by a high fence or wall, behind which dogs barked furiously at all who approached, who were presumably foes until otherwise proven. Such places did not lack beauty. Nor were passers-by always wanting in charm. But in each case the beauty and charm were hidden by defensive battlements. Such are the cities of hearts when their love is concealed by the battlements erected by superstition and fear. In many of the new cities the absence of walls reveals velvet lawns and the varied charm of flowers. The adornments of the home, the sport of the children, the family co-operation in simple toil, create impressions of friendliness and accentuate the joy of life.

Those who visualize the City of God have faith in the final outcome of human destiny through a love that transcends all boundaries of race. Herein lies joy to the worker whose toil is linked with heaven as he serves mankind *en masse* as well as singly. Peace to the nations when ready to pursue those ideals that guide the people of splendor. Perfection in education when the youth are allowed to treasure the jewels of minds and hearts despite the obstinate barriers of caste. Wealth for governments when the huge sums now given to armaments are by common consent turned into channels of construction. Solace for the needy when deserts are irrigated, waste places reclaimed, slums removed, the deep yields its coffers and the earth its fruits. Illumination to humanity when every man sees in his neighbor a garment in which God has clothed the reflection of the Manifestation of Himself. Glory for the whole world when receptive to divine civilization which descends through the majestic revelation of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh, the Shining Orb of His Covenant and the protection of His laws by which all races are banded together in the exaltation of service.

The story runs that a youth long absent from home in pursuit of education returned and was overjoyed to find that he now had a younger brother, born during his absence. He eagerly and lovingly embraced the newcomer. But alas! That child of immature years seeing in his brother only a stranger and all unaware of the relationship made a great outcry, wiggled out of his arms and even scratched his brother's face.

Such is all too often the attitude of people of one group toward those of another when uninformed of the divine law which makes all men brothers. Such immaturity in a time of rapid changes must soon happily pass as that which is real comes more and more into view.

That reality is the co-operation of all mankind in productive enterprises, the awakening of spiritual life, the assurance of the way of God, and the enkindlement of the flame of divine love which removes all clouds. To forsake prejudice is better than to amass wealth. The conquest of animosities is far greater than victory over one's foes. The struggle for universal good is far nobler than the desire for personal success.

The Glory of the rising Sun reveals the way. Victory and joy to those who strive!

FROM THE VOLUME ARCHIVES

Unity Through Diversity
A Bahá'í Principle

By
Alain Locke

THURSDAY APRIL 21, 1932

"What the contemporary mind stands greatly in need of is the divorce of the association of uniformity with the notion of the universal," wrote the American philosopher, Alain Locke, 'Father of the Harlem Renaissance' in this article, first published in *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. IV, 1930-1932.

There is one great spiritual advantage in the tidal series of negative upsets and breakdowns in the contemporary world and that is the ever-accumulative realization of the need for a complete reconstruction of life. Even among the unintellectual classes and in the most partisan circles the idea of reform and radical change meets no effective resistance, where but a short while ago, any suggestion of change would have met both emotional and doctrinal resistance to a serious degree. And although there is still a considerable amount of surviving partisanship in the notion of specific cures and panaceas, each based on some over-emphasis on some special view or theory or formula, in many cases, – perhaps the majority, there has come the recognition that superficial and local change are alike insufficient, and that to cure or affect modern ills, any remedy seriously proposed must be fundamental and not superficial, and wide-scale or universal rather than local or provincial. And so the most usual sanctions of contemporary thinking even for partisan and sectarian causes are the words "universal," "international," "human." Ten years ago, national, racial, or some equivalent circumscribed loyalty and interest would have been unquestioningly assumed, and agitated almost without apology as axiomatic. I regard this change, although as yet a negative gain, as both

one of the most significant and positive steps forward that humanity has taken,– or rather, – has been forced to take.

In this dilemma of doubt and frantic search, many are the gods and principles invoked, and doubtless a few of the many will turn out historically to have had saving grace. For certainly no pure principle can of itself do more than motivate or sanction; mankind is not saved by declarations and professions of faith, but by works and ideas. However, in the doing and the acting, there is always the important factor of the orientation and attitude which are so vital, and often the initial aspect of a new way of life. In this connection, I think, it is of the utmost importance to recognize as an influential factor in the contemporary situation a common trend toward individualism. Even though it is not yet accepted as a general principle, as a general desire and an ideal goal, the demand for universality is beyond doubt the most characteristic modern thing in the realm of spiritual values, and in the world of the mind that reflects this realm.

But when we come to the statement of this generally desired universality, we fall foul of countless nostrums, and welter again in the particularisms that we have inherited from tradition and our factional and denominationalized world. Here, then, is the present dilemma; –we feel and hope in the direction of universality, but still think and act particularistically. And in many ways and connections, it seems that we must. Is there no solution to this typical but tragic situation?

It is just at this juncture that the idea of unity in diversity seems to me to become relevant, and to offer a spiritual common denominator of both ideal and practical efficacy. What the contemporary mind stands greatly in need of is the divorce of the association of uniformity with the notion of the universal, and the substitution of the notion of equivalence. Sameness in difference may be a difficult concept for us, it is. But the difficulty is historical and traditional, and is the specific blight and malady of the modern and Western mind. I take it for granted that the desire and effort to reach universality in the characteristic modern and Western way would be fatal if possible, and

is fortunately impossible in practice. Only in the chastisement of defeat will it be recognized how unnecessary and hopeless the association of the two concepts really is. Spiritual unity is never achieved by an exacting demand for conformity or through any program of imposed agreement. In fact, the demands of such an attitude are self-defeating. What we need to learn most is how to discover unity and spiritual equivalence underneath the differences which at present so disunite and sunder us, and how to establish some basic spiritual reciprocity on the principle of unity in diversity.

This principle is basic in the Bahá'í teaching. It may lead us to another dangerous partisanship to assert it is exclusively Bahá'í; but there is no escaping the historical evidences of its early advocacy and its uncompromising adoption by the Bahá'í prophets and teachers. But it is not the time for insisting on this side of the claim; the intelligent, loyal Bahá'í should stress not the source, but the importance of the idea, and rejoice not in the originality and uniqueness of the principle but rather in its prevalence and practicality. The idea has to be translated into every important province of modern life and thought, and in many of these must seem to be independently deprived and justified. Suffice it, if the trend and net result are in the same general and progressive direction and serve to bring some values and behaviour nearer to the main ideal. Through the realization of this, and the welcome acceptance of all possible collaboration, a spiritual leadership and influence can be exerted that is otherwise impossible. And no narrow cultism, however pious and loyal, can accomplish this. The purity of Bahá'í principles must be gauged by their universality on this practical plane. Do they fraternize and fuse with all their kindred expressions? Are they happy in the collaborations that advocate other sanctions but advance toward the same spiritual goal? Can they reduce themselves to the vital common denominators necessary to mediate between other partisan loyalties?

We should not be over-optimistic. The classical statements of this and other basic Bahá'í teachings like the oneness of humanity are on the lips and tongues of many, but almost every specific program enlisting

the practical activities of men today still has in it dangerous elements of sectarianism. And to the old sectarianisms that we could possibly regard as having had their day, there is constantly being added new ones that are very righteous in the view of their adherents. Oppressed classes and races cannot be told that their counter-claims forced from them by the natural reactions and resistance to suppression and restriction should yield in the early hours of their infancy to broader less specific loyalties. These new nationalisms and other causes will not listen immediately to such caution or impose upon themselves voluntarily such unprecedented sacrifices. Let us take specific instances. Can anyone with a fair-minded sense of things, give wholesale condemnation the partisanships of Indian Nationalism, or Chinese integrity and independence, or Negro and proletarian self-assertion after generations of persecution and restriction? Scarcely, – and certainly not at all unless the older partisanships that have aroused them repent, relax, and finally abdicate their claims and presumptions.

On questions like these we reach the crux of the problem, and seem to face a renewal and intensification of national, class and racial strife. Is there no remedy?

In my view, there is but one practical way to the ideal plane on which a cessation or abatement of the age-old struggle can be anticipated with any degree of warrant. And that is in the line of not asking a direct espousal of universalism at the expense of the natural ambitions and group interests concerned; but rather to ask on the basis of reciprocity a restriction of these movements to their own natural boundaries, areas and interests. Josiah Royce, one of the greatest of the American philosophers saw this problem more clearly than any other Western thinker, and worked out his admirable principle of loyalty, which is nothing more or less than a vindication of the principle of unity in diversity carried out to a practical degree of spiritual reciprocity.

Of course, it will be a long time yet before the mind of the average man can see and be willing to recognize the equivalence of value between his own loyalties and those of all other groups, and when he

will be able to assert them without infringement of similar causes and loyalties. But when the realization comes from hard necessity that the only alternative policy is suicidal, perhaps we can count on a radical reversal of what still seems to be the dominant and ineradicable human failing and propensity to continue the tragic narrow self-assertiveness of the human past.

In starting with the unequivocal assertion of equivalence and reciprocity between religions, the Bahá'í teaching has touched one of the trunk-nerves of the whole situation. But it seems that this principle needs to be carried into the social and cultural fields. Because there the support and adherence of the most vigorous and intellectual elements in more societies can be enlisted. Translated into more secular terms, a greater practical range will be opened for the application and final vindication of the Bahá'í principles. Only the narrowly orthodox will feel any loss of spirituality in this, and the truly religious-minded person will see in it a positive multiplication of spiritual power, directly proportional to the breadth and variety of the interests touched and motivated. The Bahá'í teaching proposed a religion social and modern in its objectives; and so the challenge comes directly home to every Bahá'í believer to carry the universal dimension of tolerance and spiritual reciprocity into every particular cause and sectarianism that he can reach. His function there is to share the loyalties of the group, but upon a different plane and with a higher perspective. He must partake of partisanship in order to work toward its transformation, and help keep it within the bounds of constructive and controlled self-assertion.

Each period of a faith imposes a special new problem. Is it too much to assume that for us the problem of this particular critical decade is just this task of transposing the traditional Bahá'í reciprocity between religions in the social and cultural denominationalisms of nation, race and class, and vindicating anew upon this plane the precious legacy of the inspired teachings of 'Abdul-Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh? Certainly that is my reverent conviction and my humble suggestion.

Notes

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This eBook has been compiled from material found at The Bahá'í World It is one of a number of Special Collections that explore themes of relevance to the progress and well-being of humanity, highlight advancements in the worldwide Bahá'í community at the levels of thought and action, and reflect on the dynamic history of the Bahá'í Faith.

[←2]

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[←3]

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[←4]

Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, Available at www.bahai.org/r/720204804

[←5]

Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated 10 April 2011 in Extracts from Letters Written on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Individual Believers in the United States on the Topic of Achieving Racial Unity (Updated Compilation 1996-2020), [7],5. Available at https://greenlakebahaischool.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/compilation-uhj-on-race-unity-1996-2020.pdf One aim of this extraordinary period from 1996 to the present has been to empower distinct populations and, indeed, the masses of humanity to take ownership of their own spiritual, intellectual, and social development. A future article will look at the impact of this latter period on the approach to the racial crisis in the United States. Recent articles on community building and approaches to building racial unity in smaller geographic spaces provide valuable insights about developments during this period.

[←6]

Franklin and Moss, 282.

[←7]

Franklin and Moss, 283.

[←8]

Franklin and Moss.

[←9]

Franklin and Moss, 285.

[←10]

Matt Reimann, “When a black fighter won ‘the fight of the century,’ race riots erupted across America.” May 25, 2017. Available at https://timeline.com/when-

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[←12]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/098175321

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‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/322003373

[←14]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/635635504

[←15]

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[←16]

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[←17]

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[←18]

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Individuals such as Dr. Aldon Morris, Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, and Dr. Jennifer Eberhardt have offered systematic, nuanced studies of how racial discrimination infects discourse while also providing solutions for how racial discrimination can end. Also, collaboration with Dr. Rayshawn Ray, a University of Maryland professor, Brookings Institution Fellow, and a Bahá'í Chair Board Member since 2018, has been particularly instrumental in shaping dialogues organized by the Chair.

[←139]

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[←143]

The other two of three principles were rectitude of conduct, primarily for institutions, and a chaste and holy life for individuals.

[←144]

For confirmation of the current relevance of these principles, see Universal House of Justice, 4 March 2020, letter to an individual, par. 3, reprinted in "Extracts from Letters Written on behalf of the

Universal House of Justice to Individual Believers in the United States on the Topic of Achieving Race Unity, 1996-2020."

[←145]

Pioneers are Bahá'ís who travel to other places in support of the global plans. Usually moving without financial support from the Bahá'í Faith, they find jobs or other means of income and live among their new population as contributing members of the community. In addition to *The Advent of Divine Justice*, see for more description of the global plans: Melanie Smith and Paul Lample, The Spiritual Conquest of the Planet: Our Response to Global Plans (Palabra Press, 1993) and June Thomas, Planning Progress: Lessons from Shoghi Effendi (Association for Bahá'í Studies, 1999).

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[←148]

Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1996 letter, par. 28 and 29. Listed are only a few of the skills that the training institute facilitates.

[←149]

Universal House of Justice, 26 November 1999 letter, par. 2.

[←150]

Bahá'ís organized groups of metropolitan areas, cities, villages, or rural areas into "clusters," defined by Bahá'ís but based on existing secular conditions, specifically "culture, language, patterns of transport, infrastructure, and the social and economic life of the inhabitants." Universal House of Justice, 9 January 2001 letter, par. 10.

[←151]

Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010 letter, par. 5.

[←152]

Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010 letter, par. 5, 14.

[←153]

Universal House of Justice, 26 March 2016 letter, par. 5.

[←154]

Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015 letter, par. 24.

[←155]

Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 letter, par. 34.

[←156]

Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2018 letter, par. 3

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Universal House of Justice, 26 March 2016 letter, par. 3.

[←158]

Universal House of Justice, 22 July 2020 letter, par. 2.

[←159]

Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages, 1922-1932 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), 130.

[←160]

Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, 33.

[←161]

Universal House of Justice, 22 July 2020 letter, par. 4.

[←162]

Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015 letter, par. 25.

[←163]

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 31 January 2018 letter, par. 4.

[←164]

See for example Universal House of Justice, 10 April 2011 letter. Other relevant letters compiled in "Extracts from Letters Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Individual Believers in the United States on the Topic of Achieving Race Unity, 1996-2020."

[←165]

Universal House of Justice, 10 April 2011 letter, par. 4.

[←166]

https://soundcloud.com/bahaiworldnewsservice/podcast-a-vision-of-peace-stories-from-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo

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Philip Selznick, "Civility and Piety as Foundations of Community," The Journal of Bahá'í Studies, Vol. 14, number ½, March-June 2004. Also see Philip Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth: Social Theory and the Promise of Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 388—9.

[←168]

Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence—The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), p. xiii.

[←169]

Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 101—2.

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Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 68.

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David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-Globalization* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2002), p. 91.

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Charles Carnegie, *Postnationalism Prefigured: Carribbean Borderlands* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), p. 1.

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Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 26.

[←174]

For example, many important concepts in modern science and mathematics find their genesis in the work of Chinese and Indian thinkers, some of which were later elaborated and transmitted to the West by Muslim innovators. Asian culture and architecture was greatly influenced by the movements of the Mughals and Mongols. The Bantu migrations spread ironworking and new agricultural methods across Africa. The great distances covered across oceans by the Vikings and the Polynesians; the movements and engineering achievements of indigenous societies in the Americas; the existence of Ming china in Swahili graves; and the spread of the tomato and the chili from the Americas to Europe and Asia illustrate the extent of human migration and interchange throughout the ages.

[←175]

Charles Carnegie, *Postnationalism Prefigured*, p. 9.

[←176]

Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 8.

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Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 184.

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Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Case for Contamination," The New York Times Magazine, Jan. 1, 2006.

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Will Kymlicka, cited in Appiah, The *Ethics of Identity*, p. 132.

[←180]

Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 323.

[←181]

For a in-depth exploration of this point, see the Bahá'í International Community statements, "The Prosperity of Humankind", 1995, and "Who is Writing the Future?", 1999.

[←182]

These were among the last words penned by Roosevelt which, due to his death, were not delivered. See http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1945/450413b.html

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[←183]

Samuel Huntington, in his seminal article "The Clash of Civilizations?", posits that global stability will be determined by the interactions among what he calls Western, Hindu, Islamic, Sinic, African, Latin American, Buddhist, and Orthodox Christian civilizations. Huntington writes: "The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future." See Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993.

[←184]

Amartya Sen, I*dentity and Violence*, p. 20.

[←185]

Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 16.

[←186]

Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. xv.

[←187]

Amartya Sen, Identity and Violence, p. 8.

[←188]

Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Case for Contamination,” The New York Times Magazine, Jan. 1, 2006.

[←189]

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, p. 113.

[←190]

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, p. 137.

[←191]

Charles Carnegie, *Postnationalism Prefigured*, p. 17.

[←192]

Charles Carnegie, *Postnationalism Prefigured*, p. 9.

[←193]

Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. xiv.

[←194]

Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/696472436

[←195]

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/407719266

[←196]

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/294539200

[←197]

Cited in *Century of Light*, Bahá'í World Centre, 2001. Available at www.bahai.org/r/031947140 .

[←198]

Cited in *Century of Light*, Bahá'í World Centre, 2001. Available at www.bahai.org/r/690838011

[←199]

Cited in *Century of Light*, Bahá'í World Centre, 2001. Available at www.bahai.org/r/416856683

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Cited in *Century of Light*, Bahá'í World Centre, 2001. Available at www.bahai.org/r/463388482

[←201]

Through adherence to and active implementation of spiritual precepts, the Iranian Bahá'í community effectively eliminated poverty and achieved universal literacy over the span of six to seven decades. Commitment to the principles of human equality and nobility, moral rectitude, collaborative decision-making, education—particularly of girls, of the exalted station of work, cleanliness and good hygiene, and respect for scientific knowledge as applied to agriculture, commerce and other avenues of human endeavor constituted the basis of a spiritually inspired process of social advancement. For additional perspective on the Bahá'í approach to social and economic progress see Bahá'í International Community, "For the Betterment of the World", 2002; and In Service to the Common Good: The American Bahá'í Community's Commitment to Social Change, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 2004.

[←202]

One Common Faith, Bahá'í World Centre, 2005. Available at www.bahai.org/r/969956715

[←203]

One Common Faith, Bahá'í World Centre, 2005. Available at www.bahai.org/r/969956715

[←204]

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/580032274

[←205]

Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995.

[←206]

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/494001842

[←207]

Universal House of Justice, Letter to the World's Religious Leaders, April 2002.

[←208]

Bahá'u'lláh emphatically states that "women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God." He insists upon the emancipation of women from long-entrenched patterns of subordination and calls for the full participation of women in the social, economic, and political realms of civilized life. Women: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice (Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1986), No. 54. Concerning racial equality, Bahá'u'lláh counsels, "Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness." Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/486554855

[←209]

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Available at www.bahai.org/r/473374410

[←210]

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Available at www.bahai.org/r/327958234. It should be noted, however, that the Bahá'í teachings recognize the need for authority and rank for the purpose of ensuring functionality in the pursuit of community goals. In this regard, all decision-making authority in the Bahá'í administrative system rests not with individuals but elected corporate bodies. A distinction is thus made between the moral and spiritual equality of all human beings and the differentiation that may exist in how individuals serve society.

[←211]

Bahá'u'lláh, provisional translation, courtesy of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.

[←212]

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/895919188

[←213]

Bahá'í International Community, "*The Prosperity of Humankind*", 1995. Available at www.bahai.org/r/406673721

[←214]

The sociologist Emile Durkheim referred to such coordinated interaction among society's diverse elements as "organic solidarity"—a solidarity governed by the "law of cooperation." See Philip Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth*, pp. 142-3.

[←215]

Bahá'í International Community, "*The Prosperity of Humankind*", 1995. Available at www.bahai.org/r/616572370

[←216]

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/268841058

[←217]

'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.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/322101001

[←218]

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, p. 153.

[←219]

Cited in Century *of Light.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/202372160

[←220]

It should be noted that for one who does not arrive at a spiritual understanding of existence, Bahá'u'lláh urges that individual to "at least conduct himself with reason and justice." Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002. Available at www.bahai.org/r/653038584

[←221]

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/008934837

[←222]

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/194578922

[←223]

Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán. Available at www.bahai.org/r/621220243

[←224]

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic No. 30. Available at www.bahai.org/r/172419670

[←225]

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic No. 2. Available at www.bahai.org/r/099947277

[←226]

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/199999278

[←227]

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/397234171

[←228]

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/494001842

[←229]

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/407719266

[←230]

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity* (Bahá'í World Centre, 2006). Available at www.bahai.org/r/855801133

[←231]

This is not to suggest that duties prevail over or precede rights, but that the recognition and exercise of such duties provide the very framework for actualizing human rights. There is a complementary relationship between rights and duties. That individuals have specific entitlements or needs, informs us of particular duties that attach to other individuals or the broader society.

[←232]

Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 33

[←233]

The evolving international human rights discourse is one significant example of such cross-cultural moral exchange.

[←234]

Bahá'u'lláh, in *Consultation: A Compilation* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 3.

[←235]

Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/787830813

[←236]

In the vocabulary of moral philosophy, "the good" refers to a vision of happiness, human well-being, or a specific way of life. Thus, many

conceptions of "the good" are possible. "The right" refers to types of principled or just action—binding duties, codes and standards that regulate and guide how individuals pursue their particular notions of "the good." Modern liberal thought, going back to Immanuel Kant, places emphasis on "the right" over "the good." Communitarians have critiqued this view, arguing that it has led to the exaggerated individualism of Western society.

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'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/006593911

[←238]

Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/437022378

[←239]

For more on this point, see Amitai Etzioni, *The Monochrome Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 221-45.

[←240]

Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap and Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 9-95.

[←241]

Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap and Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 9-95.

[←242]

To acknowledge the limitations of pluralism, however, is not to deny the centrality of individual and group autonomy, civil rights, and democratic values to human well-being. What is being critiqued here is a pluralism that is unable to foster a definite vision of the common good.

[←243]

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/015747998

[←244]

Universal House of Justice, May 24, 2001. Available at www.bahai.org/r/413655933

[←245]

Bahá'ís attach great importance to cooperative decision-making and assign organizational responsibility for community affairs to freely elected governing councils at the local, national, and international levels. Bahá'u'lláh designated these governing councils "Houses of Justice." This administrative system 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 collaboration and unity on a global scale. A unique feature of the Bahá'í electoral process is the maximum freedom of choice given to the electorate through the prohibition of nominations, candidature and solicitation. Election to Bahá'í administrative bodies is based not on personal ambition but rather on recognized ability, mature experience, and a commitment to service. Because the Bahá'í system does not allow the imposition of the arbitrary will or leadership of individuals, it cannot be used as a pathway to power. Decision-making authority rests only with the elected bodies themselves. All members of the Bahá'í community, no matter what position they may temporarily occupy in the administrative structure, are expected to regard themselves as involved in a learning process, as they strive to understand and implement the laws and principles of their Faith. Significantly, in many parts of the world, the first exercises in democratic activity have occurred within the Bahá'í community. Bahá'ís believe that this consultatively-based administrative system offers a useful example of the institutional structures necessary for global community life. For more on the underlying principles of the Bahá'í Administrative Order see Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/922842353

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Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/852608044

[←247]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/841208804

[←248]

Universal House of Justice, *On the Occasion of the Official Opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb*, May 22, 2001. Available at https://news.bahai.org/story/119/

[←249]

Barret, D.B., “World Religious Statistics.” Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1988), p. 303.

[←250]

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Oliner, Samuel P., and Pearl . Oliner, “Promoting Extensive Altruistic Bonds: A Conceptual elaboration and Some Pragmatic Implications.” In Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological, and Historial Perspective on Altruism. Ed. Pearl M. Oliner, et al (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

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Arbab, Farzam, “The Process of Social Transformation.” In The Bahá’í Faith and Marxism: Proceedings of a Conference Held January 1986 (Ottawa: Association for Bahá’í Studies, 1987), p. 10.

[←253]

Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing trust, 1974), p. 198.

[←254]

Universal House of Justice, Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: A Statement by the Universal House of Justice (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing trust, 1989), p. 20.

[←255]

Universal House of Justice, Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: A Statement by the Universal House of Justice (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing trust, 1989), pp. 20-21.

[←256]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing trust, 1975), p. 2.

[←257]

Arbab, “Process,” p. 11.

[←258]

Arbab, “Process,” p. 11.

[←259]

Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), p. 72.

[←260]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks: Addresses given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911 (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), p. 170.

[←261]

Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writing of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 288.

[←262]

Selections, pp.1-2.

[←263]

World Order, p. 114.

[←264]

Selections, p.69.

[←265]

Gleanings, p. 288.

[←266]

Gleanings, p. 287.

[←267]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1975) p. 117.

[←268]

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[←269]

World Order, p.42.

[←270]

Selections, pp. 20-21.

[←271]

Paris Talks, p. 16.

[←272]

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 42.

[←273]

Selections, p. 129.

[←274]

Selections, p. 135.

[←275]

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Selections, p. 134.

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Selections, p. 125.

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Mussen and Eisenberg-Berg, Roots.

[←282]

Gleanings, p. 247.

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1982).

[←284]

Selections, p. 158.

[←285]

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[←286]

Arbab, “Process,” p. 11.

[←287]

Bahá’í Administration, p. 21.

[←288]

Each member of the consultative group has an equal right of expression, and no blocs, factions, or any subdivision of the group are permitted. Inseparable from the Bahá’í consultative process is the development of sensitivity and respect for the different voices whose expressions of opinion may not fit into conventional or dominant cultural modes of communication. Since the group attempts to work toward consensus on an issue, voting only as a last resort, the process does not necessarily require reduction to duality: alternatives need not

be narrowed down to the two poles “for” and “against”. Instead, the consultative process itself, drawing on the interactive contributions of all its diverse members, is looked to as the creative source of new solutions. Consultation is regarded both as a method for generative decision making and conflict resolution as well as an instrument for reinforcing the unity of a diverse group. It is the method by which the Bahá’í administrative institutions conduct the affairs of the Bahá’í community, but Bahá’ís are also encouraged to use consultation in all aspects of their lives, whether in the family, neighborhood, or workplace. Another way in which Bahá’í administrative institutions are structured to implement unity in diversity involves practices intended to ensure the participation of minority ethnic populations. (The definition of what constitutes a “minority” is left to the discretion of the national institution in each country.) “To discriminate against any race, on the ground of its being socially backward, politically immature, and numerically in a minority”, is considered to be “a flagrant violation of the spirit” of the Bahá’í teachings.

[←289]

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[←290]

Advent, p. 36.

[←291]

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