

EDITOR

J. Rennie Whitehead
 1368 Chattaway Ave.
 OTTAWA On. K1H 7S3
 CANADA
 Tel (613) 731-6536
 Fax (613) 731-1759.
 e mail: jrennie@magi.com

SECY-TREASURER

R B. (Rob) Hoffman
 34 Hereford Place
 OTTAWA,
 Ont. K1Y 3S5 CANADA
 Tel (613) 722-5774.
 e-mail: rhoffman@robbert.ca
 Bus. & Fax: (613) 232-5613

Canadian Association Association Canadienne

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MAPCOP

CHAIRMAN

H.F. (Bob) Fletcher
 3437, Grants Side Road
 KINBURN On. K2G 0M4
 CANADA

Tel: (613) 832-3024

Fax: (613) 832-3024

e-mail: af821@freenet.carleton

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A Bahá'í Perspective on Global Governance

by Don Dainty¹

"... The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all- embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men." (Bahá'u'lláh - ~1870 - GI p 249)

Introduction

One obvious benefit and major contributor to human welfare is **peace**: and in the attainment of that objective, the matter of the art of governance inevitably springs to mind.

This is an unquestionably complex subject as it must deal with the great diversity which makes up human reality, and it must relate directly to the individual, as well as to the several levels of collectivity: neighbourhood, municipal, regional, national and international.

To adequately deal with this complex reality, government, at any level, must, above all, have a sense of direction, an objective and an understanding of the nature of the human being so that the consequent social objectives state the responsibilities as well as match the needs of all peoples wherever they may abide. These matters of goals, rights and responsibilities are discussed further below.

Social Evolution and Changing Needs

These important needs and responsibilities, change as history unfolds. The human race has, over previous history, successively and successfully, evolved through the changing stages of consolidation of the family, the clan, the tribe, the city and the nation. This success results from the application of an over-riding principle of concern, initially only for our immediate family, but then unto ever-enlarging loyalties, until now we see the beginnings of an emergent planetary loyalty. We sense that this global affinity could lead to a potentially highly advanced world civilization, largely freed from want and hate, and in which the latent potentialities of each human being can be nourished and ultimately flower. While some consider such a view as utopian, others firmly embrace it as a certainty. Among the latter, one can firmly place the Bahá'í World Community.

¹ Don Dainty retired in 1991 as Principal Scientist of the Mining Research Laboratories of CANMET/NRCAN. He now speaks frequently on mining health and safety issues, and on subjects related to the Bahá'í Faith.

Most everyone senses, however, that in order for this yearning to be realized, some fundamental attitudinal changes are required. Traditionally, such civilizing changes have been provided by the education of the race at various times and places in the principles of concern for others, resulting in social co-operation and, eventually, the emergence of civilizations.

This scheme of things has been insightfully attested to by that very famous historian, Professor Arnold Toynbee, at mid-century, in his remarkable work entitled – *A Study of History*. In it, he identified some twenty-one civilizations, and made the universal claim that, at their root, were founders whom he called 'Saviour Kings'. Among these supremely gifted souls were a number of the Founders of the world's great religions. He eloquently summarizes his thesis in his 'study' in a section quoted as follows.

"...We concluded that the institution which we call a society consists in the common ground between the respective fields of action of a number of individual souls; that the source of action is never the society itself, but always an individual; that the action which is an act of creation is always performed by a soul which is in some sense a superhuman genius; that the genius expresses himself, like every living soul, through action upon his fellows; that in any society, the creative personalities are always a small minority; and that the action of the genius upon souls of common clay operates occasionally through the perfect method of direct illumination, but usually through the second best expedient of a kind of social drill which enlists the faculty of mimesis (or imitation) in the souls of the uncreative rank and file, and thereby enables them to perform 'mechanically' an evolution which they could not have performed on their own initiative. These conclusions were reached in the course of our analysis of growth, and in general they must be true of the interaction of individuals and societies in all stages of a society's history." (A Study of History, Chap. XX, p 533)

In his writings, he further suggests that humankind has been launched into a global experiment, in which the last stage of society building will occur, i.e. global civilization.

And, finally, he ponders which paradigm, offered by which 'superhuman genius' or 'Saviour-King', is destined to accomplish the anticipated and admittedly daunting goal of global unification.

The Nature of the Problem

Humanity has progressed immeasurably since the middle of the last century by developing material and intellectual tools, the like of which the ancients could only dream. Proof of this, for example, is the commonly quoted statement that more than 90% of all scientists and engineers who ever existed, are alive now!

This general explosion in the intellectual education of the race has bestowed great material power upon us. Unfortunately, we have often wielded such power badly, contributing to the familiar pattern of continual war to the present.

It should be clear now however, because of the devastating power of the current engines of war developed by modern science, that the future of the race itself has been, and remains,

in jeopardy. The use of such weapons is, for most, unthinkable and intolerable.

What is evidently needed is a global mindset that puts aside animosities and substitutes co-operative attitudes to, in turn, facilitate: agreement on common universal objectives and needs, the formulation of beneficial, globally-applicable policies, and the establishment of a world-girdling administration to implement those policies – that is, some form of global governance!

The Writings of the Central Figures and Institutions of the Bahá'í Faith touch on all the above weighty issues. This process of outlining the fundamental aspects of world unity, governance and civilization, began in 1844 and continues in the present. Before His passing in 1892, Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, identified these salient issues, thus foreshadowing the much later conclusions of Prof. Toynbee, as described above.

The 'Superhuman Genius'

A fundamental matter, from a Bahá'í viewpoint, is the nature of Toynbee's 'superhuman genius' – the source of civilization. About this concept, in different words that express a similar idea, Bahá'u'lláh affirms that:

"The Prophets of God should be regarded as physicians whose task is to foster the well-being of the world and its peoples, that, through the spirit of oneness, they may heal the sickness of a divided humanity... No man, however acute his perception, can ever hope to reach the heights which the wisdom and understanding of the Divine Physician have attained... They were thus able to scatter the darkness of ignorance, and to shed upon the world the glory of their own knowledge." (G1 pp 80/81).

And, in another place, He adds that:

"The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy... Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements." (G1 p 213)

You may already have correctly concluded that Bahá'is do indeed revere Bahá'u'lláh as that 'genius' Whose ambitious task it is to unify the world and bring peace.

Unity is the Pre-eminent Principle

Leadership is the ability to guide and bring people together to co-operate in the attainment of common goals. This is the supreme talent of the Prophet-Founders of religion. With respect to the fostering of that essential 'coming together', Bahá'u'lláh confirms the pre-eminent importance of this talent, when He says:

"The One true God beareth Me witness... My object is none other than the betterment of the world and the tranquillity of its peoples. The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established. This unity can never be achieved so long as the counsels which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed are suffered to pass unheeded." (G1 p 286)

Thus does Bahá'u'lláh inform us that the first task among the many steps leading to global civilization, is the fostering of the unity of the entire human race.

This principle of unity involves not merely, nor only, race, but it also involves the abolition of prejudices of all kinds. This fundamental point is emphasized many times in the Bahá'í Writings.

For example, Bahá'u'lláh says:

"It is incumbent upon every man, in this Day, to hold fast unto whatsoever will promote the interests, and exalt the station, of all nations and just governments. Through each and every one of the verses which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed, the doors of love and unity have been unlocked and flung open to the face of men..."

Whatsoever hath led the children of men to shun one another, and hath caused dissension and divisions amongst them, hath, through the revelation of these words, been nullified and abolished." (G1 pp 94-96)

Peace Follows Unity

Thus, PEACE in this world becomes the child of UNITY. The anticipation of this peace has been lauded by the visionaries of the past for millennia as humanity's essential goal. For example, Isaiah foresaw peace, and the just government necessary to administer it, some 2,750 years ago, when he wrote:

"For unto us... a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end... to order it and to establish it with judgement and with justice forever..." (Isa 9:6-7)

But such a peace has been unachievable during the infancy and childhood of the race. Bahá'ís understand that humanity is now passing through a most turbulent adolescence before achieving its imminent maturity. This adolescent stage requires, like a parent to a child, the guidance and prescriptions which only the Divine Physician can impart.

In a most interesting fashion, given the recent glimmerings of confirmation by history, Bahá'u'lláh has stated that peace will be achieved in two stages – the first is the 'Lesser Peace', the second, the 'Most Great Peace'.

The 'Lesser Peace' is a political peace, arrived at as a result of the rationalization by the leaders of the world that war is no longer a profitable means of aggrandizing a nation or a people, and is therefore outmoded as a suitable instrument of national policy. But this peace is to be an empty, structural one, devoid of the human virtues inherent in the word UNITY.

The 'Most Great Peace' on the other hand is born of those same virtues. The educative processes which have been set in motion by that 'genius', and Whose reflection is mirrored by those around Him (a process Prof. Toynbee called 'mimesis'), are designed to infuse those virtues into the human character, and usher in that Most Great Peace.

In a fascinating chapter of the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh, we find that He, as the 'Saviour-King', proffered peace to the world in

His numerous challenging letters written between 1863 AD and the early years of the 1870s. These remarkable letters were addressed individually, and collectively, to the world's kings and rulers, who, at that time, were possessed of great autocratic power, sufficient for the declaration of a state of universal peace.

Not unexpectedly, they failed to respond to His challenges. This prompted Him to advise them of the consequence, as follows:

"O kings of the earth! We see you increasing every year your expenditures, and laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is wholly and grossly unjust... lay not excessive burdens on your peoples... Your people are your treasures... By them ye rule, by their means ye subsist, by their aid ye conquer. Yet, how disdainfully ye look upon them! How strange, how very strange! ... Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependants." (G1 pp 253/4)

Global Governance and Collective Security

Subsequently, alarm and fear among the leaders of the world have caused them to undertake, twice within this century, the establishment of the means of collective security against an intolerable growth in the abominations of war. Recently, we have seen a number of co-operative actions to maintain that collective security. And, as a result of passing through several grades in the school of bitter experience, we have seen progress in the development of the world's current instrument – the United Nations – toward greater effectiveness. The process continues! This process is clearly foreseen in detail by Bahá'u'lláh, when He writes that the Creator...

"... wishing to reveal the prerequisites of the peace and tranquillity of the world and the advancement of its peoples, hath written: The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men... Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him... This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation..." (G1 pp 249)

While penned more than a century ago, one notices the steady progress toward this goal in recent times. The 'Physician' has indeed prescribed an appropriate remedy of collective security and world governance.

The Structure of Global Governance

On page 15 of a 1995 Bahá'í Document called the 'Turning Point for All Nations', we find the following statement:

"Along with the measures for strengthening its structure, the United Nations needs to adopt initiatives that release the latent power of all people to participate in this galvanizing process. To this end certain themes that accelerate the advancement of the individual and society warrant special consideration. Among them, ..."

- promoting economic development
- protecting human rights
- advancing the status of women, and
- emphasizing moral development,

are four priorities so closely tied to the advancement of civilization that they must be emphasized as part of the United Nations agenda."

Such matters form the bases of a Bahá'í approach. The detail of the Divine Physician's prescription is extensive, as indicated by the following brief descriptions of related principles.

1. The Principle of Justice

From the above citations, a discernible pattern emerges. According to Bahá'u'lláh, the prime objective is the attainment of PEACE; and the prime tactic in the strategy for its attainment is the establishment of UNITY; and the major instrument for the maintenance of unity and peace is the convening of a 'vast assemblage of the kings and rulers' – GLOBAL GOVERNANCE. And finally, the underlying, supreme principle which must govern the deliberations of that assemblage is JUSTICE.

Bahá'u'lláh extols justice in the following terms

"The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour... Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of my loving kindness. Set it then before thine eyes." (AHW #2)

It should be no surprise, then, that Bahá'u'lláh ordained that the supranational administrative body of the Bahá'í World Community, when brought into being, be titled – the Universal House of Justice. This Institution, and its related systems, are further described below in terms of a suggested model of future global governance.

2. Just Economic Principles:

A most important, perhaps the most important 'department' of that administrative system, will be that of Justice. The misadventures of rogue dictators aside, it is inequities of wealth and privilege which define the haves and have-nots locally, regionally and internationally. Such economic and political inequities foster strife, such as we currently (1996) see in the Mexican uprisings, for example. So in a peaceful world society there must be principles to justly govern the global economy.

Again, on page 15 of the 1995 Bahá'í document, the 'Turning Point for All Nations', we find the following statement:

"Economic development strategies employed by the United Nations, the World Bank and a number of governments during the last fifty years, however sincerely conceived and executed, have fallen far short of aspirations... These failures can be traced to a number of factors. They include a misplaced focus on large-scale projects and bureaucratic over-centralization, unjust terms of international trade, a pervasive corruption that has been allowed to flourish throughout the system, the exclusion of women from the decision-making process at all levels, a general

inability to ensure that resources reach the poor, and the diversion of development resources into military hardware."

Further, among twelve fundamental principles presented by Bahá'ís, are two which are particularly relevant to the world's economy, and which give dimension to economic justice. These are:

- 1) **the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty, and,**
- 2) **the equitable distribution of the world's wealth.**

Through the implementation of such economic principles, the 'first and third worlds' will be wrapped into one emergent, unified world.

However, to maintain economic, and all other kinds of order in a unified world, a policing instrument must be brought into being.

3. The Instrument of Justice:

In His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of maintaining order in a global civilization in these terms:

"The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment." (Gl p 219)"Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories." (Gl p 249)

Thus it is that He underlines the necessity for collective action with respect to the establishment of a world police force – a prevision of the present struggle to do so. This struggle now involves the formation of a 'rapid strike force' under the authority of the United Nations. Such a force is designed to be dispatched quickly, on only an intimation of trouble, in order to prevent tragic outbreaks of racial/ethnic/religious warfare of the type that we have recently seen in Bosnia and Rwanda-Burundi.

In this connection, Ploughshares International, in a 1996 document entitled: Abolition of Nuclear Weapons – Section E, lists recent Canadian contributions to this process, as follows:

"Three publications show how Canada is providing impressive leadership in advancing subjects on the UN agenda:

- *Towards a Rapid Reaction Capability for the United Nations – Report of the Government of Canada, 1995;*
- *Constraining Conventional Proliferation: A Role for Canada – Research Report prepared for the Non-Proliferation, Arms Control and Disarmament Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1996, and*
- *Verification in All Its Aspects, Including the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Verification (A UN Report prepared by a group of qualified governmental experts, chaired by Canada, 1995)."*

For Canadians, it is a pleasing matter, is it not, to see that Canada has been a leading exponent for the establishment of such a force, and has consistently, over these many years, contributed to police keeping functions under the authority of

the United Nations? This is but one manifestation of the promises of a very great future for Canada, materially and spiritually, foreshadowed, many decades ago in the Bahá'í Writings.

4. The Decentralization of Political Power:

"He, (Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Bahá'u'lláh) moreover... foreshadowed the movement of the decentralization of political power which would inevitably be set in motion..." (GPB p 282)

This is another surprising principle which is an underlying feature of the current drama being played out on the stage of the entire world, a particular example of which, is Canada's current constitutional difficulties.

While the Bahá'í Writings insist that authority to govern must rest with an appropriately constituted world authority, the greatest power to achieve the common goals enunciated by that authority rests at the 'grass roots' level of society. The expression – 'power to the people' – underlines both the currency of this view at the basic level of society, and the desire of people to effect solutions within their own spheres.

Further, we read in 'Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World', that:

"Top-down models of community development can no longer adequately respond to modern day needs and aspirations. The world community must move toward more participatory, knowledge-based, value-driven systems of governance in which people can assume responsibility for the processes and institutions that affect their lives. These systems need to be democratic in spirit and method, and must emerge on all levels of world society, including the global level. Consultation – the operating expression of justice in human affairs – should become the primary mode of decision-making." (page 4 - Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World – Bahá'í International Community, June 1996)

5. Universal Education:

This decentralized power can be properly wielded only by a mature population, which, while mindful of its human rights, is devoted equally to exercising its responsibilities and duties. Both authority and power arise from 'appropriate universal education', a principle which becomes a right not a privilege in the Bahá'í scheme of things. About education, Bahá'u'lláh says:

"... Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can alone cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom." (G1 p 260)

Such education builds the moral base in the population by emphasizing the spiritual messages of love, unity, fellowship and co-operation – of such stuff is civilization!

6. The Equality of Women and Men

:"Unity in Diversity" is a slogan which flowed from Bahá'u'lláh's pen. It is now frequently employed to testify to the importance of this seeming contradiction between the exercise of power by the diverse populations around the globe, and the unifying effect of a single world authority. This slogan suggests that, while all differences are acknowledged, they can be thought of as positive

contributions to the richness of the world's multi-dimensional mosaic, and need not be the cause of division.

One dimension of the unity that must stem from diversity, is that expressed by the principle of the equality of women with men.

Past discrimination, oppression and under-valuing of women are acknowledged, but such must now be abandoned as the men and women of today are called to equal partnership in every aspect of life. In the Bahá'í Writings:

"Divine justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other in the eyes of heaven." (PT p 162)

and,

"In the estimation of God there is no distinction of sex. One whose thought is pure, whose education is superior, whose scientific attainments are greater, whose deeds of philanthropy excel, be that one man or woman, is entitled to full rights and recognition; there is no differentiation whatsoever." (PUP p 186)

Such a principle involves work and change for both sexes. For example, when choices must be made, the assuring of the priority education of girls over that of boys, is a principle which recognizes the crucial role of an appropriately educated mother in the early, formative, years of a child's development.

In the Bahá'í framework, women are challenged to strive to be the equals of men in every sphere of life, and men are instructed to encourage, support and assist women in their efforts, and to welcome them as equal partners. Bahá'í women already enjoy the right of universal suffrage around the entire world. By extension, such responsibilities on the parts of both women and men, have their beneficial application to humanity as a whole.

While not a Bahá'í practice, a laudable and practical measure to appropriately empower women in the governing processes, is the recently proposed makeup of the Nunavut Assembly in Canada's Arctic – one woman and one man elected from each and every constituency! From the acorn of a stated principle some 120 years ago, a mighty oak, in the form of widespread awareness of the equality principle, has indeed grown! In such ways, the empowering of women the world over adds the vital contribution of feminine views to the political processes. This will assure a more peaceful, compassionate and communicative complexion to the conduct of the world's affairs. In connection with an improved dimension of communication, a common language becomes a necessary condition for an effective world administration.

7. A Universal Auxiliary Language:

A major stumbling block to communication and understanding in virtually all international circumstances, is the existence of a myriad of languages that are generally unintelligible to one another. In the areas of law and governance, this barrier is of particular concern.

Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes that:

"The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script..."

These things are obligatory and absolutely essential." (GI pp 249-250)

World government, world law, world commerce, universal education, elimination of misunderstandings at all levels, etc., etc., depend on the implementation of this principle.

A commonly understood universal auxiliary language is therefore, fundamental to processes ranging from simple conversation among individuals, to education at all levels, and ultimately to the process of consultation, the means of conflict resolution at the global level.

8. Consultation in All Matters:

Unity and understanding, according to the Bahá'í Writings, is fostered by 'consultation'.

This process involves individual spiritual approaches to social interchange and communication, thus minimizing the adversarial confrontations so evident in modern society. By this means we will evolve from a stance of political opposition to one of consultation and co-operation.

The following excerpts from the Bahá'í Writings indicate the fundamental importance of this process which fosters movement from the inevitable 'clash of conflicting opinion' to the point where the 'spark of truth shines forth'.

"Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation." (Consultation p 93)

"... The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding. (TB p 168).

Such principles form the basis of a Bahá'í approach which assumes that the appropriate character of administration generally, is:

"... not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candour, and courage on the other." (Bahá'í Admin. pp 63-64)

The suggestion is that such sentiments form a suitable basis for the administration of our globe. But one arena in which consultation has regrettably often given way to implacable partisanship, is that of the world's environment.

9. Care of the Environment – a Sacred Trust:

The spoiling of our planetary nest has been an increasing cause of concern in recent decades. This concern likely began in mind of the population-at-large, with the advent of the atomic bomb, but now the concerns are legion.

One manifestation of this general concern, originating in Canada, has been the Greenpeace example. It's actions are expressive of the continuing struggles between idealism and practicality, activism and inertia, sacrifice and expense,

governance and anarchy, etc. And yet, in the end, we all know that we cannot afford to continue to foul our own global nest or indefinitely postpone actions to preserve it.

Bahá'u'lláh, in celebrating creation, says:

"...whatever I behold, I readily discover that it maketh Thee (God) known unto me... Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven... and... turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and... bounty." (PM pp 271-272)

To which He adds:

"Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world." (TB pp 141-142)

In order to foster the Creator's Will, and to respond to the stated policy that Bahá'í communities are called upon to make the conservation of the natural environment an integral part of their on-going activities, the Bahá'í International Community functions as a Non-Governmental Organization attached to the United Nations in New York, and is accredited to three UN Agencies. It is also a member of the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). The efforts produced by implementation of that policy, result in the contribution of the global Bahá'í Community to some 50 conservation projects in 30 countries around the world.

The Brundtland Commission of the United Nations clearly expressed related views in 1987, when, in 'Our Common Future', it was pointed out that:

"A safe, environmentally sound and economically viable energy pathway that will sustain human progress into the distant future, is clearly imperative. But it will require new dimensions of political will and institutional Cupertino to achieve it."

In a word, what is required is a world body to state environmental policies, a world police force to enforce them, a world tribunal to exercise justice in disputes about them, and finally, a concerted world-wide educational program to impart the principle that preservation of the natural environment is a sacred trust.

In Summary, a Bahá'í Model for Global Governance

Among the many facets of the Bahá'í model, some of the more important aspects are:

1. A Global Governing Body:

In the Bahá'í framework, the Universal House of Justice, is the global administrative institution of the Bahá'í Faith. It was established in 1963 on the slopes of Mount Carmel in the State of Israel, and functions within a Constitution derived from the principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh. Long before it's first election, the local and national Bahá'í bodies were already taking form. This development has been such that, at present, there is a Bahá'í governance infrastructure established around the globe, composed of 233 national or regional Councils, 20,000 local Councils and 120,000 localities where Bahá'ís reside.

The House of Justice is the apex of a structure which effectively embraces the 5,000,000 Bahá'ís of all backgrounds

around the world into one unified body, demonstrating in real circumstances, the beauty of the concept – Unity in Diversity.

2. The Statement of Beneficial Principles:

An important role that the House of Justice performs is the interpretation of Bahá'í principles pertinent to the present day, and the communication of these views, not only to Bahá'ís, but also to the peoples of the world.

In recent years, there have been major documents prepared on behalf of the House of Justice for this purpose. Among them are:

1. "A Statement on Peace"
2. "The Turning Point for All Nations" and
3. "The Prosperity of Humankind."

As they elaborate the themes which relate to the subject of governance, they are recommended reading.

3. Universal Suffrage:

Since 1963, the Universal House of Justice has been elected every five years by a series of local, national and international elections, in a process of universal suffrage ultimately involving all the Bahá'ís of the globe, men and women, rich and poor, etc.

4. A Three-Tiered Bahá'í Administration:

Every citizen of the Bahá'í World is urged to exercise the right to vote in local Bahá'í elections, the first electoral stage, and every citizen within that local region is eligible for election. This process is repeated at the national level, involving the election of regional delegates to a National Convention, where the elected delegates, in turn, cast votes to elect the membership of the national councils. The members of these National Assemblies, in turn, cast their votes for members of the Universal House of Justice at the International Conventions convened for the purpose.

5. Criteria for election:

This democratic electoral process, at all levels, is characterized by: no parties and no electioneering. Before casting a ballot, one is enjoined to keep in mind certain criteria which include, but not exclusively: an unprejudiced desire for service to the human world, demonstrated devotion to moral and spiritual principles, a well-trained mind, and mature experience. Because the elected bodies are not obligated to lobbyists and other types of external pressures, they are free to apply principle to each situation and act accordingly. The consequence of the application of such criteria is an elected collective leadership of high quality and capacity.

6. Consultation

As stated above, it is through the process of consultation that governance at all levels takes form. In order that governance should benefit from consultation in the Bahá'í sense of the word, behaviour in accordance with principle is necessary. Such principles include, but not exclusively: 1) the exercise of justice, 2) mutual respect for the rights and freedoms of others, 3) equality in all its forms, 4) courtesy, 5) a search for truth in any situation, 6) ultimate detachment from one's own views once proffered, and 7) wholehearted acceptance of the product

of consultation, and willingness to implement the decisions and policies. Such are the characteristics for which Bahá'ís strive during consultation at all levels, everywhere in the world.

7. A Global Educational System:

Most of these prerequisites and others, form a common world curriculum defining an enlightened educational process beginning from the first days of life and implemented globally as circumstances permit. Toward this end, in 1991 for example, the Bahá'í community engaged in approximately 1,000 educational activities world-wide, mainly involving literacy programs (203) and the establishment of schools (741).

8. Dispute Settlement:

It is through the process of enlightened consultation that disputes are settled at whatever level. Individuals are enjoined to take local disputes to the local Bahá'í administrative body for resolution. There is the possibility of appeal to the two higher levels of the administration. The highest level decisions are binding. Similarly, disputes at the national level are resolved by consultation with the National Assemblies, and those between national communities, by consultation with the Universal House of Justice.

9. Human Rights and Freedoms:

In this general respect, on page 7 of a booklet entitled – 'Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh' by the Universal House of Justice – we read:

"Freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of action, are among the freedoms which have received the ardent attention of the social thinkers across the centuries... A true reading of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh leaves no doubt as to the high importance of these freedoms to constructive social processes. Consider, for instance, Bahá'u'lláh's proclamations to the kings and rulers. Can it not be deduced from this alone that the attainment of freedom is a significant purpose of His Revelation? His denunciations of tyranny and his urgent appeals on behalf of the oppressed provide unmistakable proof. But does not the freedom fore-shadowed by His Revelation imply nobler, ampler manifestations of human achievement? Does it not indicate an organic relationship between the internal and external realities of man as has not yet been attained?"

Is this Model Flourishing?

Very briefly, this system is implemented now in the Bahá'í World. It does indeed flourish by deriving unity, as well as the richness of variety, from the immense diversity of the populations of the world. Evidence of this is the fact is that the Bahá'í Faith is now the most geographically widespread religion in the world, second only to Christianity. This conclusion is the result of an independent study on behalf of the Encyclopaedia Britannica which was published in its 1992 Year Book.

Further, while there have been several attempts to divide the body of the Bahá'í Faith, they have been unsuccessful throughout the 150 years of its existence – a feat of unity unparalleled in history – a unity which is not the result of

oppression, but due to the free expression of all its component peoples at all levels of its administration.

Is Religion a Positive Influence?

The entire above approach suggests, oft-expressed opinions to the contrary, that religion is not only a positive influence, but the very basis of civilization itself.

Many a war has been fought ostensibly in the name of religion with historical examples cited from Christendom, Islam and others, as well as the current examples of 'Jihad', Ireland and Bosnia. So there is a legitimacy to the question: Has religion hindered peace? The Bahá'í Writings provide a background for an answer to this question by pointing out the following pattern: religion is born, rises, flourishes and bears its fruit, but then suffers decay. Thus, to evaluate the fruits of a religion and establish the legitimacy of the resulting society, it is necessary to examine that society at its historical zenith, not during its period of regrettable decay.

For continual spiritual progress then, religion must be renewed as the Scriptures of those religions themselves declare. This cyclic renewal theme is ancient, as demonstrated by the statement of Krishna some four to five millennia ago:

"When there is an insurrection of vice and injustice in the world, I incarnate myself from age to age for the preservation of the just and the destruction of the wicked."

In such renewals, aberrated views are corrected, spiritual truth is reaffirmed, and new concepts are imparted. Attitudes toward war represent one such an aberrated example, as war-like attitudes are difficult to justify from the fundamentals of either Christianity or Islam, for example.

Consequently, these original teachings ought not to be the cause of discord, but insistence on aberrated views is indeed a dispeller of peace. The fault lay not with God's Revelations, but rather with men who insist on their own views, and fail to observe the spirit of the ordinances of the Prophet-Founders of their societies. So it is irreligion which is at the foundation of such aberrative behaviour.

Accordingly, a renewed stream of moral, ethical and spiritual concepts, emerges as a prerequisite for the realization of unity, then peace, the establishment of global governance, and ultimately, evolution toward world civilization.

Conclusion

In the latter part of the 19th Century, the poet Wordsworth, in his inspired poem 'Locksley Hall', wrote:

"For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see, Saw the vision of the world, and the wonder that would be; ... Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm, With the standards of the people plunging through the thunder storm, Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were fur'd In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world. There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe, and the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law." (excerpts from 'Locksley Hall')

Bahá'ís experience delight that such sentiments, and particularly Bahá'u'lláh's detailed and specific recommendations for global governance and related matters composed more than a century ago, find increasing relevance as the world evolves. They believe that Bahá'u'lláh not only foresaw these matters clearly, but also laid out a pattern of the 'Divine Plan' for centuries to come.

In doing this, He is not simply a seer with knowledge of the future, but rather He becomes, by virtue of being the Physician-Educator and the 'superhuman genius', the root cause of these wondrous developments.

Finally, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh:

"Of old it hath been revealed: 'Love of one's country is an element of the Faith of God.' The Tongue of Grandeur hath, however... proclaimed: 'It is not his to boast who loveth his country, but it is his who loveth the world.' Through the power released by these exalted words He hath lent a fresh impulse, and set a new direction, to the birds of men's hearts..." (GI pp 94-96)

