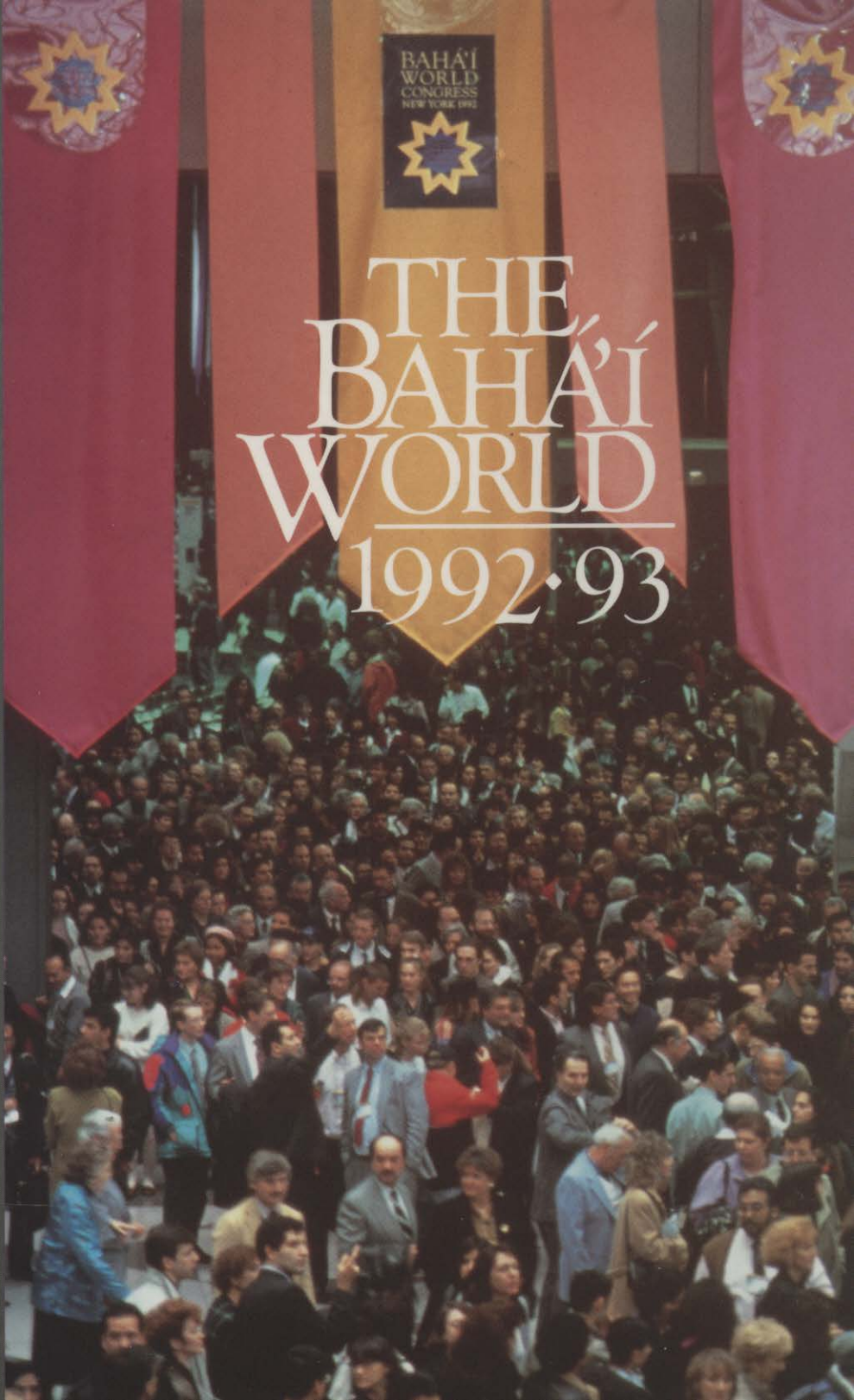

THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD

1992·93

THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD
1992–93

149 OF THE BAHÁ'Í ERA

THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD 1992·93

AN INTERNATIONAL RECORD

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HAIFA

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THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD 1992–93

PREFACE TO THE NEW SERIES

The appearance of this volume inaugurates a new series of *The Bahá'í World*, the publication that was conceived almost seventy years ago as the principal public record of the activities around the globe of the emerging Bahá'í community. The first volume, published in 1926, stated the objective of the series simply and modestly: "to disclose to others something of the significance of the world-wide movement called into being by the Message of Bahá'u'lláh." Altogether, nineteen volumes of the initial series have so far appeared, with a twentieth, covering the years 1987 to 1992, now in preparation. The redesign of the series is undertaken primarily in recognition of a growing public interest in the Bahá'í Faith and a desire to respond better to the needs of serious researchers.

Beginning as a yearbook but becoming a biennial with the second volume, *The Bahá'í World* was struggling by the end of World War II to maintain this regular schedule. Increasingly, the series tended to appear intermittently, as the vagaries of a period of unprecedented upheaval in the fortunes of mankind, and the severely limited resources of a small and heavily burdened body of believers made possible. While Volume X duly covered the years 1944 to 1946, Volume XI encompassed a four-year period. Since that time, the publication schedule has varied widely, from three years each (Volumes XVI and XVII) to nine years (the huge compendium of information in Volume XIII), covering the most dramatic period in the

history of the Faith's expansion.

In a certain sense, *The Bahá'í World* became a victim of the success of the global enterprise it serves. After devoting several decades to the gradual and careful construction of the foundations required for its work, the Bahá'í Faith was enjoying by 1963 an extraordinary expansion. The achievement in full of several teaching plans designed by Shoghi Effendi, culminating in the enormously ambitious Ten Year Crusade (1953–1963), had resulted in the establishment of Bahá'í communities in 259 countries and major territories, the election of 3,555 local Spiritual Assemblies, and a membership of approximately 408,000 adherents, representative of some 589 different ethnic and tribal backgrounds. Parallel with these impressive successes had been the community's progress in winning ever-wider recognition of its institutions and observances by civil authorities in many lands and in preparing the ground for what was to prove a highly productive collaboration with agencies of the United Nations. Educational and information initiatives proliferated rapidly at both the national and local levels throughout the world, as did the translation and publication of Bahá'í literature. All of this rapid growth and diversification had somehow to be captured in the pages of the Faith's public record of its achievements.

In the minds of those responsible for the publication of *The Bahá'í World*, this challenge was intensified by the painful recognition of the gap that had developed between the character that the series had assumed and the goal established for it in the guidelines set down by Shoghi Effendi. From the outset he had emphasized that, although Bahá'ís also derive great benefit from it, *The Bahá'í World* should measure its success especially in the eyes of the public for whom this work is mainly destined. Editorial policy, including decisions as to content and design, should be taken, he said, with a view primarily to meeting the needs of a growing body of serious researchers who would have access to the work in the collections of university and public libraries. In March 1938, Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf that, despite the heavy financial burdens the Faith was experiencing as the first of the interna-

tional teaching plans got underway, the mission of *The Bahá'í World* was so important that "no sacrifices can be considered too great for its publication."

A review of the contents of the first twenty volumes provides evidence of the extent to which, despite severely limited human and financial resources, *The Bahá'í World* endeavoured to realize Shoghi Effendi's vision. Documents prepared under the direction of the Guardian of the Faith and, in some cases, by his own pen provide authoritative statements of Bahá'í belief, as well as descriptions of particularly important historical events. After 1963, the major statements of the Universal House of Justice met this need. The series served, too, as a compendium of vital information on the growth of the Bahá'í community, reproduction of key documents, bibliographies, statistical data, and biographical sketches of prominent members of the Bahá'í community. A wealth of photographs lent an immediacy to the series' depiction of the accelerating emergence of a community that increasingly merited the description global. Essays on a great many subjects, most of them the work of contributing authors rather than the publishing committees, can today be read as a window on the community's evolving understanding of its Founder's message. As the Bahá'í Faith continues to grow and to attract ever greater interest, the detailed record contained in the pages of these early volumes will constitute the principal historical resource for the general student of the Faith.

A survey of the series makes it equally clear, however, why the contents were of interest chiefly to Bahá'í readers. Not surprisingly, given the only desultory attention paid to their Faith by scholars and the relatively narrow range of the Bahá'í topics that then concerned journalists, the writers and editors of *The Bahá'í World* addressed themselves increasingly to an audience on whose serious interest they could count. This tendency came to determine not only much of the content, but also the style in which it was presented. It is particularly apparent in the often exhaustive treatment of the teaching and other development activities of local and national communities. These held a lively interest for the members of still small Bahá'í

communities, who could find in the pages of *The Bahá'í World* insights and perspectives on the significance of the services they had personally rendered to a rapidly expanding global movement, but much of the information will have a diminished importance in the eyes of general readers. Even so, the loving attention lavished on the activities of those whom Shoghi Effendi had appointed as "Hands of the Cause of God" will likely gain in value, as with the passing of Shoghi Effendi no future Hands of the Cause can be appointed. Only future generations will be able adequately to appreciate, in the context of a new understanding of the nature of man and society, the unique role that these extraordinary figures played in the emergence of a world community.

Today, however, there are signs everywhere of a developing public interest in the Bahá'í community and the body of teachings and concepts that animate it. On 28 May 1992, the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies paid an extraordinary tribute to Bahá'u'lláh, on the centenary of His ascension. The regular sessions of the legislature were suspended and spokesmen for all twelve of the major parliamentary groupings gave moving appreciations of the loftiness of Bahá'u'lláh's vision and of the ideals of world unity and social justice that characterize those who follow Him. This dramatic and largely unsolicited public recognition of the Founder of the Faith came immediately on the heels of the publication by *Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year* (1992) of statistics showing that the Bahá'í Faith now ranks second only to Christianity among the religions of the world, in the number of countries and significant territories where its communities are established.

While there are many factors that account for the extraordinary changes that events of this kind acknowledge, three seem particularly notable. Over the past decade Bahá'í communities around the world have struggled manfully and with the sustained support of sympathetic voices in the United Nations, many governments, and the world's media to defend the members of their Faith threatened with annihilation in the land of Bahá'u'lláh's birth. The result has been to bring both the Faith's attractive message and the admirable record of its

followers to the attention of many millions of people around the globe. Throughout this period, the expanding efforts of these same communities to translate Bahá'u'lláh's message into practical programs of social and economic development and of environmental responsibility have endowed the Faith with appealing features of yet another kind, that have aroused broad interest at many levels. A third influence, one that has succeeded in translating this growing public awareness into solid growth, was the cumulative effect of a series of ambitious teaching plans launched by the Universal House of Justice, on the basis of the model already established by Shoghi Effendi. Energetically pursued by the rank and file of believers everywhere, who see the message of Bahá'u'lláh as the sole means by which humanity can deliver itself from a moral catastrophe, the organized teaching efforts of the Bahá'í community have today made the Faith one of the world's fastest growing religions.

By the mid-1980s, the increase in public awareness had reached the point where the Universal House of Justice decided it was necessary to create a specialized agency within the system of offices serving the Bahá'í International Community, that could coordinate public information activities. Its functions would include ensuring that essential materials were made readily accessible in a form required by the serious researcher. The Office of Public Information came into existence in April 1985. By 1991 the new agency was in a position to add responsibility for the publication of *The Bahá'í World* to its functions, and this decision was taken by the House of Justice in February of that year. It was determined that the current series would end with Volumes XIX and XX, then in preparation and covering, respectively, the two periods 1983–1986, 1986–1992. The new series would begin with the second Bahá'í Holy Year, 1992–1993.

This happy conjunction of circumstances and long-term planning makes it possible to bring the *The Bahá'í World* volumes a stage closer to the goals set for them by Shoghi Effendi. The new series will appear annually, each volume covering a twelve-month period beginning with Riḍván, the anniversary of

Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His mission in April 1863. As the present volume illustrates, the series will continue to provide the interested researcher with the full text of major statements by the Head of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice, and articles on particularly important historical developments. Although treated briefly and with a minimum of editorial comment, there will also continue to be a chronology providing descriptions of significant Bahá'í events during the year, a bibliography of current Bahá'í publications, biographical sketches of outstanding believers who died during the twelve months under review, and up-to-date statistics of the community's expansion and consolidation. Major sections of each yearbook will now be devoted to in-depth examination of subjects on which the Bahá'í community has been particularly focusing its energies. As before, every effort is being made to include a representative selection of photographs, supplemented by maps, charts, and whatever other graphic material may be considered useful.

The concluding three survey articles will provide an overview of the Faith for general readers who have only a superficial familiarity with it. The first of these, written by Shoghi Effendi in 1947, as a statement prepared for the United Nations Special Palestine Council, contributes an invaluable and authoritative summary of the beliefs, history, and institutional system of the religion founded by Bahá'u'lláh.

In embarking on this new stage in the development of *The Bahá'í World*, the editors have before them the high standard contained in words of appreciation addressed by Shoghi Effendi to their predecessors, who had successfully launched the series in the 1920s, undeterred by the painfully limited resources then available to them: "I confidently and emphatically recommend it to every thoughtful and eager follower of the Faith, whether in the East or in the West, whose desire is to place in the hands of the critical and intelligent ... a work that can truly witness to the high purpose, the moving history, the enduring achievements, the resistless march and infinite prospects of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh."[1]

1. *The Bahá'í World*, vol. III, 1928–1930 (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930), xiv.

INTRODUCTION

Founded a century and a half ago, the Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions. It is based on the claim of Bahá'u'lláh to be the Messenger of God to the age of humanity's maturity, an advent anticipated in all of the scriptural traditions of humanity's past.

The driving force behind the civilizing of human nature, Bahá'u'lláh asserts, has been the successive interventions of the Divine in history. It has been through this influence that the innate moral and spiritual faculties of humanity have been gradually developed and the advancement of civilization made possible. Associated with the missions of such transcendent figures as Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Muḥammad, the phenomenon is an ever-recurring one; it is without beginning or end because it is fundamental to the evolutionary order itself.

The essential message of Bahá'u'lláh is that of unity. Humanity, He declares, has collectively come of age in this day, and the distinguishing feature of this stage of its social evolution is that the entire human race is being drawn into the recognition of its own oneness and of the earth as a common homeland.

The overriding challenge facing the peoples of the world, therefore, Bahá'u'lláh says, is to subordinate lesser identities and loyalties to the task of building a unified global society based on principles of social justice and cultivating the spiritual nature of humankind. The capacity

for such a response has been created in all people through the operation of the Will of God: "This is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things."[1] The purpose of the Divine Revelation of which Bahá'u'lláh is the Spokesman is to awaken and train this universal capacity.

In just over one hundred years, the Faith that Bahá'u'lláh founded has grown from an obscure movement in the Middle East to its present status as an independent world religion. Embracing people from more than 2100 ethnic, racial, and tribal groups, and maintaining its cohesiveness in doing so, it represents what is probably the most diverse organized body of people on the planet today. The geographical dimensions of this growth are equally impressive: both the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982) and the *Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year* (1992) show the Bahá'í Faith as the second most widespread of the world's religions, after only Christianity.

The unity of belief and organization that characterizes His Faith provides striking evidence of the capacity of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to create the moral and spiritual conditions for the new kind of human society He envisions. Despite the wide ethnic and cultural diversity of its adherents, the Faith has successfully overcome the perennial impulse of all forms of human association to break eventually into sects and factions. This seems particularly significant when taken in the context of the challenging Bahá'í moral code for the individual life and the fact that the community pursues a social program that addresses virtually every important trend in the world today.

The Bahá'í World series was created in 1925 by Shoghi Effendi, the appointed Guardian of Bahá'u'lláh's mission, to serve as the public record of the Bahá'í community's achievements. As the Preface of this book explains, the series now enters a new stage in its development, its principal aim being to provide a window on Bahá'í concepts, concerns, and

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 6.

activities that will be particularly useful and accessible to the interested general reader. With this purpose in mind, the editions will appear annually. As this first volume illustrates, the series will continue to provide the kind of basic documentation that is already familiar to the readers of the 1926–1992 series. Because they constitute the authoritative administrative guidance upon which the community has pursued its goals, four major statements issued during the year by the Head of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice, are reproduced here in full. By happy circumstance this first volume in the new series coincides with the period of the second Bahá'í Holy Year, April 1992 to April 1993. Several important pieces have special relation to this commemoration of the centenary of both Bahá'u'lláh's ascension and the inauguration of the Covenant that provides the authority for the system of institutions He established. The article entitled "Bahá'u'lláh," for example, was produced to serve as a major resource piece for the commemorative activities, and has been translated into some 102 languages. Included, as well, is a brief survey of the major international events of the commemorative period.

Although not a feature of the Holy Year program, the release this April of the first authorized English language translation of Bahá'u'lláh's Book of Laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, has intimate connections with the historical events being remembered. One of the articles, "The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Its Place in Bahá'í Literature," seeks to place this most important of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings in the broader context of His mission.

A number of items in the book are particularly designed to give the general reader easy access to basic current information. The statistical summary inaugurated here, for example, will make it possible for students of the Faith to track the growth of the Bahá'í international community in such areas as membership, the numbers of elected governing bodies at both national and local levels, the production of Bahá'í literature, and the establishment of development agencies of various kinds. Given the growth of the community, *The Bahá'í World* volumes will no longer include the lengthy obituaries that were a cherished feature of the first series, but a section is devoted

to brief sketches of prominent Bahá'ís who have died during the year under review. A biographical publication will also be produced as a supplement to the series.

While it is not possible to report fully on the multifarious activities of the thousands of Bahá'í communities around the world, a chronology provides a representative sampling of the year's highlights, month by month. Similarly, a bibliographical article surveys the year's principal publications and will serve as a cross-section of the ongoing discussion of ideas that is so important a feature of Bahá'í community life. One long-awaited publishing event is reviewed in greater detail: the appearance of an authoritative edition of the documentation for the crucial period 1957–1963, between the death of the Faith's Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, and the successful election of the Universal House of Justice. Entitled *The Ministry of the Custodians, 1957–1963*, this compilation with an introduction by Shoghi Effendi's widow and close collaborator, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, fills a major gap in the Faith's detailed historical record.

An index of the development of the Bahá'í Faith and particularly of its growing interaction with the society around it is the interest being shown by the mass media. As in the past, therefore, *The Bahá'í World* will continue to include a brief section surveying press attention during the period under review. William Collins's article "The Bahá'í Faith in the Eyes of the World: What the Print Media Report About the Bahá'í Faith" moves this effort onto a new level, however, through its careful analysis of the Bahá'í themes that are receiving media attention and a reflection on the trends observed. Mr. Collins believes that the events of the second Bahá'í Holy Year mark "a turning point in the public information activities of the Bahá'í community, and in the media reception of stories about its adherents."

Indeed, readers will find all the essays in the new series considerably more focused than has hitherto been the case. Because of its rapid growth and greater involvement in the life of society, and as conditions in the world permit, the Bahá'í community has been able increasingly to direct attention and energy to those issues of broad public concern to which it

attaches a particularly high priority. This past year, for example, the Rio summit offered the community a unique platform for the presentation of its strongly-held views on the subject of sustainable development. A particularly thought-provoking exploration of some of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on the subject will be found in Robert White's article "Spiritual Foundations for an Ecologically Sustainable Society" (page 195). "The work of Bahá'u'lláh," Mr. White believes, "offers a vision of wholeness in our relationship to Nature and of spiritual purpose in the whole evolution of life. Its effect is to empower individuals and communities to become agents of transformation in developing an ecologically sustainable global civilization."

At the practical level of development, the rapid growth of Bahá'í communities, in the Third World especially, has given scope for a wide range of experiments in the application of Bahá'í principles to social and economic life. Holly Hanson's "An Overview of Bahá'í Social and Economic Development" gives a valuable survey of these efforts, emphasizing that "as important, or more important than the immediate concrete results of any development undertaking, is that people are drawn together, that they develop the ability to hear all of the voices in a community, and that they begin to learn the process of collective action."

In recent years a good deal of the current public interest in the Bahá'í Faith has arisen from the bitter campaign of persecution launched against it by ruling circles in the Islamic Republic of Iran and from the energetic efforts of Bahá'í communities in the rest of the world to defend the victims. Douglas Martin's article "The Case of the Bahá'í Minority in Iran," which looks at the second of these two aspects of the fourteen-year struggle, makes the provocative point that "the Bahá'í case" constitutes, in effect, compelling proof of the capacity of the United Nations human rights system to defend religious and other minorities.

In building a global community marked by a distinctive pattern of life and guided by a unified network of local, national and international governing councils, the followers of

Bahá'u'lláh have created an encouraging model for cooperation and social action. The emergence of such a model offers persuasive evidence that humanity, in all its diversity, can eventually learn to live and work as a single people in a global homeland. *The Bahá'í World* volumes will seek to provide the serious student and the general enquirer alike with a reliable overview of this great enterprise.

The following four messages were sent by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world during the 1992–1993 Bahá'í Holy Year.

MESSAGES FROM THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

RIDVÁN 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

At this Riḍván season, with its inherent splendors and its initiation of unusual, eventful days, our hearts throb in wonderment, we kneel in homage to the King of Glory by Whose grace we have arrived at an auspicious juncture in the history of His Cause.

From the peak of triumph of the Six Year Plan now ended, we come to the threshold of the Holy Year, now begun, awestruck at the very thought of the unique significances associated with the commemoration of that sanctified occasion one hundred years ago when Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One of all ages, took His leave of this earthly life. The Sun of Truth, however, was to set only to shine everlastingly from the "Kingdom of fadeless glory," thenceforward to shed the radiance of its regenerative power on the entire world. Gone from this plane was He Who is the Author of a Revelation of "inconceivable greatness" in which "all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation"; the Originator of a new Universal Cycle "that must extend over a period of at least five hundred thousand years"; the

Founder of a World Order, a "System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed." Moreover, He was the Dawning Point of the Day of God, the "Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men." Such are the superlative realities upon which our contemplations are focused during this special anniversary occurring at this crucial moment in the affairs of humankind.

So imbued are we by the sacred remembrances evoked by this Holy Year, that we can do no less than invite you all to take pause to enter into this period of reflection, this time of reconsecration, this stage of preparation for tasks yet to be done, heights yet to be attained, splendors yet to be unveiled. For if we look back at one hundred years of an unexampled history of unremitting progress, we also look forward to many centuries of unfolding fulfillment of divine purpose—fulfillment, which as experience has shown, is incrementally realized through the systematic advances of Plans and the wondrous leaps and thrusts of epochs.

Indeed, the immediate portal to this propitious Holy Year is the vista of new horizons opened by the triumph of the Six Year Plan, which coincided with the initial phase of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age of our Faith. Overall it is not so much a triumph in numerical achievements, though in many places and at particular moments the scope of expansion was extraordinary. It is a triumph that has been manifested in a new variety of victories, in new beginnings, fresh initiatives and mature institutional developments, such as to stamp the seal of success on the Plan's seven major objectives. Impossible as it is to enumerate in these few pages the results of the Plan, the main aspects of the developments in this remarkably dynamic period deserve, nonetheless, to be highlighted. The Bahá'í community changed markedly over the last six years. The major indicators are, no doubt, discernible to the friends everywhere and may be summed up thus:

One: The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is represented in every country on earth. The sudden change in the political climate, no doubt by intervention of God's Major Plan, opened vast regions to the penetration of the divine teachings, primarily in

the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries. The opportunities created by this change made possible the settlement of Knights of Bahá'u'lláh in the last virgin territories that remained from Shoghi Effendi's Ten Year World Crusade. They also impelled the launching at Riḍván 1990 of the subsidiary Two Year Plan for those regions. This supplementary Plan was a spectacular success, not only in terms of expansion in the many countries involved, but also in the diversity of the strata represented by the new believers in these countries, in the volume and variety of Bahá'í literature published and in the array of Bahá'í institutions established during that short time. The Bahá'í world was highly stimulated by these developments, and a number of countries elsewhere recorded significant successes in the teaching work. Figures already available to the World Centre indicate that more than one and a half million souls entered the Cause during the Six Year Plan. Of particular interest was the three-year special teaching project in Guyana which resulted in an increase of the size of the Bahá'í community to some six percent of the country's population.

Two: The proclamation of the Faith throughout the world attained an entirely new stage. The campaign of proclamation launched in 1967 through the inspiration of the centennial anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's Proclamation to the kings and rulers of mankind, and which gathered added momentum in 1979 with the surge of the persecution of the Iranian Bahá'í community, now covered a greatly expanded range with the distribution of *The Promise of World Peace.* Kings, queens, presidents, prime ministers, legislators, jurists, academics, diverse institutions and organizations became aware of Bahá'u'lláh's Message. The creative energies by which communities everywhere were exercised in broadcasting the Cause became one of the driving forces of the Plan and in no small way stimulated the interest of organizations, leaders of thought and the media in the solutions which the Faith has to offer to a strangely disordered world. Inspired by the impact of the measures they adopted for proclamation of the Faith, and also by that of their continuing efforts to defend the sorely persecuted Iranian Bahá'í community, National and Local Spiritual Assemblies

displayed and continue to display a striking audacity and originality in dealing with the public. This is evident in their innumerable contacts with officials at all levels of government, in their association with a widening spectrum of organizations, and in the increasing facility of their contacts with the media.

Three: The dedication in December 1986 of the Mother Temple of the Indian Subcontinent to public worship introduced a new force to the teaching and proclamation activities of the Faith. As an edifice of rare beauty and excellence, the "Lotus Temple" has won wide acclaim, while at the same time exerting an extraordinary appeal to great numbers of visitors. Its fame as an architectural wonder spread with speed as did its spiritual influence. It is no exaggeration to say that of all the Bahá'í Houses of Worship, this Temple is today the single most effective silent teacher of the Faith, annually attracting more visitors, at the average rate of 20,000 daily, than all the other Bahá'í Temples combined. Among its visitors from many lands are some of the most prominent persons in the world. A source of great interest to the media, the Temple has been featured in television programs, even in Russia and China. The influence of its success in these respects has contributed immeasurably to the widespread public awareness of the Faith.

Four: The further emergence of the Faith from obscurity is reflected in distinctive ways. In learned circles, in reference works and in the media, the Faith is increasingly being referred to as a "principal" or "major" world religion. Media coverage of the Faith's activities has increased voluminously by the intensified efforts of the friends in proclamation activities, but more important is the fact that the media are showing an independent interest in the Bahá'í community and are initiating contacts with it in various parts of the world. The exposure of influential segments of the public to Bahá'í ideas in such areas as peace, the environment, status of women, education and literacy, has induced a response which increasingly calls upon the Bahá'ís to participate with others in a range of projects associated with governments or with non-governmental organizations.

Moreover, such exposure is creating in the public mind the

realization that the Faith has answers to current problems and thus the expectation that the Bahá'í community should take a more active part in public affairs. The notable success of the activities of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of the Environment, established during the Plan, amply illustrates the nature of these developments. Furthermore, the formal relationship which the Bahá'í International Community established with the Conservation and Religion Network of the World Wide Fund for Nature and with the World Conference on Religion and Peace, in conjunction with the numerous such relationships established by National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in their respective jurisdictions, reflects a trend in the Faith's emergence as an entity to be reckoned with. Altogether, the drive of the ramified proclamation campaign has produced a public resonance about the Faith, which can be said to be known to the most significant public institutions and prominent persons on earth.

Five: Bahá'í projects of social and economic development have greatly multiplied and brought much credit to the community in the examples of the power of group initiative and voluntary consultative action that have been set in numerous places. Activities in this respect involved more than one thousand projects in the areas of education, agriculture, health, literacy, the environment and improvement of the status of women. In a number of instances the projects benefited from collaboration with or assistance from governments and international non-governmental organizations, as, for example, the projects for the improvement of the status of women undertaken by five National Spiritual Assemblies with the financial assistance of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and those projects in other fields receiving assistance from the Canadian, Indian, German and Norwegian governments. Some projects have been so distinguished in their achievements as to be given public notice through the citations and awards of governments and international non-governmental agencies.

Six: Youth activities took on a special character shaped by the idea of a youth year of service. The involvement of the

youth in the Six Year Plan as short-term pioneers, travelling teachers and projecteers had a profound effect on the teaching work overall and in bolstering the efforts at social and economic development attempted by growing numbers of national and local communities. They had much to do with the many victories in the former communist countries. Their work in social and economic development projects attracted, in some cases, the attention of governments and development organizations. Creation of the European Bahá'í Youth Council galvanized the activities of the youth which powerfully reinforced the teaching thrust on that continent during the final years of the Plan. A significant feature of the youth's activities has been their involvement, as short-term volunteers from all parts of the planet, in the work of the World Centre where their services have been of inestimable value.

Seven: The advances in the consolidation of the Bahá'í administrative system are evident from the marked improvement in the internal development and collaborative efforts of its two arms. The cherished and intrepid Hands of the Cause of God, true to the allegiance they bear to their beloved Guardian, persevere in their unique services, astonishing the community with their resilient powers. The growth in confidence and strength of the Boards of Counsellors and their auxiliaries, backed by a reinforced and vigorous International Teaching Centre, assured to the Spiritual Assemblies, whom they are charged to stimulate and advise, a buttressing indispensable to the welfare of the entire system; while the extension of the span of activities of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, themselves charged with guiding the destinies of their communities, significantly broadened the base of that system. Collaterally, the work of these institutions has facilitated and boosted the evolution of the Administrative Order. Even more: they have demonstrated a creative energy that bodes well for their continued maturation.

Eight: The great building projects on the Mountain of God, anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of Carmel, inaugurated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá with the construction of the Tomb of the Báb and carried forward in the plans of Shoghi Effendi, entered a

new stage. Work commenced in May 1990 on reinforcing and extending the main terrace of the Shrine of the Báb as the initial step towards realizing the architectural concept for fulfilling 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision of the Terraces that will extend from the foot to the ridge of the mountain. By September of the next year, ground was broken for the construction of the Centre for the Study of the Texts and for the Extension tō the International Archives Building, to be followed by the construction of other edifices on the Arc, namely: the buildings for the International Teaching Centre and, in due course, the International Bahá'í Library.

All these developments have made it evident that the accumulated potential for further progress of the Bahá'í community is incalculable. The changed situation within and among nations and the many problems afflicting society amplify this potential. The impression produced by such change is of the near approach of the Lesser Peace. But there has been a simultaneous recrudescence of countervailing forces. With the fresh tide of political freedom resulting from the collapse of the strongholds of communism has come an explosion of nationalism. The concomitant rise of racism in many regions has become a matter of serious global concern. These are compounded by an upsurge in religious fundamentalism which is poisoning the wells of tolerance. Terrorism is rife. Widespread uncertainty about the condition of the economy indicates a deep disorder in the management of the material affairs of the planet, a condition which can only exacerbate the sense of frustration and futility affecting the political realm. The worsening state of the environment and of the health of huge populations is a source of alarm. And yet an element of this change is the amazing advances in communications technology making possible the rapid transmission of information and ideas from one part of the world to the other. It is against such "simultaneous processes of rise and fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other," that a myriad new opportunities for the next stage in the unfoldment of the beloved Master's Divine Plan present themselves.

The burgeoning influence of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation seemed, with the imminence of the Holy Year, to have assumed the character of an onrushing wind blowing through the archaic structures of the old order, felling mighty pillars and clearing the ground for new conceptions of social organization. The call for unity, for a new world order, is audible from many directions. The change in world society is characterized by a phenomenal speed. A feature of this change is a suddenness, or precipitateness, which appears to be the consequence of some mysterious, rampant force. The positive aspects of this change reveal an unaccustomed openness to global concepts, movement towards international and regional collaboration, an inclination of warring parties to opt for peaceful solutions, a search for spiritual values. Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening wind as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying and amplifying our perspectives as to the purpose of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh in the wake of humanity's suffering and turmoil.

The situation in the world, while presenting us with an acute challenge of the utmost urgency, calls to mind the encouraging global vision of Shoghi Effendi for the prospects of the Administrative Order during the second century of the Bahá'í Era, whose midpoint we are rapidly approaching. In 1946, he wrote: "The second century is destined to witness a tremendous deployment and a notable consolidation of the forces working towards the world-wide development of that Order, as well as the first stirrings of that World Order, of which the present Administrative System is at once the precursor, the nucleus and pattern—an Order which, as it slowly crystallizes and radiates its benign influence over the entire planet, will proclaim at once the coming of age of the whole human race, as well as the maturity of the Faith itself, the progenitor of that Order."

Attention to the special occasions of the Holy Year will surely equip us to undertake the urgent tasks of the next stage in the evolution of the Divine Plan. This commemorative period provides a befitting demarcation between the glories and

triumphs of the last one hundred years and the lustrous prizes yet to be garnered. At the outset, we welcome with joyous and grateful hearts the further expansion and consolidation of the Administrative Order which will accrue from the formation this Riḍván of twelve National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies. How striking it is that the number of these Assemblies is the same as the total number of National Spiritual Assemblies which existed at the launching of the Ten Year World Crusade in 1953! This is gratifying evidence of the rapidity of the expansion of the Administrative Order in less than forty years. With these new Assemblies, and making allowance for the absorption of Sikkim into India and the disruption of the Bahá'í Administration by the unsettled situation in Liberia, the number of National Spiritual Assemblies which will take part in the seventh International Bahá'í Convention next Riḍván will reach 165.

We are pleased to announce that the following Hands of the Cause of God will attend, as our representatives, six of the founding Conventions. Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum will attend the Conventions of Bulgaria and of Poland; Mr. 'Alí-Akbar Furútan will attend those of the Baltic States and of Hungary; and Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá will attend those of Greenland and of the Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. At the remaining Conventions our representatives will be Counsellors: Mr. George Allen, the Congo Republic; Dr. Farzam Arbab, Central Asia; Mr. Rolf von Czékus, Angola; Mrs. Parvin Djoneidi, Niger; Mr. Hartmut Grossmann, Albania; and Mr. Mas'úd Khamsí, Azerbaijan.

Only a few weeks from now, in the sacred precincts of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, a gathering of solemn purpose will take place to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the Ascension of the Desire of the Nations. The scroll bearing the Roll of Honor of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh will, on the previous morning, 28 May, have been deposited, as indicated by our beloved Guardian, at the entrance door of the inner Sanctuary of the Most Holy Shrine, there to remain a symbol of the historic victory that rewarded the unswerving determination of the lovers of the Blessed Beauty who, in response to the call of the

mighty Ten Year Crusade, planted the banner of His Faith in virgin territories throughout the world.

Subsequently, in November, at the second Bahá'í World Congress, the hosts of Bahá will gather in New York in their thousands to register, in a highly symbolic gesture on behalf of their brethren throughout the world, their regard for the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh bequeathed, and to evoke the memory of Him Who was appointed its Centre and Who exalted that metropolis by bestowing upon it the designation "City of the Covenant." There they will also demonstrate the power of the unity that the Covenant is meant to ensure to all the peoples of the world. It will be a moment of capital importance to the Bahá'í community in the gaze of the world at large.

These two international events are pivotal to the gatherings of similar intent in which the friends in every corner of the world will take part. The spiritual character and dignified manner of their participation will surely draw down confirmations from on high and profoundly influence the constructive forces at work throughout the earth.

Another source of blessings to which we have long directed our hopes will also become manifest. Bahá'u'lláh has written: "While in prison We have revealed a Book which We have entitled 'The Most Holy Book'. We have enacted laws therein and adorned it with the commandments of thy Lord, Who exerciseth authority over all that are in the heavens and on the earth." Hence, it is with full cognizance of its world-shaking significance that we inform you of the forthcoming publication during the course of this year of the annotated English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Charter of the future world civilization which Bahá'u'lláh revealed in the House of 'Údí Khammár in Acre some six score years ago.

And now, amid the eager anticipations occasioned by the two major commemorative events and by the imminent publication of the Mother Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh takes effect as part of the constant practice of the members of our entire world community. May the promised divine bounties associated with the activation of this holy law be showered upon the beloved of the Lord in every land.

A year charged with happenings of such sacred import is bound to yield consequences of unimaginable potency. The immediate outcome is, however, impossible to predict, nor can it be fruitfully speculated about. Rather should we direct our thoughts to the meaning of the solemn occasions which this year is set apart to memorialize. For the purpose of the Holy Year is not fulfilled by public memorials alone, befitting as they will be. Essential to its purpose is the opportunity it offers for inner reflection on the part of every Bahá'í individual. Indeed, this is a special time for a rendezvous of the soul with the Source of its light and guidance, a time to turn to Bahá'u'lláh, to seek to obtain a deeper appreciation of His purpose, to renew allegiance to Him. This is a time of retreat to one's innermost being, to the dwelling-place of the Spirit of Bahá, that interior to which He summons us when He says: "Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting." This is a time for recommitment to the Covenant, for rededication to duty, for revitalizing the energy for teaching, the "most meritorious of all deeds."

As the foremost aid to your reflections and actions, you will doubtless draw upon the insight and inspiration of such of His words as these: "I am the Sun of Wisdom and the Ocean of Knowledge. I cheer the faint and revive the dead. I am the guiding Light that illumineth the way." "By My Life! Not of Mine own volition have I revealed Myself, but God, of His own choosing, hath manifested Me." "I have come in the shadows of the clouds of glory, and am invested by God with invincible sovereignty." "He that hath Me not is bereft of all things. Turn ye away from all that is on earth and seek none else but Me." "Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant." "The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness."

Whatever our private reflections or response to duty may lead us to do, of one thing we must be sure: that the Name of Him Who is the Lifegiver of the World becomes known throughout the earth among high and low alike. Considering that it is already a whole century since the Blessed Beauty ascended, and given the crushing weight of the ills burdening the peoples of the world, and seeing that a veritable cry of anguish is issuing more loudly from the hearts of those who long for some hope of relief, we, His avowed servants, can neither falter nor fail in this primary and urgent duty. For He, Bahá'u'lláh, is the Supreme Manifestation, the Unifier and Redeemer of all mankind, the Fountainhead of Justice, the immortal Beloved; for, according to His own unerring proclamation, "He Who is the Unconditioned is come, in the clouds of light, that He may quicken all created things with the breezes of His Name, the Most Merciful, and unify the world, and gather all men around this Table which hath been sent down from heaven." Let us bear His Name with dignity to those who must hear It, offer It as a treasure to those who must receive It, speak It with love to those who must embrace It.

How laudable it would be if, imbued by this desire to blazon abroad His Name, and as a demonstration of our special love for the Abhá Beauty, we could each of us mount a personal campaign of teaching, such that the collective force and results of it throughout the world would bring to a resounding conclusion the sacred exercises of this Holy Year and set the stage for the launching of the impending Three Year Plan at Riḍván 1993!

Finally, it is highly fitting at this time to recall Bahá'u'lláh's expression in the Most Holy Book of His will for us with regard to the nature of our reactions to His passing: "Be not dismayed, O peoples of the world," He wrote, "when the day-star of My beauty is set, and the heaven of My tabernacle is concealed from your eyes. Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven

shall be unable to defeat his purpose."

Beloved friends, we shall not forget to supplicate at the Holy Threshold that from His retreat of deathless splendor the Blessed Beauty may fill the souls of each and all of you with the revivifying breath of His celestial power.

ON THE OCCASION OF THE CENTENARY COMMEMORATION AT BAHJÍ OF THE ASCENSION OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

A TRIBUTE BY THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

With soul-stirring emotion we gather in the hallowed environs of His resting place to honor the memory of the Supreme Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh, on the solemn, historic occasion of the centenary of His ascension.

We lift our voices at the prompting of our hearts' desire to pay tribute to a life infinitely beyond compare. But how shall we realize such a wish when it is evident that no mind can attain the comprehension which would make possible the vocabulary worthy of His celestial court? In very truth, our tongues falter in their impotence to describe, let alone extol, the prodigies of a prophetic career which was framed in superlatives. For here at Bahjí, one hundred years ago, was drawn the last breath on earth of the world's greatest Luminary, Founder of the Dispensation marking the culmination of the six-thousand-year-old Adamic Cycle, and Inaugurator of the five-thousand-century Bahá'í Cycle. He, the Most Great Manifestation, appeared in the Most Great Name and endured the greatest suffering in authoring the Most Great Revelation, which is the wellspring of the Most Great Peace. In our attempt to appreciate these matchless bounties, we recite the gem-like names of the Adored One, picked out as pearls from the veritable ocean of His Revelation, bestrewing them throughout our testimonial that they may lend an acceptable gleam to our expression of His glory and majesty.

King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Supreme Mediator, Most

Ancient Beauty: He is the Well-Beloved of all worlds. We hail Him as the long-awaited Promised One, the Object of the adoration of the world. And we exclaim: "Hallowed be the Lord in Whose hand is the source of dominion!"

How grievously Bahá'u'lláh suffered to regenerate the world! Wrongly accused, imprisoned, beaten, chained, banished from country to country, betrayed, poisoned, stripped of material possessions, and "at every moment tormented with a fresh torment": such was the cruel reception that greeted the Everlasting Father, Him Who is the Possessor of all Names and Attributes. For two score years, until the end of His earthly days, He remained a prisoner and exile—persecuted unceasingly by the rulers of Persia and the Ottoman Empire, opposed relentlessly by a vicious and scheming clergy, neglected abjectly by other sovereigns to whom He addressed potent letters imparting to them that which, in His truth-bearing words, "is the cause of the well-being, the unity, the harmony, and the reconstruction of the world, and of the tranquillity of the nations." "My grief," He once lamented, "exceedeth all the woes to which Jacob gave vent, and all the afflictions of Job are but a part of My sorrows."

The voice halts for shame from continuing so deplorable a recitation, the heart is torn by mere thought of the Divine Target of such grief—grief no ordinary mortal could endure. But lest we give way to feelings of gloom and distress, we take recourse in the tranquil calm He induces with such meaningful words as these: "We have borne it all with the utmost willingness and resignation, so that the souls of men may be edified, and the Word of God be exalted." Thus, the Wronged One, patient beyond measure, preserved a majestic composure, revealing His true Self as the Merciful, the Loving, the Incomparable Friend. Concentrating His energies on the pivotal purpose of His Revelation, He transmuted His tribulations into instruments of redemption and summoned all peoples to the banner of unity.

No worldly power could thwart the purpose of the Most Exalted Pen. Through the copiousness of His writings, He poured upon the planet the healing waters of the Word of God

renewed. Descending upon Him like a spring rain, His Revelation comprises some one hundred volumes—"volumes replete with unnumbered exhortations, revolutionizing principles, world-shaping laws and ordinances, dire warnings and portentous prophecies, with soul-uplifting prayers and meditations, illuminating commentaries and interpretations, impassioned discourses and homilies, all interspersed with either addresses or references to kings, to emperors and to ministers, of both the East and the West, to ecclesiastics of divers denominations, and to leaders in the intellectual, political, literary, mystical, commercial and humanitarian spheres of human activity." Foremost among His Books is His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the charter of the future world civilization in which He has announced the Laws of God for this age. Our hearts thrill to the prospect that during the course of this centennial year, the annotated English translation of this Mother Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is to be published. We acknowledge with astonished joy the prolific legacy of this divine outpouring. And we exclaim: "Praised be Thou, Who art the Desire of the world, and thanks be to Thee, O Well-Beloved of the hearts of such as are devoted to Thee!"

Today, we bear witness to the further abundance of a peerless heritage. With the setting of the Sun of Bahá, the Moon of His Covenant rose in reflected glory, lifting the darkness of a night of despair, and lighting the path to the unity of all humankind. In the fullness of its radiance stands the magnetic Figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the beloved Son Whom Bahá-'u'lláh designated as the Interpreter of His Word and Executive of His authority, and Whom He appointed the Centre of His Covenant, an office without parallel in all religious history.

We acknowledge the mysterious power of His wisdom, the illuminating potency of His words, the immortal example and unific character of His deeds. By His untiring exertions the fame of the infant Cause was spread abroad, the design of its Administrative Order was completed, the World Centre of the Faith emerged into clear visibility, and the splendors of the Mountain of God, as alluded to in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Carmel, began to be manifested. With profound gratitude for

such evident blessings we reaffirm our loyalty to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. And we exclaim: "Glorified be the All-Merciful, the Lord of Grace abounding!"

As a result of the phenomenal effects of His Covenant, a world community has been raised up on an "unassailable foundation." The entire system of the Administrative Order originated by Bahá'u'lláh in His Most Holy Book has been erected. A vigorous network of local, national, continental and international institutions functions in exemplary harmony throughout the planet. Vitalized and nurtured by His stupendous Revelation, watered by the precious blood of countless martyrs, and tended by the loving care of unnumbered, devoted servants, the Tree of the Cause has, in these hundred years, grown mightily, has put forth its far-stretching branches and borne its first and plentiful fruit.

Bahá'u'lláh found the world in a "strange sleep." But what a disturbance His coming has unloosed! The peoples of the earth had been separated, many parts of the human race socially and spiritually isolated. But the world of humanity today bears little resemblance to that which Bahá'u'lláh left a century ago. Unbeknownst to the great majority, His influence permeates all living beings. Indeed, no domain of life remains unaffected. In the burgeoning energy, the magnified perspectives, the heightened global consciousness; in the social and political turbulence, the fall of kingdoms, the emancipation of nations, the intermixture of cultures, the clamor for development; in the agitation over the extremes of wealth and poverty, the acute concern over the abuse of the environment, the leap of consciousness regarding the rights of women; in the growing tendency towards ecumenism, the increasing call for a new world order; in the astounding advances in the realms of science, technology, literature and the arts—in all this tumult, with its paradoxical manifestations of chaos and order, integration and disintegration, are the signs of His power as World Reformer, the proof of His claim as Divine Physician, the truth of His Word as the All-Knowing Counsellor.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote voluminously about the purpose of this mysterious force and its transformative effects, but the essence

can be drawn from these few perspicuous words: "Through the movement of Our Pen of Glory We have, at the bidding of the Omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this worldwide regeneration." And again: "A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive." And yet again: "He Who is the Unconditioned is come, in the clouds of light, that He may quicken all created things with the breezes of His Name, the Most Merciful, and unify the world, and gather all men around this Table which hath been sent down from heaven."

Let the denizens of the earth wake from their slumber at the resonances of His Name and arise from their confused dreams to embrace the clarity of the new Day: For "This is the King of Days, the Day that hath seen the coming of the Best-beloved, Him Who through all eternity hath been acclaimed the Desire of the World."

Our thoughts turn back to the mourning time in 1892 when a vast number of residents from the surrounding area came to join His bereaved followers in lamenting the departure of the immortal Beloved. These were not adherents of His Cause and had no real understanding of His station, but the effect of His presence among them was such as to fill them with a grave sense of loss. Today, a century later, it is we, who identify ourselves with His community, who have come in multitudinous array from the far corners of the earth to pay homage to the King of Glory. With us in spirit are the millions of His lovers scattered among tens of thousands of villages, towns and cities, themselves observing in their own localities this solemn anniversary, their hearts focused on the Primal Spot here at Bahjí.

And among us at this Point of Adoration are a number of the heroic souls from the celebrated company who earned the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh conferred upon them by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Cause—this to signify their acts of daring and devotion as teachers of the Faith. It is they who were in the vanguard during the triumphant Ten Year World

Crusade. Their exploits, built upon the dramatic feats of the Heroic Age and the sacrifices of countless martyrs and heroes of the past, and following the trail blazed by earlier teachers of the Faith, realized the actual establishment of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh as a world religion.

Now, on this commemorative occasion, the Roll of Honor on which the names of the Knights have been inscribed is being deposited by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum at the entrance door of the Most Holy Shrine in the spot designated by our beloved Guardian. This is both a symbol and a promise—a symbol registering the reality of a clear response, at a critical time, to the duty laid upon us by the Lord of Hosts to diffuse His teachings among all peoples; a promise that the commitment so dazzlingly displayed by these intrepid pioneers will be reaffirmed by generations of their successors, ensuring that the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, "shining in all its power and glory, will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet."

This is also a mark of recognition of the power of the Hand of Omnipotence to turn gnats into eagles. His bounties embolden us. Broken-winged birds are we; yet, with His assurances resounding in our souls, we soar to ever greater heights in His service. "I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the Almighty!" He declares, benevolently adding: "I unfold the drooping wings of every broken bird and start it on its flight." How then can we fail?

We here make this vow: With a stirring history of divine support behind us and a clear vision of unfolding destiny before us, we move onward, renewed, reconsecrated, resolute, until the consciousness of every human being has been touched by the knowledge of God's triumphant Faith. And, intoning the expectant words of His Martyr-Herald, we exclaim: "Exalted be His glory, and magnified be His might, and sanctified be His holiness, and glorified be His grandeur, and lauded be His ways!"

26 NOVEMBER 1992

To the Bahá'ís of the World

A full century has gone by since the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh was established and set in motion. And we extend to the members of His community our loving greetings as they are assembled today at the World Congress in New York and at auxiliary conferences on all continents, or as they otherwise participate in the observance of this centennial occasion.

We are particularly pleased that we have been afforded a special opportunity to pause for a moment, together with our fellow-believers, to gather our thoughts, to see how we have fared since 1892, and to consider where we are now headed. This enables us to engage in a symbolic act which by its very nature exemplifies the purpose of the Covenant—a Covenant intended by its divine Author to unite the races and nations of the earth.

Sublime emotions surge in our hearts as we survey the dramatic history and amazing progress of these one hundred years. At the time of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'í community was contained within the borders of no more than fifteen countries, the vast majority of its members living in His native Iran. The community now embraces the entire planet. We rejoice at the spirit of unity which is evident in its steady consolidation through the workings of the Administrative Order to which the Covenant has given birth. Our cumulated experience has clearly demonstrated the efficacy of the Covenant. The genuine unity it induces greatly encourages our expectation that all of humanity can and will be united.

We have toiled to build a community at a period when the world has witnessed startling changes which have profoundly altered the character of society and plunged it into an unprecedented state of worry and confusion. Indeed, the world in its current condition has lost its bearings through the operation of forces it neither understands nor can control. It is a period in which great dynasties and empires have collapsed in rapid succession, in which powerful ideologies have captured the hearts

of millions only to expire in infamy, in which two world wars wreaked havoc on civilized life as it was known at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the wake of such horrendous disruptions, there have been unexampled advances in the realms of science, technology and social organization; a veritable explosion of knowledge; and an even more remarkable burgeoning in the awakening and rise of masses of humanity which were previously presumed to be dormant. These masses are claiming their rightful places within the community of nations which has greatly expanded. With the simultaneous development of communications at the speed of light and transportation at the speed of sound, the world has contracted into a mere neighborhood in which people are instantly aware of each other's affairs and have immediate access to each other. And yet, even with such miraculous advances, with the emergence of international organizations, and with valiant attempts and brilliant successes at international cooperation, nations are at woeful odds with one another, people are convulsed by economic upheavals, races feel more alienated than before and are filled with mistrust, humiliation and fear.

Collateral with these changes has been the breakdown of institutions, religious and political, which traditionally functioned as the guideposts for the stability of society. Even the most resilient of these seem to be losing their credibility as they have become preoccupied with their own internal disorder. This calls attention to the emptiness of the moral landscape and the feeling of futility deranging personal life. Thoughtful commentators write apprehensively about the fall of culture and the consequent disappearance of values, the loss of the fullness of the inner life, a technological civilization facing an increasingly serious crisis. They write, moreover, of the human species as being at the end with its wisdom and being unable to control itself, of the need for divine wisdom and foresight, and of the human psyche as being far removed from recognizing this need.

These ominous comments reflect the universal consequences of a failed understanding as to the purpose of God for

humankind. It is in this particular respect that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh sheds new light; it refreshes our thoughts; it clarifies and expands our conceptions. His Teachings imbue us with the abundance of God's love for His creatures; they impress upon us the indispensability of justice in human relations and emphasize the importance of adhering to principle in all matters; they inform us that human beings have been created "to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization" and that the virtues that befit the dignity of every person are: "forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth."

As the members of our community have pursued their plan for teaching His Faith, they have grown to appreciate more adequately the purpose of the multifarious processes of change which have been at work during the course of the century. "Such simultaneous processes of rise and fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other, are," our Teachings tell us, "but aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theatre of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind."

Disunity is the crux of the problems which so severely afflict the planet. It permeates attitudes in all departments of life. It is at the heart of all major conflicts between nations and peoples. More serious still, disunity is common in the relations between religions and within religions, vitiating the very spiritual and moral influence which it is their primary purpose to exert. "Should the lamp of religion be obscured," Bahá'u'lláh asserts, "chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine."

In an elaboration of these dreadful consequences, our Teachings state that "when, as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts ... a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity immediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul is capable of revealing. The perversion of human nature, the

degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves, under such circumstances, in their worst and most revolting aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very feeling of peacefulness, of joy and of hope is gradually extinguished."

Such, unfortunately, is the state to which institutions and individuals have come in our time. Against this background the requirements of the Covenant assume even more critical importance than before. There can be no doubt that if our community is to cope with the situation, it must advance rapidly towards the next phase in its evolution. It will be a phase in which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh must of necessity anticipate a deep encounter with the forces operating with such bewildering ferocity throughout the world. Let us, therefore, take this propitious occasion to review the covenantal arrangement which generates and sustains our actions.

The foundation of our belief rests on our recognition of the sovereignty of God, the Unknowable Essence, the Supreme Creator, and on our submission to His will as revealed for this age by Bahá'u'lláh. To accept the Messenger of God in His Day and to abide by His bidding are the two essential, inseparable duties which each soul was created to fulfil. One exercises these twin duties by one's own choice, and by so doing performs an act which may be regarded as the highest expression of free will with which every human being is endowed by an all-loving Creator. The vehicle in this resplendent age for the practical fulfillment of these duties is the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. It is the instrument by which belief in Him is translated into constructive deeds.

The oneness of humankind is the pivotal principle and ultimate goal of His mission. This principle means far more than the reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and goodwill among people: "It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet

experienced." The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh embodies the spirit, instrumentality and method to attain this essential goal. In addition to laying down, in His Book of Laws, the fundamentals for a new World Order, Bahá'u'lláh, in the Book of His Covenant, confirmed the appointment of His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the interpreter of His Word and the Centre of His Covenant. As the interpreter, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became the living mouth of the Book, the expounder of the Word; as the Centre of the Covenant, He became the incorruptible medium for applying the Word to practical measures for the raising up of a new civilization. The Covenant is, therefore, unique as a divine phenomenon, in that Bahá'u'lláh, further to conferring upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá the necessary authority to fulfil the requirements of His singular office, vested in Him the virtues of perfection in personal and social behavior, that humanity may have an enduring model to emulate. In no annals of the past is there recorded such an arrangement for ensuring the realization of the purpose of the Manifestation of God.

This Covenant is the guarantee against schism; that is why those who occasionally attempt to create a cleavage in the community utterly fail in the long run. Similarly, the incessant persecution the community has been forced to endure for more than a century in the land of Bahá'u'lláh's birth has not succeeded in destroying its identity or undermining its organic unity. The glorious, ultimate effect of this arrangement will be to ensure the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, as promised in the Holy Books of old and as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

"The Day of the Promise is come," He clearly announces, "and He Who is the Promised One loudly proclaimeth before all who are in heaven and all who are on earth: 'Verily there is none other God but He, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting!' I swear by God! That which had been enshrined from eternity in the knowledge of God, the Knower of the seen and unseen, is revealed. Happy is the eye that seeth, and the face that turneth towards, the Countenance of God, the Lord of all being."

Indeed, the coming of Bahá'u'lláh ushered the world into a new age, making possible the beginning of a wholly new

relationship between humanity and its Supreme Creator. The characteristics of this relationship are summed up in the Covenant inaugurated upon His passing a century ago. Its spiritual dynamic and cohesive power, its unifying principles and practical institutional provisions are a pattern for the healing of the ills afflicting our fractured societies and defective social systems. The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh gives new meaning to humanity's checkered history; it imparts a fresh impulse to human striving. "Like unto the artery," 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, it "beats and pulsates in the body of the world." The pervasive influence it exerts is at the heart of the derangement of human affairs; it drives the accelerating transition from the old order to the new World Order envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh. "Soon," He writes, "will the present day Order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead." And He explains: "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this Most Great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System, the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed."

Let those seriously concerned about the state and fate of the world give due attention to the claims of Bahá'u'lláh. Let them realize that the storms battering at the foundations of society will not be stilled unless and until spiritual principles are actively engaged in the search for solutions to social problems. Let us, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, redouble our effort in the exercise of our sacred duty to acquaint all humanity with the animating purpose of the world-wide Law of Bahá'u'lláh. Let them discover that, "Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world." Let us, with patience and humility, respond to challenging or skeptical questions while unfolding the purposes of this Law. Let them know that it "can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of

excessive centralization are to be avoided."

Let us by word and example show that "it does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world." Finally, let them appreciate that "it calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race"; that "it insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world"; that "it repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other"; that "its watchword is unity in diversity."

It is especially noteworthy that coincidental with this Bahá'í Holy Year are the commemorations of other world-shaking occurrences which, centuries ago, commenced processes destined to attain their glorious consummation in the Promised Day of God. The ultimate resolution of the profound issues to which they gave rise, and which have ripened with the passage of time, is discernible in the eventual realization of the world-embracing System of Bahá'u'lláh.

Our thoughts turn to the history of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's epic journey to the West and particularly to North America where, in New York, He disclosed to His western disciples the implications of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. It was, in a sense, an act of renewal, prospective of the consolidation of the union of the Old and New Worlds into one global entity. Surnamed by Him "City of the Covenant," New York resonates with the effects of that experience of eighty years ago. Then it was still the major entryway to the "Land of Promise" for millions of people seeking new horizons. Now it is recognized as a gathering place for the leaders of nations, an international venue for efforts at achieving unity in the political realm. Its very atmosphere vibrates with the hopes of a world seeking to set its affairs in order. Today, the hearts of the Bahá'ís throughout the earth are focused on this City of the Covenant wherein many thousands of their fellow-believers, from all parts of the planet, have assembled in the second Bahá'í World Congress. The presence there of such a widely varied representation of the human race

is an affirmation of the unific power of the Covenant which the event was convened to celebrate.

In this season of beginnings and of the commemorations of beginnings, we Bahá'ís set for ourselves a new measure of effort, one more daring and persistent than before. May our words proclaim, and our deeds demonstrate, that there is only one God, only one religion, only one race. And few though we be, may we thus fulfil our duty towards Bahá'u'lláh, towards His Covenant, and, indeed, towards all humankind.

5 MARCH 1993

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas—the Book described in such exalted terms by the Guardian of the Cause of God as "that priceless treasury enshrining for all time the brightest emanations of the mind of Bahá'u'lláh, the Charter of His World Order, the chief repository of His laws, the Harbinger of His Covenant, the Pivotal Work containing some of His noblest exhortations, weightiest pronouncements, and portentous prophecies, and revealed during the full tide of His tribulations, at a time when the rulers of the earth had definitely forsaken Him"—this Most Holy Book, we have the honor to announce, will, in a copiously annotated English translation, be released to the Community of Bahá at Naw-Rúz.

Bahá'u'lláh's own designations of the Book—the "Unerring Balance," the "Straight Path," the "quickener of mankind," the "source of true felicity"—indicate its phenomenal importance, an importance which staggers the mind when viewed in light of the realization that this Book is, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, the "principal repository of that Law which the Prophet Isaiah had anticipated, and which the writer of the Apocalypse had described as the 'new heaven' and the 'new earth,' as 'the Tabernacle of God,' as the 'Holy City,' as the 'Bride,' the 'New

Jerusalem coming down from God'." Such metaphors of hope have been recited from sacred scriptures down the ages, have fired the imagination and excited the expectations of unnumbered generations, and now, at long last, in this new Dispensation, have been given tangible form by the Promised One of All Ages in this Mother Book of His Revelation.

The publication of the Book in English satisfies a major goal of the Six Year Plan. But even beyond this, it initiates the fulfillment of a prospect voiced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who anticipated its publication in various languages; it realizes an intention cherished by Shoghi Effendi, who had himself translated substantial portions of it into English which he diffused through his letters and in his compilations of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, and who had also, "as an essential prelude to the eventual translation and publication of its entire text," initiated steps in 1955 for the preparation of a Synopsis and Codification of the Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. This was a task on which he made considerable progress and which was completed by the Universal House of Justice in 1973, on the hundredth anniversary of the revelation of the Book which occurred, as Shoghi Effendi confirmed, "soon after Bahá'u'lláh had been transferred to the house of 'Údí Khammár (*circa* 1873), at a time when He was still encompassed by the tribulations that had afflicted Him, through the acts committed by His enemies and the professed adherents of His Faith."

The accessibility to Western readers of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in full authorized text, for the first time in one of their major languages, enormously extends the sphere of its influence, opening wider the door to a vast process of individual and community development which must certainly exert an increasingly powerful, transformative effect on peoples and nations as the Book is translated further into other languages. That the English edition of this highly treasured and incalculably potent work should appear now amid the welter of a world at odds with itself is a demonstration of confidence in the ultimate emergence of a peaceful, civilized, global society. That it should be published during the period of the centenary of both the Ascension of its divine Author and the inauguration of His

Covenant amplifies the striking impact, already felt, of the Holy Year which marks so important an anniversary.

A Book of such indescribable holiness is itself a symbol of the incomparable greatness of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and is, indeed, a potent reminder of the high respect which is due to all that has flowed from His prodigious, truth-bearing pen. May the friends of God ever be mindful of its exalted rank among the sacred texts of the Faith; treasure it as the bread of life; regard possession of it as a sacred honor, as a priceless legacy from the Pen of the Most High, as a source of God's greatest bounty to His creatures; place their whole trust in its provisions; recite its verses; study its contents; adhere to its exhortations; and thus transform their lives in accordance with the divine standard.

Let us rejoice. Let us be filled with the felicitous spirit evoked in the Blessed Beauty's own announcement of the Mother Book of His Dispensation when He said: "We announce unto everyone the joyful tidings concerning that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book—a Book from above whose horizon the day-star of My commandments shineth upon every observer and every observed one." May we be such upholders of its laws and principles as to deserve His gloriously promised benediction: "Blessed those who peruse it. Blessed those who apprehend it. Blessed those who meditate upon it. Blessed those who ponder its meaning. So vast is its range that it hath encompassed all men ere their recognition of it. Ere long will its sovereign power, its pervasive influence and the greatness of its might be manifested on earth. Verily, thy God is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed."

This statement was issued by the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information at the request of the Universal House of Justice in May 1992.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

May 29, 1992, marks the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh. His vision of humanity as one people and of the earth as a common homeland, dismissed out of hand by the world leaders to whom it was first enunciated over a hundred years ago, has today become the focus of human hope. Equally inescapable is the collapse of moral and social order, which this same declaration foresaw with awesome clarity.

The occasion has encouraged publication of this brief introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's life and work. Prepared at the request of the Universal House of Justice, trustee of the global undertaking which the events of a century ago set in motion, it offers a perspective on the feeling of confidence with which Bahá'ís the world over contemplate the future of our planet and our race.

As the new millennium approaches, the crucial need of the human race is to find a unifying vision of the nature of man and society. For the past century humanity's response to this impulse has driven a succession of ideological upheavals that have convulsed our world and that appear now to have exhausted themselves. The passion invested in the struggle, despite its disheartening results, testifies to the depth of the need. For, without a common conviction about the course and direction of human

history, it is inconceivable that foundations can be laid for a global society to which the mass of humankind can commit themselves.

Such a vision unfolds in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the nineteenth-century prophetic figure whose growing influence is the most remarkable development of contemporary religious history. Born in Persia, 12 November 1817, Bahá'u'lláh[1] began at age 27 an undertaking that has gradually captured the imagination and loyalty of several million people from virtually every race, culture, class, and nation on earth. The phenomenon is one that has no reference points in the contemporary world, but is associated rather with climactic changes of direction in the collective past of the human race. For Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be no less than the Messenger of God to the age of human maturity, the Bearer of a Divine Revelation that fulfills the promises made in earlier religions, and that will generate the spiritual nerves and sinews for the unification of the peoples of the world.

If they were to do nothing else, the effects which Bahá'u'lláh's life and writings have already had should command the earnest attention of anyone who believes that human nature is fundamentally spiritual and that the coming organization of our planet must be informed by this aspect of reality. The documentation lies open to general scrutiny. For the first time in history humanity has available a detailed and verifiable record of the birth of an independent religious system and of the life of its Founder. Equally accessible is the record of the response that the new faith has evoked, through the emergence of a global community which can already justly claim to represent a microcosm of the human race.[2] During the earlier decades of this century, this development was relatively

1. Bahá'u'lláh ("Glory of God") was born Ḥusayn-'Alí. The authoritative work on the missions of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh is Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987). For a biographical study see Hasan Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980). Bahá'u'lláh's writings are extensively reviewed in Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1975), four volumes.

obscure. Bahá'u'lláh's writings forbid the aggressive proselytism through which many religious messages have been widely promulgated. Further, the priority which the Bahá'í community gave to the establishment of groups at the local level throughout the entire planet militated against the early emergence of large concentrations of adherents in any one country or the mobilization of resources required for large-scale programs of public information. Arnold Toynbee, intrigued by phenomena that might represent the emergence of a new universal religion, noted in the 1950s that the Bahá'í Faith was then about as familiar to the average educated Westerner as Christianity had been to the corresponding class in the Roman empire during the second century A.D.[3]

In more recent years, as the Bahá'í community's numbers have rapidly increased in many countries, the situation has changed dramatically. There is now virtually no area in the world where the pattern of life taught by Bahá'u'lláh is not taking root. The respect which the community's social and economic development projects are beginning to win in governmental, academic, and United Nations circles further reinforces the argument for a detached and serious examination of the impulse behind a process of social transformation that is, in critical respects, unique in our world.

No uncertainty surrounds the nature of the generating impulse. Bahá'u'lláh's writings cover an enormous range of subjects from social issues such as racial integration, the equality of the sexes, and disarmament, to those questions that affect the innermost life of the human soul. The original texts, many of them in His own hand, the others dictated and

2. *Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year*, 1992, indicates that, although the Bahá'í community numbers only about five million members, the Faith has already become the most widely diffused religion on earth, after Christianity. There are today 165 Bahá'í National Assemblies in independent countries and major territories of the globe, and more than 20,000 elected Assemblies functioning at the local level. It is estimated that 2,112 nationalities and tribes are represented.

3. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. VIII (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 117.

affirmed by their Author, have been meticulously preserved. For several decades, a systematic program of translation and publication has made selections from Bahá'u'lláh's writings accessible to people everywhere, in over eight hundred languages.

BIRTH OF A NEW REVELATION

Bahá'u'lláh's mission began in a subterranean dungeon in Teheran in August 1852. Born into a noble family that could trace its ancestry back to the great dynasties of Persia's imperial past, He declined the ministerial career open to Him in government, and chose instead to devote His energies to a range of philanthropies which had, by the early 1840s, earned Him widespread renown as "Father of the Poor." This privileged existence swiftly eroded after 1844, when Bahá'u'lláh became one of the leading advocates of a movement that was to change the course of His country's history.

The early nineteenth century was a period of messianic expectations in many lands. Deeply disturbed by the implications of scientific inquiry and industrialization, earnest believers from many religious backgrounds turned to the scriptures of their faiths for an understanding of the accelerating processes of change. In Europe and America groups like the Templers and the Millerites believed they had found in the Christian scriptures evidence supporting their conviction that history had ended and the return of Jesus Christ was at hand. A markedly similar ferment developed in the Middle East around the belief that the fulfillment of various prophecies in the Qur'án and Islamic Traditions was imminent.

By far the most dramatic of these millennialist movements had been the one in Persia, which had focused on the person and teachings of a young merchant from the city of Shiraz, known to history as the Báb.[4] For nine years, from 1844 to 1853, Persians of all classes had been caught up in a storm of

4. The Báb ("Gate" or "Door") was born Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad in Shiraz, 20 October 1819.

hope and excitement aroused by the Báb's announcement that the Day of God was at hand and that He was Himself the One promised in Islamic scripture. Humanity stood, He said, on the threshold of an era that would witness the restructuring of all aspects of life. New fields of learning, as yet inconceivable, would permit even the children of the new age to surpass the most erudite of nineteenth-century scholars. The human race was called by God to embrace these changes through undertaking a transformation of its moral and spiritual life. His own mission was to prepare humanity for the event that lay at the heart of these developments, the coming of that universal Messenger of God, "He Whom God will make manifest," awaited by the followers of all religions.[5]

The claim had evoked violent hostility from the Muslim clergy, who taught that the process of Divine Revelation had ended with Muḥammad; and that any assertion to the contrary represented apostasy, punishable by death. Their denunciation of the Báb had soon enlisted the support of the Persian authorities. Thousands of followers of the new faith had perished in a horrific series of massacres throughout the country, and the Báb had been publicly executed on July 9, 1850.[6] In an age of growing Western involvement in the Orient, these events had aroused interest and compassion in influential European circles. The nobility of the Báb's life and teachings, the heroism of

5. Passages in the Báb's writings which refer to the advent of "Him Whom God will make manifest" include cryptic references to "the year Nine" and "the year Nineteen" (i.e. roughly 1852 and 1863, calculating in lunar years from the year of the Báb's inauguration of His mission, 1844). On several occasions the Báb also indicated to certain of His followers that they would themselves come to recognize and serve "Him Whom God will make manifest."

6. The proclamation of the Báb's message had been carried out in mosques and public places by enthusiastic bands of followers, many of them young seminarians. The Muslim clergy had replied by inciting mob violence. Unfortunately, these events coincided with a political crisis created by the death of Muḥammad Sháh and a struggle over the succession. It was the leaders of the successful political faction, behind the boy-king Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, who then turned the royal army against the Báb's

His followers, and the hope for fundamental reform that they had kindled in a darkened land had exerted a powerful attraction for personalities ranging from Ernest Renan and Leo Tolstoy to Sarah Bernhardt and the Comte de Gobineau.[7]

Because of His prominence in the defense of the Báb's cause, Bahá'u'lláh was arrested and brought, in chains and on foot, to Teheran. Protected in some measure by an impressive personal reputation and the social position of His family, as well as by protests which the Bábí pogroms had evoked from Western embassies, He was not sentenced to death, as influential figures at the royal court were urging. Instead, He was cast into the notorious Síyáh-Chál, the "Black Pit," a deep, vermin-infested dungeon which had been created in one of the city's abandoned reservoirs. No charges were laid but He and some thirty companions were, without appeal, kept immured in the darkness and filth of this pit, surrounded by hardened criminals, many of them under sentence of death. Around Bahá'u'lláh's neck was clamped a heavy chain, so notorious in penal circles as to have been given its own name. When He did not quickly perish, as had been expected, an attempt was made to poison Him. The marks of the chain were to remain on His body for the rest of His life.

Central to Bahá'u'lláh's writings is an exposition of the great themes which have preoccupied religious thinkers throughout the ages: God, the role of Revelation in history, the

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enthusiasts. The latter, raised in a Muslim frame of reference, and believing that they had a moral right to self-defense, barricaded themselves in makeshift shelters and withstood long, bloody sieges. When they had eventually been overcome and slaughtered, and the Báb had been executed, two deranged Bábí youth stopped the Shah in a public road and fired birdshot at him, in an ill-conceived attempt at assassination. It was this incident which provided the excuse for the worst of the massacres of Bábís which evoked protests from Western embassies. For an account of the period see W. Hatcher and D. Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 6–32.

7. For an account of these events see Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, chapters I–V. Western interest in the Bábí movement was aroused, particularly, by the publication in 1865 of Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale* (Paris: Didier, 1865).

relationship of the world's religious systems to one another, the meaning of faith, and the basis of moral authority in the organization of human society. Passages in these texts speak intimately of His own spiritual experience, of His response to the Divine summons, and of the dialogue with the "Spirit of God" which lay at the heart of His mission. Religious history has never before offered the inquirer the opportunity for so candid an encounter with the phenomenon of Divine Revelation.

Toward the end of His life, Bahá'u'lláh's writings on His early experiences included a brief description of the conditions in the Síyáh-Chál.

> We were consigned for four months to a place foul beyond comparison ... The dungeon was wrapped in thick darkness, and Our fellow-prisoners numbered nearly a hundred and fifty souls: thieves, assassins and highwaymen. Though crowded, it had no other outlet than the passage by which We entered. No pen can depict that place, nor any tongue describe its loathsome smell. Most of these men had neither clothes nor bedding to lie on. God alone knoweth what befell Us in that most foul-smelling and gloomy place![8]

Each day the guards would descend the three steep flights of stairs of the pit, seize one or more of the prisoners, and drag them out to be executed. In the streets of Teheran, Western observers were appalled by scenes of Bábí victims blown from cannon mouths, hacked to death by axes and swords, and led to their deaths with burning candles inserted into open wounds in their bodies.[9] It was in these circumstances, and faced with the prospect of His own imminent death, that Bahá'u'lláh received the first intimation of His mission:

> One night, in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: "Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be

8. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), 20–21.

9. A number of Western diplomatic and military observers have left harrowing accounts of what they witnessed. Several formal protests were registered with the Persian authorities. See Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844–1944* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981).

> Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him."[10]

The experience of Divine Revelation, touched on only at second hand in surviving accounts of the lives of the Buddha, Moses, Jesus Christ, and Muḥammad, is described graphically in Bahá'u'lláh's own words:

> During the days I lay in the prison of Ṭihrán, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.[11]

EXILE

Eventually, still without trial or recourse, Bahá'u'lláh was released from prison and immediately banished from His native land, His wealth and properties arbitrarily confiscated. The Russian diplomatic representative, who knew Him personally and who had followed the Bábí persecutions with growing distress, offered Him his protection and refuge in lands under the control of his government. In the prevailing political climate, acceptance of such help would almost certainly have been misrepresented by others as having political implications.[12] Perhaps for this reason, Bahá'u'lláh chose to accept banishment to the neighboring territory of Iraq, then under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. This expulsion was the beginning of forty years of exile, imprisonment, and bitter persecution.

In the years which immediately followed His departure

10. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, 21.
11. Ibid., 22.
12. There was, understandably, great suspicion in Persia about the intentions of the British and Russian governments, both of which had long interfered in Persian affairs.

from Persia, Bahá'u'lláh gave priority to the needs of the Bábí community which had grown in Baghdad, a task which had devolved on Him as the only effective Bábí leader to have survived the massacres. The death of the Báb and the almost simultaneous loss of most of the young faith's teachers and guides had left the body of the believers scattered and demoralized. When His efforts to rally those who had fled to Iraq aroused jealousy and dissension,[13] He followed the path that had been taken by all of the Messengers of God gone before Him, and withdrew to the wilderness, choosing for the purpose the mountain region of Kurdistan. His withdrawal, as He later said, had "contemplated no return." Its reason "was to avoid becoming a subject of discord among the faithful, a source of disturbance unto Our companions." Although the two years spent in Kurdistan were a period of intense privation and physical hardship, Bahá'u'lláh describes them as a time of profound happiness during which He reflected deeply on the message entrusted to Him: "Alone, We communed with Our spirit, oblivious of the world and all that is therein."[14]

Only with great reluctance, believing it His responsibility to the cause of the Báb, did He eventually accede to urgent messages from the remnant of the desperate group of exiles in Baghdad who had discovered His whereabouts and appealed to Him to return and assume the leadership of their community.

Two of the most important volumes of Bahá'u'lláh's writings date from this first period of exile, preceding the declar-

13. The focal point of these problems was one Mírzá Yaḥyá, a younger half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh. While still a youth and under the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh, Yaḥyá had been appointed by the Báb as nominal head of the Bábí community, pending the imminent advent of "Him Whom God will make manifest." Falling under the influence of a former Muslim theologian, Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahání, however, Yaḥyá gradually became estranged from his brother. Rather than being expressed openly, this resentment found its outlet in clandestine agitation, which had a disastrous effect on the exiles' already low morale. Yaḥyá eventually refused to accept Bahá'u'lláh's declaration, and played no role in the development of the Bahá'í Faith which this declaration initiated.

14. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), 251.

ation of His mission in 1863. The first of these is a small book which He named The Hidden Words. Written in the form of a compilation of moral aphorisms, the volume represents the ethical heart of Bahá'u'lláh's message. In verses which Bahá'u'lláh describes a distillation of the spiritual guidance of all the Revelations of the past, the voice of God speaks directly to the human soul:

> O Son of Spirit!
> 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 neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.
>
> O Son of Being!
> Love Me that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant.
>
> O Son of Man!
> Sorrow not save that thou art far from Us. Rejoice not save that thou art drawing near and returning unto Us.
>
> O Son of Being!
> With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else, for My work is perfect and My command is binding. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof.[15]

The second of the two major works composed by Bahá'u'lláh during this period is *The Book of Certitude*, a comprehensive exposition of the nature and purpose of religion. In passages that draw not only on the Qur'án, but with equal facility and insight on the Old and New Testaments, the Messengers of God are depicted as agents of a single, unbroken process, the awakening of the human race to its spiritual and moral potentialities. A humanity which has come of age can respond to a directness of teaching that goes beyond the

15. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), 3–4, 4, 12, 6.

language of parable and allegory; faith is a matter not of blind belief, but of conscious knowledge. Nor is the guidance of an ecclesiastical elite any longer required: the gift of reason confers on each individual in this new age of enlightenment and education the capacity to respond to Divine guidance. The test is that of sincerity:

> No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth ... The essence of these words is this: they that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly—their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth. They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. Then will they be made worthy of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding ... inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious ... unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets. Consider the past. How many, both high and low, have, at all times, yearningly awaited the advent of the Manifestations of God in the sanctified persons of His chosen Ones ... And whensoever the portals of grace did open, and the clouds of divine bounty did rain upon mankind, and the light of the Unseen did shine above the horizon of celestial might, they all denied Him, and turned away from His face—the face of God Himself ...
>
> Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being ... Then will the manifold favors and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind ... Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude. He will discover in all things the ... evidences of an everlasting Manifestation.
>
> When the channel of the human soul is cleansed of all worldly and impeding attachments, it will unfailingly perceive the breath of the Beloved across immeasurable distances, and will, led by its perfume, attain and enter the City of Certitude ...

> That city is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation ... All the guidance, the blessings, the learning, the understanding, the faith, and certitude, conferred upon all that is in heaven and on earth, are hidden and treasured within these Cities.[16]

No overt reference is made to Bahá'u'lláh's own as yet unannounced mission; rather, *The Book of Certitude* is organized around a vigorous exposition of the mission of the martyred Báb. Not the least of the reasons for the book's powerful influence on the Bábí community, which included a number of scholars and former seminarians, was the mastery of Islamic thought and teachings its author displays in demonstrating the Báb's claim to have fulfilled the prophecies of Islam. Calling on the Bábís to be worthy of the trust which the Báb had placed in them and of the sacrifice of so many heroic lives, Bahá'u'lláh held out before them the challenge not only of bringing their personal lives into conformity with the Divine teachings, but of making their community a model for the heterogeneous population of Baghdad, the Iraqi provincial capital. Though living in very straitened material circumstances, the exiles were galvanized by this vision. One of their company, a man called Nabíl, who was later to leave a detailed history of both the ministries of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, has described the spiritual intensity of those days:

> Many a night no less than ten persons subsisted on no more than a pennyworth of dates. No one knew to whom actually belonged the shoes, the cloaks, or the robes that were to be found in their houses. Whoever went to the bazaar could claim that the shoes upon his feet were his own, and each one who entered the presence of Bahá'u'lláh could affirm that the cloak and robe he then wore belonged to him ... O, for the joy of those days, and the gladness and wonder of those hours![17]

To the dismay of the Persian consular authorities who had believed the Bábí "episode" to have run its course, the community of exiles gradually became a respected and influential element in Iraq's provincial capital and the neighboring towns.

16. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 3–4, 195–200.
17. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 137.

Since several of the most important shrines of Shí'ah Islam were located in the area, a steady stream of Persian pilgrims was also exposed, under the most favorable circumstances, to the renewal of Bábí influence. Among dignitaries who called on Bahá'u'lláh in the simple house He occupied were princes of the royal family. So enchanted by the experience was one of them that he conceived the somewhat naive idea that by erecting a duplicate of the building in the gardens of his own estate, he might recapture something of the atmosphere of spiritual purity and detachment he had briefly encountered. Another, more deeply moved by the experience of his visit, expressed to friends the feeling that "were all the sorrows of the world to be crowded into my heart they would, I feel, all vanish, when in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. It is as if I had entered Paradise ..."[18]

THE DECLARATION IN THE RIḌVÁN GARDEN

By 1863, Bahá'u'lláh concluded that the time had come to begin to acquaint some of those around Him with the mission which had been entrusted to Him in the darkness of the Síyáh-Chál. This decision coincided with a new stage in the campaign of opposition to His work, which had been relentlessly pursued by the Shí'ah Muslim clergy and representatives of the Persian government. Fearing that the acclaim which Bahá'u'lláh was beginning to enjoy among influential Persian visitors to Iraq would re-ignite popular enthusiasm in Persia, the Shah's government pressed the Ottoman authorities to remove Him far from the borders and into the interior of the empire. Eventually, the Turkish government acceded to these pressures and invited the exile, as its guest, to make His residence in the capital, Constantinople. Despite the courteous terms in which the message was couched, the intention was clearly to require compliance.[19]

18. Quotation from Prince Zaynu'l-'Ábidín Khán in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 135.
19. See Note 68 below.

By this time, the devotion of the little company of exiles had come to focus on Bahá'u'lláh's person as well as on His exposition of the Báb's teachings. A growing number of them had become convinced that He was speaking not only as the Báb's advocate, but on behalf of the far greater cause which the latter had declared to be imminent. These beliefs became a certainty in late April 1863 when Bahá'u'lláh, on the eve of His departure for Constantinople, called together individuals among His companions, in a garden to which was later given the name Riḍván ("Paradise"), and confided the central fact of His mission. Over the next four years, although no open announcement was considered timely, the hearers gradually shared with trusted friends the news that the Báb's promises had been fulfilled and that the "Day of God" had dawned. The precise circumstances surrounding this private communication are, in the words of the Bahá'í authority most intimately familiar with the records of the period, "shrouded in an obscurity which future historians will find it difficult to penetrate."[20] The nature of the declaration may be appreciated in various references which Bahá'u'lláh was to make to His mission in many of His subsequent writings:

> The purpose underlying all creation is the revelation of this most sublime, this most holy Day, the Day known as the Day of God, in His Books and Scriptures—the Day which all the Prophets, and the Chosen Ones, and the holy ones, have wished to witness.[21]

> ... this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men. It behooveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His glory.[22]

20. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 153. Increasingly, after 1863, the word "Bahá'í" replaced "Bábí" as the designation for the new faith, marking the fact that an entirely new religion had emerged.

21. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), 77.

22. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), 10–11.

As repeatedly emphasized in Bahá'u'lláh's exposition of the Báb's message, the primary purpose of God in revealing His will is to effect a transformation in the character of humankind, to develop within those who respond the moral and spiritual qualities that are latent within human nature:

> Beautify your tongues, O people, with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty. Beware, O people, that ye deal not treacherously with any one. Be ye the trustees of God amongst His creatures, and the emblems of His generosity amidst His people.[23]

> Illumine and hallow your hearts; let them not be profaned by the thorns of hate or the thistles of malice. Ye dwell in one world, and have been created through the operation of one Will. Blessed is he who mingleth with all men in a spirit of utmost kindliness and love.[24]

The aggressive proselytism that had characterized efforts in ages past to promote the cause of religion is declared to be unworthy of the Day of God. Each person who has recognized the Revelation has the obligation to share it with those who he believes are seeking, but to leave the response entirely to his hearers:

> Show forbearance and benevolence and love to one another. Should any one among you be incapable of grasping a certain truth, or be striving to comprehend it, show forth, when conversing with him, a spirit of extreme kindliness and good-will.[25]

> The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle.[26]

Against the background of the bloody events in Persia, Bahá'u'lláh not only told His followers that "if ye be slain, it is better for you than to slay," but urged them to set an example of obedience to civil authority: "In every country where any of this people reside, they must behave towards the government

23. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 297.
24. Ibid., 334.
25. Ibid., 8.
26. Ibid.

of that country with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness."[27] The conditions surrounding Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Baghdad provide a dramatic demonstration of the potency of these principles. In only a few years, a band of foreign exiles whose arrival in the area had aroused suspicion and aversion on the part of their neighbors had become one of the most respected and influential segments of the population. They supported themselves through flourishing businesses; as a group they were admired for their generosity and the integrity of their conduct; the lurid allegations of religious fanaticism and violence, sedulously spread by Persian consular officials and members of the Shí'ah Muslim clergy, had ceased to have an effect on the public mind. By 3 May 1863, when He rode out of Baghdad, accompanied by His family and those of His companions and servants who had been chosen to accompany Him to Constantinople, Bahá'u'lláh had become an immensely popular and cherished figure. In the days immediately preceding the leave-taking a stream of notables, including the governor of the province himself, came to the garden where He had temporarily taken up residence, many of them from great distances, in order to pay their respects. Eyewitnesses to the departure have described in moving terms the acclaim that greeted Him, the tears of many of the onlookers, and the concern of the Ottoman authorities and civil officials to do their visitor honor.[28]

"THE CHANGELESS FAITH OF GOD ..."

Following the declaration of His mission in 1863, Bahá'u'lláh began to elaborate a theme already introduced in *The Book of Certitude*, the relationship between the Will of God and the evolutionary process by which the spiritual and moral capacities

27. The two statements quoted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá may be found cited in J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), 170; and Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), 22–23, respectively.

28. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 127–57, gives an account of these events.

latent in human nature find expression. This exposition would occupy a central place in His writings over the remaining thirty years of His life. The reality of God, He asserts, is and will always remain unknowable. Whatever words human thought may apply to the Divine nature relate only to human existence and are the products of human efforts to describe human experience:

> Far, far from Thy glory be what mortal man can affirm of Thee, or attribute unto Thee, or the praise with which he can glorify Thee! Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.[29]

> To every discerning and illumined heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is and hath ever been veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men ...[30]

What humanity experiences in turning to the Creator of all existence are the attributes or qualities which are associated with God's recurring Revelations:

> The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace ... hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence ...[31]

> These sanctified Mirrors ... are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is

29. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 4–5.
30. Bahá'u'lláh, *Certitude*, 98.
31. Ibid., 99.

but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory ...[32]

The Revelations of God do not differ in any essential respect from one another, although the changing needs they serve from age to age have called out unique responses from each of them:

> These attributes of God are not and have never been vouchsafed specially unto certain Prophets, and withheld from others. Nay, all the Prophets of God, His well-favored, His holy, and chosen Messengers, are, without exception, the bearers of His names, and the embodiments of His attributes. They only differ in the intensity of their revelation, and the comparative potency of their light ...[33]

Students of religion are cautioned not to permit theological dogmas or other preconceptions to lead them into discriminating among those whom God has used as channels of His light:

> Beware, O believers in the Unity of God, lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation. This indeed is the true meaning of Divine Unity, if ye be of them that apprehend and believe this truth. Be ye assured, moreover, that the works and acts of each and every one of these Manifestations of God, nay whatever pertaineth unto them, and whatsoever they may manifest in the future, are all ordained by God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose ...[34]

Bahá'u'lláh compares the interventions of the Divine Revelations to the return of spring. The Messengers of God are not merely teachers, although this is one of their primary functions. Rather, the spirit of their words, together with the example of their lives, has the capacity to tap the roots of human motivation and to induce fundamental and lasting change. Their influence opens new realms of understanding and achievement:

> And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist

32. Ibid., 99–100.
33. Ibid., 103–4.
34. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 59.

> between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven ... Led by the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They [the Messengers of God] are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations. Then, and only then, will the Trust of God, latent in the reality of man, emerge ... and implant the ensign of its revealed glory upon the summits of men's hearts.[35]

Without this intervention from the world of God, human nature remains the captive of instinct, as well as of unconscious assumptions and patterns of behavior that have been culturally determined:

> Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He [God] ... chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation ... Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.
>
> These energies with which the ... Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.[36]

The time has come, Bahá'u'lláh said, when humanity has both the capacity and the opportunity to see the entire

35. Ibid., 66–67.
36. Ibid., 65–66.

panorama of its spiritual development as a single process: "Peerless is this Day, for it is as the eye to past ages and centuries, and as a light unto the darkness of the times."[37] In this perspective, the followers of differing religious traditions must strive to understand what He called "the changeless Faith of God"[38] and to distinguish its central spiritual impulse from the changing laws and concepts that were revealed to meet the requirements of an ever-evolving human society:

> 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 ... Little wonder, then, if the treatment prescribed by the physician in this day should not be found to be identical with that which he prescribed before. How could it be otherwise when the ills affecting the sufferer necessitate at every stage of his sickness a special remedy? In like manner, every time the Prophets of God have illumined the world with the resplendent radiance of the Day Star of Divine knowledge, they have invariably summoned its peoples to embrace the light of God through such means as best befitted the exigencies of the age in which they appeared ...[39]

It is not only the heart, but the mind, which must devote itself to this process of discovery. Reason, Bahá'u'lláh asserts, is God's greatest gift to the soul, "a sign of the revelation of ... the sovereign Lord."[40] Only by freeing itself from inherited dogma, whether religious or materialistic, can the mind take up an independent exploration of the relationship between the Word of God and the experience of humankind. In such a search, a major obstacle is prejudice: "Warn ... the beloved of the one true God, not to view with too critical an eye the sayings and writings of men. Let them rather approach such sayings and writings in a spirit of open-mindedness and loving sympathy."[41]

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37. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent*, 79.
38. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 136.
39. Ibid., 80.
40. Ibid., 164.
41. Ibid., 329.

THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD

What is common to all who are devoted to one or another of the world's religious systems is the conviction that it is through the Divine Revelation that the soul comes in touch with the world of God, and that it is this relationship which gives real meaning to life. Some of the most important passages in Bahá'u'lláh's writings are those which discuss at length the nature and role of those who are the channels of this Revelation, the Messengers or "Manifestations of God." A recurrent analogy found in these passages is that of the physical sun. While the latter shares certain characteristics of the other bodies in the solar system, it differs from them in that it is, in itself, the source of the system's light. The planets and moons reflect light whereas the sun emits it as an attribute inseparable from its nature. The system revolves around this focal point, each of its members influenced not only by its particular composition, but by its relationship to the source of the system's light.[42]

In the same way, Bahá'u'lláh asserts, the human personality which the Manifestation of God shares with the rest of the race is differentiated from others in a way that fits it to serve as the channel or vehicle for the Revelation of God. Apparently contradictory references to this dual station, attributed, for example, to Christ,[43] have been among the many sources of religious confusion and dissension throughout history. Bahá'u'lláh says on the subject:

> Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God ... To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, ... hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled

42. For a detailed exposition of this subject see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), 163–201.
43. Examples, in the words of Jesus, are "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God ..." (Matthew 19:17); "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30)

> or surpassed ... And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished, and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth. Nay, all else besides these Manifestations, live by the operation of their Will, and move and have their being through the outpourings of their grace.[44]

Throughout history, the conviction of believers that the Founder of their own religion occupied a unique station has had the effect of stimulating intense speculation on the nature of the Manifestation of God. Such speculation has, however, been severely hampered by the difficulties of interpreting and resolving the allegorical allusions in past scriptures. The attempt to crystallize opinion in the form of religious dogma has been a divisive rather than unifying force in history. Indeed, despite the enormous energy devoted to theological pursuits—or perhaps because of it—there are today profound differences among Muslims as to the precise station of Muḥammad, among Christians as to that of Jesus, and among Buddhists with respect to the Founder of their own religion. As is all too apparent, the controversies created by these and other differences within any one given tradition have proven at least as acute as those separating that tradition from its sister faiths.

Particularly important to an understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on the unity of religions, therefore, are His statements about the station of the successive Messengers of God and the functions performed by them in the spiritual history of humankind:

> [The] Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attributes, thou hast not erred from the truth ...
>
> The other station is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the world of creation, and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, is characterized by a special attribute, fulfills a definite mission ...

44. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 177–79.

> Viewed in the light of their second station ... they manifest absolute servitude, utter destitution, and complete self-effacement. Even as He saith: "I am the servant of God. I am but a man like you."...
>
> Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: "I am God," He, verily, speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For ... through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation of God, His names and His attributes, are made manifest in the world ... And were any of them to voice the utterance, "I am the Messenger of God," He, also, speaketh the truth, the indubitable truth ... Viewed in this light, they are all but Messengers of that ideal King, that unchangeable Essence ... And were they to say, "We are the Servants of God," this also is a manifest and indisputable fact. For they have been made manifest in the uttermost state of servitude, a servitude the like of which no man can possibly attain ...[45]
>
> Thus it is that whatsoever be their utterance, whether it pertain to the realm of Divinity, Lordship, Prophethood, Messengership, Guardianship, Apostleship, or Servitude, all is true, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Therefore these sayings ... must be attentively considered, that the divergent utterances of the Manifestations of the Unseen and Day Springs of Holiness may cease to agitate the soul and perplex the mind.[46]

"AN EVER-ADVANCING CIVILIZATION ..."

Implicit in these paragraphs is a perspective which represents the most challenging feature of Bahá'u'lláh's exposition of the function of the Manifestation of God. Divine Revelation is, He says, the motive power of civilization. When it occurs, its transforming effect on the minds and souls of those who respond to it is replicated in the new society that slowly takes shape around their experience. A new center of loyalty emerges that can win the commitment of peoples from the widest range of cultures; music and the arts seize on symbols that mediate far richer and more mature inspirations; a radical redefinition of concepts of right and wrong makes possible the formulation of new codes of civil law and conduct; new institutions are

45. Ibid., 54, 55.
46. Ibid., 56.

conceived in order to give expression to impulses of moral responsibility previously ignored or unknown: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him ..."[47] As the new culture evolves into a civilization, it assimilates achievements and insights of past eras in a multitude of fresh permutations. Features of past cultures that cannot be incorporated atrophy or are taken up by marginal elements among the population. The Word of God creates new possibilities within both the individual consciousness and human relationships.

> Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame ... All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose ... No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all created things, gives birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected ... In the days to come, ye will, verily, behold things of which ye have never heard before ... Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Well Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word ...[48]

The sequence of the Divine Revelations, the Báb asserts, is "a process that hath had no beginning and will have no end."[49] Although the mission of each of the Manifestations is limited in time and in the functions it performs, it is an integral part of an ongoing and progressive unfoldment of God's power and will:

> Contemplate with thine inward eye the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestation of Adam with that of the Báb. I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, that each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely revealed Book ... The measure of the Revelation with which every one of them hath been identified had been definitely foreordained ...[50]

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47. John 1:10.
48. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 141–42.
49. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 117.
50. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 4. In the Bahá'í writings the term "Adam"

Eventually, as an ever-evolving civilization exhausts its spiritual sources, a process of disintegration sets in, as it does throughout the phenomenal world. Turning again to analogies offered by nature, Bahá'u'lláh compares this hiatus in the development of civilization to the onset of winter. Moral vitality diminishes, as does social cohesion. Challenges which would have been overcome at an earlier age, or been turned into opportunities for exploration and achievement, become insuperable barriers. Religion loses its relevance, and experimentation becomes increasingly fragmented, further deepening social divisions. Increasingly, uncertainty about the meaning and value of life generates anxiety and confusion. Speaking about this condition in our own age Bahá'u'lláh says:

> We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an enemy.[51]

When each of the Divine impulses has fulfilled itself, the process recurs. A new Manifestation of God appears with the fuller measure of Divine inspiration for the next stage in the awakening and civilizing of humankind:

> Consider the hour at which the supreme Manifestation of God revealeth Himself unto men. Ere that hour cometh, the Ancient Being, Who is still unknown of men and hath not as yet given utterance to the Word of God, is Himself the All-Knower in a world devoid of any man that hath known Him. He is indeed the Creator without a creation ... This is indeed the Day of which it hath been written: "Whose shall be the Kingdom this Day?" And none can be found ready to answer![52]

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is used symbolically in two different senses. The one refers to the emergence of the human race, while the other designates the first of the Manifestations of God.

51. Ibid., 213.

52. Ibid., 151.

Until a section of humanity begins to respond to the new Revelation, and a new spiritual and social paradigm begins to take shape, people subsist spiritually and morally on the last traces of earlier Divine endowments. The routine tasks of society may or may not be done; laws may be obeyed or flouted; social and political experimentation may flame up or fail; but the roots of faith—without which no society can indefinitely endure—have been exhausted. At the "end of the age," at the "end of the world," the spiritually minded begin to turn again to the Creative source. However clumsy or disturbing the process may be, however inelegant or unfortunate some of the options considered, such searching is an instinctive response to the awareness that an immense chasm has opened in the ordered life of humankind.[53] The effects of the new Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh says, are universal, and not limited to the life and teachings of the Manifestation of God Who is the Revelation's focal point. Though not understood, these effects increasingly permeate human affairs, revealing the contradictions in popular assumptions and in society, and intensifying the search for understanding.

The succession of the Manifestations is an inseparable dimension of existence, Bahá'u'lláh declares, and will continue throughout the life of the world: "God hath sent down His Messengers to succeed to Moses and Jesus, and He will continue to do so till 'the end that hath no end'..."[54]

THE DAY OF GOD

What does Bahá'u'lláh hold to be the goal of the evolution of human consciousness? In the perspective of eternity, its purpose is that God should see, ever more clearly, the reflection of His perfections in the mirror of His creation, and that, in the

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53. See Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1986), 6–7: "Yea, although to the wise it be shameful to seek the Lord of Lords in the dust, yet this betokeneth intense ardor in searching."

54. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, 116.

words of Bahá'u'lláh:

> ... every man may testify, in himself, by himself, in the station of the Manifestation of his Lord, that verily there is no God save Him, and that every man may thereby win his way to the summit of realities, until none shall contemplate anything whatsoever but that he shall see God therein.[55]

Within the context of the history of civilization, the objective of the succession of divine Manifestations has been to prepare human consciousness for the race's unification as a single species, indeed as a single organism capable of taking up the responsibility for its collective future: "He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful," Bahá'u'lláh says, "cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body."[56] Not until humanity has accepted its organic oneness can it meet even its immediate challenges, let alone those that lie ahead: "The well-being of mankind," Bahá'u'lláh insists, "its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."[57] Only a unified global society can provide its children with the sense of inner assurance implied in one of Bahá'u'lláh's prayers to God: "Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves."[58] Paradoxically, it is only by achieving true unity that humanity can fully cultivate its diversity and individuality. This is the goal which the missions of all of the Manifestations of God known to history have served, the Day of "one fold and one shepherd."[59] Its attainment, Bahá'u'lláh says, is the state of civilization upon which the human race is now entering.

One of the most suggestive analogies to be found in the writings not only of Bahá'u'lláh, but of the Báb before Him, is the comparison between the evolution of the human race and

55. Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, 1–2.
56. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 214.
57. Ibid., 286.
58. Ibid., 4–5.
59. John 10:16.

the life of the individual human being. Humanity has moved through stages in its collective development which are reminiscent of the periods of infancy, childhood, and adolescence in the maturation of its individual members. We are now experiencing the beginnings of our collective maturity, endowed with new capacities and opportunities of which we as yet have only the dimmest awareness.[60]

Against this background, it is not difficult to understand the primacy given in Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to the principle of unity. The oneness of humanity is the leitmotif of the age now opening, the standard against which must be tested all proposals for the betterment of humanity. There is, Bahá'u'lláh insists, but one human race; inherited notions that a particular racial or ethnic group is in some way superior to the rest of humanity are without foundation. Similarly, since all of the Messengers of God have served as agents of the one Divine Will, their revelations are the collective legacy of the entire human race; each person on earth is a legitimate heir of the whole of that spiritual tradition. Persistence in prejudices of any kind is both damaging to the interests of society and a violation of the Will of God for our age:

> O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth! Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you ... There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them, except a few which are the outcome of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. Arise and, armed with the power of faith, shatter to pieces the gods of your vain imaginings, the sowers of dissension amongst you ...[61]

The theme of unity runs throughout Bahá'u'lláh's writings:

60. For elaboration on the subject of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on the process of the maturation of the human race, see Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, 162–63, 202.

61. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 217.

"The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers."[62] "Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship."[63] "Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch."[64] The process of humanity's coming-of-age has occurred within the evolution of social organization. Beginning from the family unit and its various extensions, the human race has developed, with varying degrees of success, societies based on the clan, the tribe, the city-state, and most recently the nation. This progressively broader and more complex social milieu provides human potential with both stimulation and scope for development, and this development, in turn, has induced ever-new modifications of the social fabric. Humanity's coming-of-age, therefore, must entail a total transformation of the social order. The new society must be one capable of embracing the entire diversity of the race and of benefiting from the full range of talents and insights which many thousands of years of cultural experience have refined:

> This is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things. It is incumbent upon all the peoples of the world to reconcile their differences, and, with perfect unity and peace, abide beneath the shadow of the Tree of His care and loving-kindness ... Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead. Verily, thy Lord speaketh the truth, and is the Knower of things unseen.[65]

The chief instrument for the transformation of society and the achievement of world unity, Bahá'u'lláh asserts, is the establishment of justice in the affairs of humankind. The subject has a central place in His teachings:

> The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this

62. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, 164.
63. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 95.
64. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, 164.
65. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 6–7.

exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance ...[66]

In His later writings Bahá'u'lláh made explicit the implications of this principle for the age of humanity's maturity. "Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God,"[67] He asserts, and the advancement of civilization requires that society so organize its affairs as to give full expression to this fact. The earth's resources are the property of all humanity, not of any one people. Different contributions to the common economic welfare deserve and should receive different measures of reward and recognition, but the extremes of wealth and poverty which afflict most nations on earth, regardless of the socio-economic philosophies they profess, must be abolished.

ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE KINGS

The writings which have been quoted in the foregoing were revealed, for the most part, in conditions of renewed persecution. Soon after the exiles' arrival in Constantinople, it became apparent that the honors showered upon Bahá'u'lláh during His journey from Baghdad had represented only a brief interlude. The Ottoman authorities' decision to move the "Bábí" leader and His companions to the capital of the empire rather than to some remote province deepened the alarm among the representatives of the Persian government.[68] Fearing that the developments in Baghdad would be repeated, and might attract this time not only the sympathy but perhaps even the allegiance of influential figures in the Turkish government, the

66. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, 66–67.

67. *Wōmen: A Compilation* (Toronto: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1986), 26.

68. A combination of unusual circumstances had made the central authorities in Constantinople especially sympathetic to Bahá'u'lláh, and resistant to pressure from the Persian government. The governor of Baghdad, Namíq Páshá, had written enthusiastically to the capital about both character and influence of the distinguished Persian exile. Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz found the reports intriguing because, although he was

Persian ambassador pressed insistently for the dispatch of the exiles to some more distant part of the empire. His argument was that the spread of a new religious message in the capital could produce political as well as religious repercussions. Initially, the Ottoman government strongly resisted. The chief minister, 'Alí Páshá, had indicated to Western diplomats his belief that Bahá'u'lláh was "a man of great distinction, exemplary conduct, great moderation, and a most dignified figure." His teachings were, in the minister's opinion, "worthy of high esteem" because they counteracted the religious animosities dividing the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim subjects of the empire.[69]

Gradually, however, a degree of resentment and suspicion developed. In the Ottoman capital, political and economic power was in the hands of court functionaries who, with but few exceptions, were persons of little or no competence. Venality was the oil on which the machinery of government operated, and the capital was a magnet for a horde of people who flocked there from every part of the empire and beyond, seeking favors and influence. It was expected that any prominent figure from another country or from one of the tribute territories would, immediately upon arrival in Constantinople, join the throngs of patronage-seekers in the reception rooms of the pashas and ministers of the imperial court. No element had a worse reputation than the competing groups of Persian political exiles who were known for both their sophistication and their lack of scruple.

Caliph of Sunni Islam, he considered himself a mystical seeker. Equally important, in another way, was the reaction of his chief minister, 'Alí Páshá. To the latter, who was an accomplished student of Persian language and literature as well as a would-be modernizer of the Turkish administration, Bahá'u'lláh seemed a highly sympathetic figure. It was no doubt this combination of sympathy and interest which led the Ottoman government to invite Bahá'u'lláh to the capital rather than send Him to a more remote center or deliver Him to the Persian authorities, as the latter were urging.

69. For the full text of the report of the Austrian ambassador, Count von Prokesch-Osten, in a letter to the Comte de Gobineau, 10 January 1886, see Momen, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, 186–87.

To the distress of friends who urged Him to make use of the prevailing hostility toward the Persian government and of the sympathy which His own sufferings had aroused, Bahá'u'lláh made it clear that He had no requests to make. Although several government ministers made social calls at the residence assigned to Him, he did not take advantage of these openings. He was in Constantinople, He said, as the guest of the Sultan, at his invitation, and His interest lay in spiritual and moral concerns.

Many years later, the Persian ambassador, Mírzá Ḥusayn Khán, reflecting on his tour of duty in the Ottoman capital, and complaining about the damage which the greed and untrustworthiness of his countrymen had done to Persia's reputation in Constantinople, paid a surprisingly candid tribute to the example which Bahá'u'lláh's conduct had been able briefly to set.[70] At the time, however, he and his colleagues made use of the situation to represent it as an astute way on the exile's part of concealing secret conspiracies against public security and the religion of the State. Under pressure of these influences, the Ottoman authorities finally took the decision to transfer Bahá'u'lláh and His family to the provincial city of Adrianople. The move was made hastily, in the depth of an extremely severe winter. Housed there in inadequate buildings, lacking suitable clothing and other provisions, the exiles endured a year of great suffering. It was clear that, though charged with no crime and given no opportunity to defend themselves, they had arbitrarily been made state prisoners.

From the point of view of religious history, the successive banishments of Bahá'u'lláh to Constantinople and Adrianople have a striking symbolism. For the first time, a Manifestation of God, Founder of an independent religious system which was soon to spread throughout the planet, had crossed the narrow neck of water separating Asia from Europe, and had set foot in "the West." All of the other great religions had arisen in Asia and the ministries of their Founders had been confined to that continent. Referring to the fact that the dispensations of the

70. Taherzadeh, *Revelation*, Vol. 2, 399.

past, and particularly those of Abraham, Christ, and Muḥammad, had produced their most important effects on the development of civilization during the course of their westward expansion, Bahá'u'lláh predicted that the same thing would occur in this new age, but on a vastly larger scale: "In the East the Light of His Revelation hath broken; in the West the signs of His dominion have appeared. Ponder this in your hearts, O people ..."[71]

It is then perhaps not surprising that Bahá'u'lláh chose this moment to make public the mission which had been slowly enlisting the allegiance of the followers of the Báb throughout the Middle East. His announcement took the form of a series of statements which are among the most remarkable documents in religious history. In them, the Manifestation of God addresses the "Kings and Rulers of the world," announcing to them the dawning of the Day of God, alluding to the as yet inconceivable changes which were gathering momentum throughout the world, and calling on them as the trustees of God and of their fellow human beings to arise and serve the process of the unification of the human race. Because of the veneration in which they were held by the mass of their subjects, and because of the absolute nature of the rule which most of them exercised, it lay in their power, He said, to assist in bringing about what He called the "Most Great Peace," a world order characterized by unity and animated by Divine justice.

Only with the greatest difficulty can the modern reader envision the moral and intellectual world in which these monarchs of a century ago lived. From their biographies and private correspondence, it is apparent that, with few exceptions, they were personally devout, taking a leading part in the spiritual life of their respective nations, often as the heads of the state religions, and convinced of the unerring truths of the Bible or the Qur'án. The power which most of them wielded they attributed directly to the divine authority of passages in these same Scriptures, an authority about which they were vigorously

71. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, 13.

articulate. They were the anointed of God. Prophecies of "the Latter Days" and "the Kingdom of God" were not for them myth or allegory, but certainties upon which all moral order rested and in which they would themselves be called on by God to give an account of their stewardship.

The letters of Bahá'u'lláh address themselves to this mental world:

> O Kings of the earth! He Who is the sovereign Lord of all is come. The Kingdom is God's, the omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting ... This is a Revelation to which whatever ye possess can never be compared, could ye but know it.
>
> Take heed lest pride deter you from recognizing the Source of Revelation, lest the things of this world shut you out as by a veil from Him Who is the Creator of heaven ... By the righteousness of God! It is not Our wish to lay hands on your kingdoms. Our mission is to seize and possess the hearts of men ...[72]

> Know ye that the poor are the trust of God in your midst. Watch that ye betray not His trust, that ye deal not unjustly with them and that ye walk not in the ways of the treacherous. Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust on the day when the Balance of Justice shall be set, the day when unto every one shall be rendered his due, when the doings of all men, be they rich or poor, shall be weighed.
>
> ... Examine Our Cause, inquire into the things that have befallen Us, and decide justly between Us and Our enemies, and be ye of them that act equitably towards their neighbor. If ye stay not the hand of the oppressor, if ye fail to safeguard the rights of the downtrodden, what right have ye then to vaunt yourselves among men?[73]

> If ye pay no heed unto the counsels which ... We have revealed in this Tablet, Divine chastisement shall assail you from every direction, and the sentence of His justice shall be pronounced against you. On that day ye shall have no power to resist Him, and shall recognize your own impotence ...[74]

The vision of the "Most Great Peace" evoked no response from the rulers of the nineteenth century. Nationalistic aggrandizement and imperial expansion recruited not only kings but parliamentarians, academics, artists, newspapers, and the

72. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 210–12.
73. Ibid., 251–52.
74. Ibid., 252.

major religious establishments as eager propagandists of Western triumphalism. Proposals for social change, however disinterested and idealistic, quickly fell captive to a swarm of new ideologies thrown up by the rising tide of dogmatic materialism. In the Orient, mesmerized by its own claims to represent all that humanity ever could or would know of God and truth, the Islamic world sank steadily deeper into ignorance, lethargy, and a sullen hostility to a human race which failed to acknowledge this spiritual preeminence.

ARRIVAL IN THE HOLY LAND

Given the earlier events in Baghdad, it seems surprising that the Ottoman authorities did not anticipate what would result from the establishment of Bahá'u'lláh in another major provincial capital. Within a year of His arrival in Adrianople, their prisoner had attracted first the interest and then the fervent admiration of figures prominent in both the intellectual and administrative life of the region. To the dismay of the Persian consular representatives, two of the most devoted of these admirers were Khurshíd Páshá, the Governor of the province, and the Shaykhu'l-Islám, the leading Sunni religious dignitary. In the eyes of His hosts and the public generally, the exile was a moral philosopher and saint the validity of whose teachings was reflected not only in the example of His own life but in the changes they effected among the flood of Persian pilgrims who flocked to this remote center of the Ottoman Empire in order to visit Him.[75]

These unanticipated developments convinced the Persian ambassador and his colleagues that it was only a matter of time before the Bahá'í movement, which was continuing to spread in Persia, would have established itself as a major influence in Persia's neighboring and rival empire. Throughout this period of its history, the ramshackle Ottoman Empire was struggling against repeated incursions by Tsarist Russia,

75. For a description of these events see Taherzadeh, *Revelation*, Vol. 3, especially 296, 331.

uprisings among its subject peoples, and persistent attempts by the ostensibly sympathetic British and Austrian governments to detach various Turkish territories and incorporate them into their own empires. These unstable political conditions in Turkey's European provinces offered new and urgent arguments supporting the ambassador's appeal that the exiles be sent to a distant colony where Bahá'u'lláh would have no further contact with influential circles, whether Turkish or Western.

When the Turkish foreign minister, Fu'ád Páshá, returned from a visit to Adrianople, his astonished reports of the reputation which Bahá'u'lláh had come to enjoy throughout the region appeared to lend credibility to the Persian embassy's suggestions. In this climate of opinion, the government abruptly decided to subject its guest to strict confinement. Without warning, early one day, Bahá'u'lláh's house was surrounded by soldiers, and the exiles were ordered to prepare for departure to an unknown destination.

The place chosen for this final banishment was the grim fortress-town of Acre on the coast of the Holy Land. Notorious throughout the empire for the foulness of its climate and the prevalence of many diseases, Acre was a penal colony used by the Ottoman State for the incarceration of dangerous criminals who could be expected not to survive too long their imprisonment there. Arriving in August 1868, Bahá'u'lláh, the members of His family, and a company of His followers who had been exiled with Him were to experience two years of suffering and abuse within the fortress itself, and then be confined under house arrest to a nearby building owned by a local merchant. For a long time the exiles were shunned by the superstitious local populace who had been warned in public sermons against "the God of the Persians," who was depicted as an enemy of public order and the purveyor of blasphemous and immoral ideas. Several members of the small group of exiles died of the privations and other conditions to which they were subjected.[76]

76. For a description of this experience see Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 180–89.

It seems, in retrospect, the keenest irony that the selection of the Holy Land as the place of Bahá'u'lláh's forced confinement should have been the result of pressure from ecclesiastical and civil enemies whose aim was to extinguish His religious influence. Palestine, revered by three of the great monotheistic religions as the point where the worlds of God and of man intersect, held then, as it had for thousands of years, a unique place in human expectation. Only a few weeks before Bahá'u'lláh's arrival, the main leadership of the German Protestant Templer movement sailed from Europe to establish at the foot of Mount Carmel a colony that would welcome Christ, whose advent they believed to be imminent. Over the lintels of several of the small houses they erected, facing across the bay to Bahá'u'lláh's prison at Acre can still be seen such carved inscriptions as "Der Herr ist nahe" ("The Lord is near").[77]

In Acre, Bahá'u'lláh continued the dictation of a series of letters to individual rulers, which He had begun in Adrianople. Several contained warnings of the judgment of God on their negligence and misrule, warnings whose dramatic fulfillment aroused intense public discussion throughout the Near East. Less than two months after the exiles arrived in the prison-city, for example, Fu'ád Páshá, the Ottoman foreign minister, whose misrepresentations had helped precipitate the banishment, was abruptly dismissed from his post and died in France of a heart attack. The event was marked by a statement which predicted the early dismissal of his colleague, Prime Minister 'Alí Páshá, the overthrow and death of the Sultan, and the loss of Turkish territories in Europe, a series of disasters which followed on the heels of one another.[78]

77. In the 1850s two German religious leaders, Christopher Hoffmann and George David Hardegg, collaborated in the development of the "Society of Templers," devoted to creating in the Holy Land a colony or colonies which would prepare the way for Christ, on His return. Leaving Germany on 6 August 1868, the founding group arrived in Haifa on 30 October 1868, two months after Bahá'u'lláh's own arrival.

78. For a description of the disasters which befell European Turkey in the Russo-Turkish War see Addendum III in Balyuzi, *King of Glory*, 460–62.

A letter to Emperor Napoleon III warned that, because of his insincerity and the misuse of his power: "... thy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands, as a punishment for that which thou hast wrought ... Hath thy pomp made thee proud? By My life! It shall not endure ..."[79] Of the disastrous Franco-Prussian War and the resulting overthrow of Napoleon III, which occurred less than a year after this statement, Alistair Horne, a modern scholar of nineteenth-century French political history has written:

> History knows of perhaps no more startling instance of what the Greeks called *peripateia*, the terrible fall from prideful heights. Certainly no nation in modern times, so replete with apparent grandeur and opulent in material achievement, has ever been subjected to a worse humiliation in so short a time.[80]

Only a few months before the unexpected series of events in Europe that led to the invasion of the Papal States and the annexation of Rome by the forces of the new Kingdom of Italy, a statement addressing Pope Pius IX had urged the Pontiff, "Abandon thy kingdom unto the kings, and emerge from thy habitation, with thy face set towards the Kingdom ... Be as thy Lord hath been ... Verily, the day of ingathering is come, and all things have been separated from each other. He hath stored away that which He chose in the vessels of justice, and cast into the fire that which befitteth it ..."[81]

Wilhelm I, King of Prussia, whose armies had won such a sweeping victory in the Franco-Prussian War, had been warned by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas to heed the example of the fall of Napoleon III and of other rulers who had been victorious in war, and not to allow pride to keep him back from recognizing this Revelation. That Bahá'u'lláh foresaw the failure of the German Emperor respond to this warning is shown by the ominous passage which appears later in that same Book:

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79. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, 51.
80. Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 34.
81. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), 32–33.

> O banks of the Rhine! We have seen you covered with gore, inasmuch as the swords of retribution were drawn against you; and you shall have another turn. And We hear the lamentations of Berlin, though she be today in conspicuous glory.[82]

A strikingly different note characterizes two of the major pronouncements, that addressed to Queen Victoria[83] and another to the "Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein." The former praises the pioneering achievement represented by the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire, and commends the principle of representative government. The latter, which opens with the announcement of the Day of God, concludes with a summons, a virtual mandate, that has no parallel in any of the other messages: "Bind ye the broken with the hands of justice, and crush the oppressor who flourisheth with the rod of the commandments of your Lord, the Ordainer, the All-Wise."[84]

RELIGION AS LIGHT AND DARKNESS

Bahá'u'lláh's severest condemnation is reserved for the barriers which, throughout history, organized religion has erected between humanity and the Revelations of God. Dogmas, inspired by popular superstition and perfected by misspent intelligence, have repeatedly been imposed on a Divine process whose purpose has at all times been spiritual and moral. Laws of social interaction, revealed for the purpose of consolidating community life, have been made the basis for structures of arcane doctrine and practice which have burdened the masses whose benefit they were supposed to serve. Even the exercise of intellect, the chief tool possessed by the human race, has been deliberately hampered, producing an eventual breakdown in the dialogue between faith and science upon which civilized life depends. The consequence of this sorry record is the worldwide

82. Cited in Ibid., 37.
83. Cited in Ibid., 35.
84. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947–1957* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), 18–19.

disrepute into which religion has fallen. Worse, organized religion has become itself a most virulent cause of hatred and warfare among the peoples of the world. "Religious fanaticism and hatred," Bahá'u'lláh warned over a century ago, "are a world-devouring fire, whose violence none can quench. The Hand of Divine power can, alone, deliver mankind from this desolating affliction."[85]

Those whom God will hold responsible for this tragedy, Bahá'u'lláh says, are humanity's religious leaders, who have presumed to speak for Him throughout history. Their attempts to make the Word of God a private preserve, and its exposition a means for personal aggrandizement, have been the greatest single handicap against which the advancement of civilization has struggled. In the pursuit of their ends, many of them have not hesitated to raise their hands against the Messengers of God themselves, at their advent:

> Leaders of religion, in every age, have hindered their people from attaining the shores of eternal salvation, inasmuch as they held the reins of authority in their mighty grasp. Some for the lust of leadership, others through want of knowledge and understanding, have been the cause of the deprivation of the people. By their sanction and authority, every Prophet of God hath drunk from the chalice of sacrifice ...[86]

In an address to the clergy of all faiths, Bahá'u'lláh warns of the responsibility which they have so carelessly assumed in history:

> Ye are even as a spring. If it be changed, so will the streams that branch out from it be changed. Fear God, and be numbered with the godly. In like manner, if the heart of man be corrupted, his limbs will also be corrupted. And similarly, if the root of a tree be corrupted, its branches, and its offshoots, and its leaves, and its fruits, will be corrupted.[87]

These same statements, revealed at a time when religious orthodoxy was one of the major powers throughout the world, declared that this power had effectively ended, and that the

85. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, 14.
86. Bahá'u'lláh, *Certitude*, 15.
87. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day*, 83.

ecclesiastical caste has no further social role in world history: "O concourse of divines! Ye shall not henceforward behold yourselves possessed of any power ..."[88] To a particularly vindictive opponent among the Muslim clergy, Bahá'u'lláh said: "Thou art even as the last trace of sunlight upon the mountaintop. Soon will it fade away as decreed by God, the All-Possessing, the Most High. Thy glory and the glory of such as are like thee have been taken away ..."[89]

It is not the organization of religious activity which these statements address, but the misuse of such resources. Bahá'u'lláh's writings are generous in their appreciation not only of the great contribution which organized religion has brought to civilization, but also of the benefits which the world has derived from the self-sacrifice and love of humanity that have characterized clergymen and religious orders of all faiths:

> Those divines ... who are truly adorned with the ornament of knowledge and of a goodly character are, verily, as a head to the body of the world, and as eyes to the nations ...[90]

Rather, the challenge to all people, believers and unbelievers, clergy and laymen alike, is to recognize the consequences now being visited upon the world as the result of the universal corruption of the religious impulse. In the prevailing alienation of humanity from God over the past century, a relationship on which the fabric of moral life itself depends has broken down. Natural faculties of the rational soul, vital to the development and maintenance of human values, have become universally discounted:

> The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?... The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.[91]

88. Cited in Ibid., 81.
89. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, 99.
90. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day*, 110–11.
91. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 200.

WORLD PEACE

In the light of subsequent events, the warnings and appeals of Bahá'u'lláh's writings during this period take on a terrible poignancy:

> O ye the elected representatives of the people in every land!... Regard the world as the human body which, though at its creation whole and perfect, hath been afflicted, through various causes, with grave disorders and maladies. Not for one day did it gain ease, nay its sickness waxed more severe, as it fell under the treatment of ignorant physicians, who gave full rein to their personal desires ...
>
> We behold it, in this day, at the mercy of rulers so drunk with pride that they cannot discern clearly their own best advantage, much less recognize a Revelation so bewildering and challenging as this ...[92]
>
> This is the Day whereon the earth shall tell out her tidings. The workers of iniquity are her burdens, could ye but perceive it ...[93]
>
> All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth ...[94]
>
> A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive. Consider the peoples of the West. Witness how, in their pursuit of that which is vain and trivial, they have sacrificed, and are still sacrificing, countless lives for the sake of its establishment and promotion ...[95]
>
> In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil ... Strange and astonishing things exist in the earth but they are hidden from the minds and the understanding of men. These things are capable of changing the whole atmosphere of the earth and their contamination would prove lethal ...[96]

92. Ibid., 254–55.
93. Ibid., 40.
94. Ibid., 215.
95. Ibid., 196.
96. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, 69.

In later writings, including those addressed to humanity collectively, Bahá'u'lláh urged the adoption of steps toward what He called the "Great Peace." These, He said, would mitigate the sufferings and dislocation which He saw lying ahead of the human race until the world's peoples embrace the Revelation of God and through it bring about the Most Great Peace:

> 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. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquility of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. 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 ... The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he were entering his own home ... That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race ... It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.[97]

"Not of Mine Own Volition"

In His letter to Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, the ruler of Persia, which refrains from any rebuke concerning His imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál and the other injustices He had experienced at the king's hand, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of His role in the Divine Plan:

> I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing. And He bade Me lift up My voice between earth and heaven, and for this there befell Me what hath caused the tears of every man of understanding to flow. The

97. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, 165–167.

> learning current amongst men I studied not; their schools I entered not. Ask of the city wherein I dwelt, that thou mayest be well assured that I am not of them who speak falsely.[98]

The mission to which He had devoted His entire life, which had cost Him the life of a cherished younger son,[99] as well as all of His material possessions, which had undermined His health, and brought imprisonment, exile, and abuse, was not one that He had initiated. "Not of Mine own volition," He said, had He entered on such a course:

> Think ye, O people, that I hold within My grasp the control of God's ultimate Will and Purpose?... Had the ultimate destiny of God's Faith been in Mine hands, I would have never consented, even though for one moment, to manifest Myself unto you, nor would I have allowed one word to fall from My lips. Of this God Himself is, verily, a witness.[100]

Having surrendered unreservedly to God's summons, He was equally in no doubt about the role which He had been called upon to play in human history. As the Manifestation of God to the age of fulfillment, He is the one promised in all the scriptures of the past, the "Desire of all nations," the "King of Glory." To Judaism He is "Lord of Hosts"; to Christianity, the Return of Christ in the glory of the Father; to Islam, the "Great Announcement"; to Buddhism, the Maitreya Buddha; to Hinduism, the new incarnation of Krishna; to Zoroastrianism, the advent of "Sháh-Bahrám."[101]

Like the Manifestations of God gone before Him, He is both the Voice of God and its human channel: "When I contemplate, O my God, the relationship that bindeth me to Thee, I am moved to proclaim to all created things 'verily I am God!'; and when I consider my own self, lo, I find it coarser than clay!"[102]

"Certain ones among you," He declared, "have said: 'He it

98. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, 11. The phrase "Not of Mine own volition" appears in the same paragraph immediately above the excerpt cited.
99. Bahá'u'lláh's son, Mírzá Mihdí, a youth of twenty-two, died in 1870, in an accidental fall resulting from the conditions in which the family was imprisoned.
100. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 91.
101. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 94–96.
102. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, 113.

is Who hath laid claim to be God.' By God! This is a gross calumny. I am but a servant of God Who hath believed in Him and in His signs ... My tongue, and My heart, and My inner and My outer being testify that there is no God but Him, that all others have been created by His behest, and been fashioned through the operation of His Will ... I am He that telleth abroad the favors with which God hath, through His bounty, favored Me. If this be My transgression, then I am truly the first of the transgressors ..."[103]

Bahá'u'lláh's writings seize upon a host of metaphors in their attempt to express the paradox that lies at the heart of the phenomenon of God's Revelation of His Will:

> I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the Almighty. I unfold the drooping wings of every broken bird and start it on its flight.[104]

> This is but a leaf which the winds of the will of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised, have stirred. Can it be still when the tempestuous winds are blowing? Nay, by Him Who is the Lord of all Names and Attributes! They move it as they list ...[105]

THE COVENANT OF GOD WITH HUMANKIND

In June 1877, Bahá'u'lláh at last emerged from the strict confinement of the prison-city of Acre, and moved with His family to "Mazra'ih," a small estate a few miles north of the city.[106] As had been predicted in His statement to the Turkish government, Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz had been overthrown and assassinated in a palace coup, and gusts from the winds of political change sweeping the world were beginning to invade even the shuttered precincts of the Ottoman imperial system. After a brief two-year stay at Mazra'ih, Bahá'u'lláh moved to "Bahjí," a large mansion surrounded by gardens, which His

103. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 228.
104. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, 169.
105. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, 11–12.
106. Although Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz's order of banishment was never formally revoked, the responsible political authorities came to regard it as null and void. They, therefore, indicated that Bahá'u'lláh could establish His residence outside the city walls, should He choose to do so.

son 'Abdu'l-Bahá had rented for Him and the members of His extended family.[107] The remaining twelve years of His life were devoted to His writings on a wide range of spiritual and social issues, and to receiving a stream of Bahá'í pilgrims who made their way, with great difficulty, from Persia and other lands.

Throughout the Near and Middle East the nucleus of a community life was beginning to take shape among those who had accepted His message. For its guidance, Bahá'u'lláh had revealed a system of laws and institutions designed to give practical effect to the principles in His writings.[108] Authority was vested in councils democratically elected by the whole community, provisions were made to exclude the possibility of a clerical elite arising, and principles of consultation and group decision making were established.

At the heart of this system was what Bahá'u'lláh termed a "new Covenant between God and humankind. The distinguishing feature of humanity's coming of age is that, for the first time in its history, the entire human race is consciously involved, however dimly, in the awareness of its own oneness and of the earth as a single homeland. This awakening opens the way to a new relationship between God and humankind." As the peoples of the world embrace the spiritual authority inherent in the guidance of the Revelation of God for this age, Bahá'u'lláh said, they will find in themselves a moral empowerment which human effort alone has proven incapable of generating. "A new race of men"[109] will emerge as the result of

107. The mansion, which had been built by a wealthy Christian Arab merchant of Acre, had been abandoned by him when an outbreak of plague began to spread. The property was first rented and, some years after Bahá'u'lláh's passing, purchased by the Bahá'í community. Bahá'u'lláh's grave is located in a Shrine in the gardens of Bahjí, and is now the focal point of pilgrimage for the Bahá'í world.

108. For a summary of this body of teaching see Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, 143–57, and Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá'í Administration* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973), throughout. A fully annotated English translation of the central document in this body of writings, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas ("The Most Holy Book"), was published to coincide with the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's passing, 1992.

109. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent*, 16.

this relationship, and the work of building a global civilization will begin. The mission of the Bahá'í community was to demonstrate the efficacy of this Covenant in healing the ills that divide the human race.

Bahá'u'lláh died at Bahjí on May 29, 1892, in His 75th year. At the time of His passing, the cause entrusted to Him forty years earlier in the darkness of Teheran's Black Pit was poised to break free of the Islamic lands where it had taken shape, and to establish itself first across America and Europe and then throughout the world. In doing so, it would itself become a vindication of the promise of the new Covenant between God and humankind. For alone of all the world's independent religions, the Bahá'í Faith and its community of believers were to pass successfully through the critical first century of their existence with their unity firmly intact, undamaged by the age-old blight of schism and faction. Their experience offers compelling evidence for Bahá'u'lláh's assurance that the human race, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work as one people, in a common global homeland.

Just two years before His death, Bahá'u'lláh received at Bahjí one of few Westerners to meet Him, and the only one to leave a written account of the experience. The visitor was Edward Granville Browne, a rising young orientalist from Cambridge University, whose attention had originally been attracted by the dramatic history of the Báb and His heroic band of followers. Of his meeting with Bahá'u'lláh, Browne wrote:

> Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold (for no distinct intimation had been given to me), a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure ... The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow ... No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain! A mild dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued:—"Praise be to God that thou hast attained! ... Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile ... We desire but the good of the

> world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment ... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled—what harm is there in this? ... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come ..."[110]

110. Edward G. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative* (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930), xxxix–xl.

An overview of the significance of the 1992–1993 Bahá'í Holy Year and its twin commemorations in the Holy Land and New York City.

THE SECOND BAHÁ'Í HOLY YEAR

The term "Holy Year" was used by Shoghi Effendi to capture for the Bahá'í world the significance of the centenary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic mission in October 1852. In one of the most poignant and dramatic passages to be found throughout his writings, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith set the challenges then facing Bahá'u'lláh's followers in the context of this historic turning point in the unfolding of the Divine purpose:

> No matter how long the period that separates them from ultimate victory; however arduous the task; however formidable the exertions demanded of them; however dark the days which mankind, perplexed and sorely-tried, must, in its hour of travail, traverse; however severe the tests with which they who are to redeem its fortunes will be confronted; ... I adjure them, by the precious blood that flowed in such great profusion, by the lives of the unnumbered saints and heroes who were immolated, by the supreme, the glorious sacrifice of the Prophet-Herald of our Faith, by the tribulations which its Founder, Himself, willingly underwent, so that His Cause might live, His Order might redeem a shattered world and its glory might suffuse the entire planet—I adjure them, as this solemn hour draws nigh, to resolve never to flinch, never to hesitate, never to relax, until each and every objective in the Plans to be proclaimed, at a later date, has been fully consummated.[1]

It is against this background that one must try to appreciate the enormous importance that attaches to the

1. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950–1957* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), 38–9.

year 1992, the one-hundredth anniversary of both Bahá-'u'lláh's ascension on 29 May and of the subsequent inauguration of His Covenant. The year marks, in short, the completion of the process of Divine Revelation that began with the Báb's Declaration, 23 May 1844, and the inauguration of the system which, Bahá'ís believe, will come to be seen as the Ark of human salvation. Little wonder that the Head of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice, has proclaimed the twelve-month period from Riḍván 1992 to Riḍván 1993 a second Holy Year: "that special time when we shall pause to appreciate the tumultuous record of events which will have brought us to the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and to reflect with due solemnity upon the redemptive purpose of the life of the most precious Being ever to have drawn breath on this planet."

The two Holy Years bracket, as it were, the first anniversary of the entire period of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry. The forty years between the two centenaries have seen the successful emergence of the entire structure of the Administrative Order whose "nucleus and pattern" the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith conceived, the establishment of His Faith in the most remote corners of the planet, and the emergence of a community of people representative of the entire diversity of humankind. The 1992 centenary, therefore, became a door opening onto an entirely new stage in the unfolding of Bahá'u'lláh's mission, a stage that will parallel, Bahá'ís believe, the emergence of international peace.

The events of the second Holy Year opened with the gathering at the Bahá'í World Centre of some 3000 believers in commemoration of the anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension. Coming from hundreds of different ethnic and tribal backgrounds, the participants represented one of the most diverse assemblages of people ever to come together on one occasion. The high point of the event was the service of commemoration itself, which took place in the precincts of Bahá'u'lláh's Shrine at Bahjí between 2:30 a.m. and dawn on 29 May, corresponding to the time of His passing. Three Hands of the Cause of God were present, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, Alí-Akbar Furútan, and 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá. These leading

dignitaries of the Faith joined the members of the Universal House of Justice for prayers in the chamber of the Mansion where the Manifestation of God had passed away a century earlier. Following this, the entire company circumambulated the Shrine, moving along the great outer path of the gardens, which had been illuminated for the occasion with some 6,000 candles.

In Haifa arrangements had been made for the participants to walk up the pathway that ascends Mount Carmel from its foot to the Shrine of the Báb and which, Shoghi Effendi declared, would in the future be ascended by "pilgrim kings" come to pay their tribute to the martyred Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh. After circumambulating the Shrine, the procession continued on to the Seat of the Universal House of Justice. There, participants had the rare privilege of viewing a portrait photograph of the Founder of their Faith.

On the day before the commemoration observances, a particularly poignant event took place. Shoghi Effendi had

The commemoration of the centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land was attended by 3000 Bahá'ís representing hundreds of tribes and ethnic backgrounds.

inaugurated during the first Holy Year (1952–53) a ten-year Teaching Crusade, and he declared that those who arose to respond to the call to open virgin territories to the Faith would be designated "Knights of Bahá'u'lláh," and their names would be inscribed on a special scroll that would be interred under the threshold of His Shrine. Now, nearly forty years later, with the settlement of the few goal territories remaining from that great Plan, made possible by the opening of the lands of the Soviet Bloc, the time had come for the fulfillment of his expressed wish. From all parts of the world, surviving Knights, now aged, some in frail health, came to the World Centre at the special invitation of the Universal House of Justice. In a gathering on the concourse of the Seat, Wednesday afternoon, 27 May 1992, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum unveiled the scroll, and the guests of honor had the inestimable bounty of seeing where their own names had been inscribed, most of them several decades earlier, during the lifetime of the Guardian.

On the morning of 28 May, the participants gathered at Bahjí to witness the placement of the scroll bearing the Roll of Honor of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh in a chamber at the entrance door of the inner Sanctuary of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. It was set into its place by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum.

The second great event of the Holy Year was the celebration of the centenary of the inauguration of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. It occurred in New York City on 23–26 November and was the largest gathering of Bahá'ís ever to assemble. An estimated 27,000 members of the Faith from all parts of the world and a great diversity of ethnic backgrounds took part in a program of brilliant commemorative events designed, in the words of the Universal House of Justice, to bring to mind "the inauguration of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and to proclaim its aims and unifying power."

The Congress theme of the oneness of humanity was given powerful expression on the final day when the Universal House of Justice addressed the gathering *via* satellite. The broadcast was also received at more than fifty down-link sites around the

world. Using a state-of-the-art network of eight satellites to reach all parts of the world, the broadcast included a two-way video hook-up with the World Centre of the Faith in Haifa and audio links to subsidiary conferences in Buenos Aires, Argentina; Sydney, Australia; New Delhi, India; Nairobi, Kenya; Panama City, Panama; Bucharest, Romania; Moscow, Russia; Singapore; and Apia, Western Samoa. "It opened up a new world for a religion whose basic principle is oneness," said an executive with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation who was a member of the Congress Program Committee. An electrifying moment occurred when suddenly from across the globe came the greetings of the Bahá'ís assembled in Moscow who were participating for the first time in a worldwide Bahá'í event.

The coming of Bahá'u'lláh, the House of Justice said in its message, makes possible "the beginning of a wholly new relationship between humanity and its Supreme Creator," a relationship summed up in the Covenant which He established. The message continued: "Its spiritual dynamic and cohesive power, its unifying principles and practical institutional provisions are a pattern for the healing of the ills afflicting our fractured societies and defective social systems ... Let those seriously concerned about the state and fate of the world give due attention to the claims of Bahá'u'lláh. Let them realize that the storms battering at the foundations of society will not be stilled unless and until spiritual principles are actively engaged in the search for solutions to social problems. Let us, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, redouble our efforts in the exercise of our sacred duty to acquaint all humanity with the animating purpose of the world-wide Law of Bahá'u'lláh ... May our words proclaim and our deeds demonstrate, that there is only one God, only one religion, only one race."

The main sessions of the Congress were held at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, a facility that provided a magnificent setting for pageantry, dramatic staging, audio-visual presentations, and the contributions of a 400-voice choir and a 70-piece orchestra, both of them assembled from around the world. The first session opened with a breathtaking oratorio celebrating the coming of Bahá'u'lláh especially written for

the occasion. Throughout the four days, one of the most effective features of the presentations made was their success in drawing on and integrating the music of many different cultures.

The role of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as "Center of the Covenant" came powerfully alive at an exhibition installed in five contiguous ballrooms of the Hilton Hotel, and running throughout the four days of the Congress. Entitled "'Abdu'l-Bahá: Mission to America," the Pavilion was the child of an artistic collaboration between a former Disney set designer and a writer and filmmaker from Canada. Using three-dimensional dioramas depicting New York of eighty years ago, and a highly imaginative combination of news magazine format and blown-up archival photographs displayed on kiosks and panels, the "Pavilion" was designed, in the words of one of its creators, "to provide the thousands of visitors with the feeling that they had themselves experienced meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá and hearing His message that a new universal civilization is dawning." Judging

As the largest gathering of Bahá'ís ever to assemble, the Second Bahá'í World Congress was a brilliant commemorative event in honor of the inauguration of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant.

by the radiant faces of those leaving the Pavilion, it achieved its objective.

In addition to these major events, two concerts were held at Carnegie Hall, one of them a tribute to John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie, whose engaging public references to the unifying influences of the Faith he adopted 25 years ago have delighted audiences on all continents of the globe.

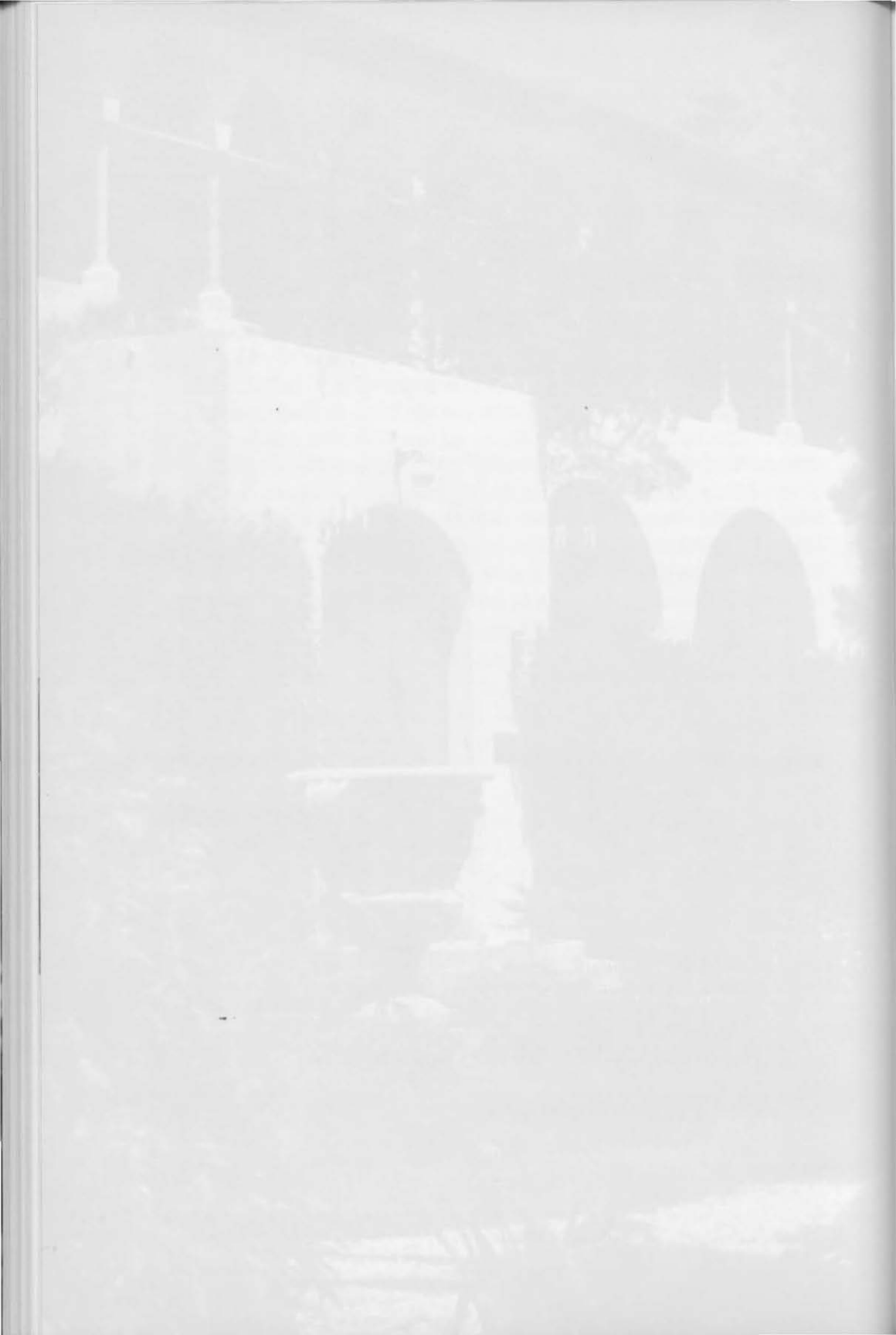
Other significant programs included the Youth Movement Forum and Youth Services Exposition, which addressed the challenges facing young Bahá'ís at this time in history and provided the opportunity for discussion of issues related to the Faith. The Forum, which brought together some 5,000 youth from 52 countries, included dialogue sessions, arts workshops, the Services Exposition and two dramatic performances at the Sheraton Hotel.

"I've been working in this industry since 1946, and I've never been more proud of an event in my whole business career," said Benjamin La Rosa, vice-president for operations of Javits Center. "From a planning point of view, I had been terrified at the difficulties of getting that many people into and out of the Center each day. But there was not a single traffic problem, not one incident caused by pushing or shoving. This was probably the most orderly and courteous group of people I have ever seen in my life."

Apart from the commemorative events at the Bahá'í World Centre and in New York City, the Holy Year provided the historic setting for an event long awaited by the entire Bahá'í world, the publication of the first authorized and fully annotated English language edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the "Most Holy Book" of the Bahá'í Revelation. Described by Shoghi Effendi as "that priceless treasury enshrining for all time the brightest emanations of the mind of Bahá'u'lláh," the Kitáb-i-Aqdas represents the charter of the World Order He has founded and the corpus of the laws designed for the global civilization of humanity's future. In it Bahá'u'lláh reasserts the sovereignty of God as the sole authority governing moral life. Fundamental values around which past societies have organized themselves are reformulated to meet the needs of a

planet contracted into a single homeland, and new laws and concepts are enunciated with a view to freeing human consciousness from culturally conditioned patterns of response.

Right: The Mansion of Bahjí, outside Acre, where Bahá'u'lláh spent the last years of His life.



This article was first issued as a booklet which accompanied copies of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas *sent to scholarly reviewers world-wide.*

THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS: ITS PLACE IN BAHÁ'Í LITERATURE

Nineteen ninety-two marked the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh. In the past hundred years, the Faith He founded has grown from an obscure movement in the Middle East to the second most widespread of the world's independent religions.[1] The Bahá'í community, which embraces people from virtually every racial and tribal group, and has maintained its unity in doing so, very likely represents the most diverse organized body of people on the planet today. The centenary coincides with the appearance of the first authorized English-language edition of the book that is central among Bahá'u'lláh's writings, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas ("The Most Holy Book"). Nucleus of a body of writings supplementing and explaining it, the Aqdas was first published in its original Arabic, in Bahá'u'lláh's lifetime. As the Bahá'í community emerged throughout the world, the book's provisions determined its shape and development, through the insights provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'u'lláh's son and great-grandson. Both were successively appointed under His authority as the interpreters of His message.

The newly published volume is extensively annotated on the basis of Bahá'u'lláh's own amplification of the text

1. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 1982; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1992.

and the work of His two interpreters. Translations into other languages will quickly follow.

HUMANITY'S COMING OF AGE

The expansion of the Bahá'í community has brought the teachings of its Founder to the attention of an ever-widening public. Frequently cited among these themes are the oneness of the human race, the equality of the sexes, and the essential harmony of faith and reason. Perhaps especially familiar are concepts of the underlying unity of all religions and the common purpose of the Prophets who have inspired them.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on the evolutionary process provide a helpful context for an understanding of the purpose of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The human race as Bahá'u'lláh describes it has neither fallen from some primordial perfection nor is it the product of socio-economic forces. As the arrowhead of evolution, human consciousness has latent within it all of the attributes of a Divinity whose essence is forever unknowable.

What should be recognized, Bahá'u'lláh says, is that these capacities have owed their cultivation chiefly to the driving force provided throughout history by successive interventions of that same ultimate Reality. Associated with the missions of such transcendent figures as Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, and Muḥammad, the phenomenon of Divine Revelation is an ever-recurring one. Without either beginning or end, it is an integral feature of the evolutionary order and the ultimate cause of the civilizing of human nature.

Bahá'u'lláh's writings describe humanity as today entering on its collective coming-of-age, capable of seeing the entire panorama of its development as a continuum. The challenge of maturity is for the peoples of the world to accept that they are one race, and to build together the foundations of global civilization. The influence that is awakening this consciousness throughout the world is that universal Revelation of God which was promised in all the scriptures of humanity's past. Bahá'u'lláh writes as its Spokesman, in the line of Divine Messengers stretching back beyond the beginnings of recorded history.

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas the Divine guidance for the age of humanity's collective maturity is endowed with a system of law, precept, and institutions capable of bringing into existence a global commonwealth ordered by principles of social justice.

"This is a Book," its concluding pages state, "which hath become the Lamp of the Eternal unto the world, and His straight, undeviating Path amidst the peoples of the earth. Say: This is the Dayspring of Divine knowledge, if ye be of them that understand, and the Dawning-place of God's commandments, if ye be of those who comprehend."[2]

FOUNDATIONS OF A GLOBAL ETHOS

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas makes its appearance in a world which, since the Enlightenment's rejection of religion as the ultimate moral authority, has engaged in an increasingly urgent search for an alternative place to stand. Today, it is apparent that this effort has failed. Neither Marxist determinism nor popular faith in situational or consensus ethics offers a basis upon which the system of values required by an emerging global society can be erected.

Bahá'u'lláh reasserts the sovereignty of God as the sole authority governing moral life. God exists; He is the Source of all that is; He reveals through His Messengers those laws and principles that are primarily responsible for the civilizing of human nature. The autonomy of the individual is conditioned, therefore, not only by the limitations of the natural world he or she inhabits, but also by a spiritual universe that transcends and pervades it. "Hold ye fast unto His statutes and commandments," is the counsel of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, "and be not of those who, following their idle fancies and vain imaginings, have clung to the standards fixed by their own selves, and cast behind their backs the standards laid down by God."[3]

Fundamental values around which all past societies have organized themselves are reformulated in the Aqdas to meet

2. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), 87.
3. Ibid., 25.

the needs of a planet contracted into a single homeland and a human race awakening to greatly enhanced powers of reason and perception. New laws and concepts are enunciated whose aim is to free human consciousness from culturally conditioned patterns of response and to nurture the emergence of global civilization.

The Aqdas is not a systematic code of law. Guidance that relates to details of individual life or social practice is set in passages which summon the reader to a challenging new conception of human nature and purpose. Evgenii Eduardovich Bertels, the nineteenth-century Russian scholar who first attempted a translation of the book, compared Bahá'u'lláh's pen writing the Aqdas to a bird, now soaring on the summits of heaven, now descending to touch the homeliest questions of everyday need.

The book's prescriptions range across subjects as varied as aesthetics, weapons control, sanitation, penal law, and the need for an auxiliary, international language. The inextinguishable human proclivity toward ritual is directed into a few areas of personal life. Various prohibitions inherited from earlier religious traditions are annulled and the door is firmly shut on the emergence of a professional clergy. The principal themes addressed in the Aqdas, however, are those great issues that are the dominant concerns of all Bahá'u'lláh's writings and of contemporary society: justice, government, law, liberty, belief, education, family, and the promotion of civilization.

ON JUSTICE

"THIS IS THE INFALLIBLE BALANCE WHICH THE HAND OF GOD IS HOLDING, IN WHICH ALL WHO ARE IN THE HEAVENS AND ALL WHO ARE ON EARTH ARE WEIGHED ..."[4]

Throughout the ages of its long journey from barbarism, the human race has been sustained by the promise—enshrined in

4. Ibid., 86.

the scriptures of all the great religions—that an age of justice would one day come. The central thrust of Bahá'u'lláh's writings is that we are witnessing its dawn. Through travail and suffering the peoples of the world are being purged of anachronistic habits and attitudes and awakened to the possibilities that their common humanity confers. They are being prepared to accept both their own oneness and their ultimate dependence on the justice of a loving and unfailing Creator.

Justice is conceived by Bahá'u'lláh as the foundation-stone of the coming global civilization. It is the essential means for the integration of the diverse peoples and communities of the planet. "The purpose of justice," Bahá'u'lláh's writings state, "is the appearance of unity among men." [5]

Love, mercy, and forgiveness are among the qualities that must distinguish human beings in their personal relationships one with another; the gradual cultivation of such responses in human nature has been one of the primary objects of the successive revelations of the Divine will. For these qualities to flourish as the distinguishing features of human life, however, each member of society and each component group must be able to trust that he or she is protected by standards that apply equally to all.

The concepts, laws, and principles enunciated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are intended to provide the spiritual bedrock of this assurance. The book represents, in its own words, "the infallible Balance which the Hand of God is holding, in which all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth are weighed ... Through it the poor have been enriched, the learned enlightened, and the seekers enabled to ascend unto the presence of God."[6]

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5. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), 67.
6. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 86.

ON GOVERNMENT

"THE PRECEPTS LAID DOWN BY GOD CONSTITUTE THE HIGHEST MEANS FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF ORDER IN THE WORLD AND THE SECURITY OF ITS PEOPLE."[7]

The Aqdas reiterates Bahá'u'lláh's endorsement, expressed in a number of places in His writings, of the principle of democratic and constitutional government. Its prescriptions envision the State as the servant of God and an instrument ensuring the rights of all of society's members.

Several passages of the book make reference to monarchs of the nineteenth century. They are warned that through historical processes over which they will have no control, the governors of human society will be compelled to recognize that they are essentially "vassals" of God answerable for the powers they exercise.[8]

These passages are best appreciated in the context of a larger body of major writings addressed to these same rulers. In them, Bahá'u'lláh insists that the real "treasures" of any land are its people.[9] Governments are warned "not to deal unjustly with any one that appealeth to you"; they are called on to recognize that "the poor are the trust of God in your midst"; the growing burden of public taxation is declared to be "wholly and grossly unjust"; should any government commit aggression, the rest are called on to "rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice."[10]

Against this background the Kitáb-i-Aqdas admonishes the arbiters of human affairs to defend the rights of the helpless and disadvantaged. Governments are not only summoned to "bind ... the broken with the hands of justice," but also have the moral right and obligation to "crush the oppressor" who is

7. Ibid., 19.
8. Ibid., 49.
9. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), 236.
10. Ibid., 251–254.

responsible for such abuses, "with the rod of the commandments of your Lord." [11]

ON LAW

"THINK NOT THAT WE HAVE REVEALED UNTO YOU A MERE CODE OF LAWS. NAY, RATHER, WE HAVE UNSEALED THE CHOICE WINE WITH THE FINGERS OF MIGHT AND POWER."[12]

As Western civilization has spread, legal codes everywhere have parted company with the metaphysical moorings that originally anchored them. A consequence has been that the concerns of law have come to focus chiefly on the tasks of deterring crime and settling disputes. In practice, even this relatively limited resolve has steadily weakened in the face of accelerating social breakdown. The behavioral sciences, however valuable, have not fulfilled their early promise as a sufficient source of relief.

Elaboration and full codification of the Divine Law revealed by Bahá'u'lláh is a task for posterity, and much of its application envisions a condition of society that will emerge only in the distant future. Its essential nature, however, is already apparent. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas reasserts both man's moral responsibility for his actions and the right of society to enforce those laws established for the maintenance of the general well-being: "Beware lest, through compassion, ye neglect to carry out the statutes of the religion of God; do that which hath been bidden you by Him Who is compassionate and merciful."[13]

The fundamental purpose of the Divine commandments, whether or not they carry legal sanctions, is to awaken the rational soul to its own real nature and to the powers latent within it. The Book of God is thus the "quickener of mankind,"

11. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 52.
12. Ibid., 21.
13. Ibid., 36.

the "source of true felicity."[14] When seen with the eyes of the spirit, it is "the Bounty of God." "Consider the mercy of God and His gifts,"[15] the Aqdas counsels: "He enjoineth upon you that which shall profit you, though He Himself can well dispense with all creatures."[16]

ON LIBERTY

"WERE MEN TO OBSERVE THAT WHICH WE HAVE SENT DOWN UNTO THEM FROM THE HEAVEN OF REVELATION, THEY WOULD, OF A CERTAINTY, ATTAIN UNTO PERFECT LIBERTY."[17]

One of the central dilemmas of Western civilization is society's need to draw a clear line between freedom and licence. Civil and other legitimate human rights have come to be used as justification for the expression of almost any human impulse. At best, the accepted limit on the individual's rights is the point at which these claims infringe on the rights of others.

Such a standard, even if it could be achieved, assumes a human race that is capable of determining, in most areas of moral decision, behavior that will serve its real needs. Thus, analogies are frequently drawn to various fields of scientific activity, the implication being that objective standards exist for attaining a reasonable measure of consensus on the promotion of human well-being.

But science is admittedly amoral and the cultural perceptions of humanity widely divergent. We confront again in Bahá'u'lláh's writings His fundamental assertion that moral insight and coherence come only as the gift of that Divinity which "chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must

14. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957), 215.
15. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 87.
16. Ibid., 40.
17. Ibid., 63–4.

needs be regarded as the generating impulse ... underlying the whole of creation."[18]

It is in this perspective that the Kitáb-i-Aqdas condemns strongly attempts to invoke "liberty" as justification for conduct that "causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety," conduct that "debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity."

On Belief

"THIS IS THE CHANGELESS FAITH OF GOD, ETERNAL IN THE PAST, ETERNAL IN THE FUTURE."[19]

The Revelation of God for the age of humanity's collective maturity, Bahá'u'lláh says, transcends the diverse sectarian systems inherited from past ages. As there is but one ultimate Reality, and one human race inhabiting our planet, so the relationship between them has always been one and unbroken. The primary purpose of the Messengers of God has not been to teach different religions but progressively to unlock a wider range of capacities within human consciousness and human society.

In a commentary related to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh states: "The Prophets and Chosen Ones have all been commissioned by the One True God ... to nurture the trees of human existence with the living waters of uprightness and understanding, that there may appear from them that which God hath deposited within their inmost selves."[20] The investigation of truth is, therefore, a right and responsibility of the individual conscience. No person or agency can claim the authority to coerce belief or compel uniformity of opinion.

It is in this spirit that the Aqdas urges: "Consort with all religions with amity and concord, that they may inhale from you the sweet fragrance of God,"[21] and that it counsels:

18. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 65.
19. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 85.
20. Ibid., 139.
21. Ibid., 72.

"Beware lest any name debar you from Him Who is the Possessor of all names."[22] Its sharp warning to clergy and theologians of the world's diverse religious traditions must be read in this same perspective: "Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men."[23]

On Learning

"THIS IS THE DAYSPRING OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE, IF YE BE OF THEM THAT UNDERSTAND ..."[24]

Bahá'u'lláh's writings declare education to be the right and obligation of every person, woman and man alike. "Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone."[25] An age has dawned, He says, in which "the secrets of the earth are laid bare,"[26] and their exploration in a spirit of service to humanity is an act of worship.

The most important goal of education is the discovery and cultivation of the moral capacities latent in human nature itself. In consequence of the universal Revelation of God, "a new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth."[27] A revolution in information, arts, and technologies has been set in motion that will most greatly advantage those who learn to function as moral beings, committed to the ideal of global unity. It will be through the acquisition of knowledge, not through privileges of sex, race, or wealth, that the true empowerment of the world's peoples will increasingly come. Such education calls for the exercise of self-discipline. The

22. Ibid., 80.
23. Ibid., 56.
24. Ibid., 87.
25. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), 26.
26. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 39.
27. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 196.

motivation that will make the effort possible is love for God. The Divine commandments, the Aqdas says, are no "mere code of laws,"[28] but the "lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures."[29]

ON FAMILY

"ENTER INTO WEDLOCK, O PEOPLE, THAT YE MAY BRING FORTH ONE WHO WILL MAKE MENTION OF ME AMID MY SERVANTS."[30]

"God hath prescribed matrimony unto you," the Aqdas says, "... that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants."[31] Bahá'u'lláh envisions the re-emergence of the extended family as the norm throughout the world, and various ordinances of the Aqdas reinforce this ideal. While the selection of a marital partner rests with the son or daughter concerned, for example, the requirement to seek parental consent aims at creating a family investment in the success of the marriage.

The provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas relating to family must be read in the context of Bahá'u'lláh's general teachings. "Women and men," He writes, "have been and will always be equal in the sight of God."[32] Justice today demands that society so reorganize its affairs as to provide equality of opportunity to all persons, without regard to differences of sex. Should financial resources be so limited that choices must be made, educational priority should be given to girls over boys.

The latter injunction relates to certain responsibilities and claims that attach to sexual identity. The education of girls is particularly important because, although both parents participate in the education of children, mothers have the

28. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 21.
29. Ibid., 20.
30. Ibid., 41.
31. Ibid.
32. Translated from an unpublished Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh.

predominant influence during the earliest years. They are the primary agents of the civilizing process.

Similarly, men are called on to assume the chief responsibilities for the maintenance of families' financial well-being, and a number of provisions in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas take this particularly into account.

ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF CIVILIZATION

"THE WORLD'S EQUILIBRIUM HATH BEEN UPSET THROUGH THE VIBRATING INFLUENCE OF THIS MOST GREAT, THIS NEW WORLD ORDER."[33]

A common feature of all of the great religions of the past has been the teaching that the purpose of human life is for the soul to know, to love, and to worship its Creator. Bahá'u'lláh's writings on this theme are particularly rich and evocative. They emphasize, however, that this inner spiritual quickening must motivate each human being to respond in his or her own way to the truth that: "All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization."[34]

Capacities as yet undreamed of are awakening in the peoples of all races and cultures; their blending will transform the very nature of cultural experience: "This is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men ... Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead."[35]

As the peoples of the world are drawn inescapably into a single planetary society, they are being challenged to free themselves from cultural limitations and prejudices, and to embrace the message of God that alone can unite their hearts and minds. In the words of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: "O peoples of the earth! ... Cast away that which ye possess, and, on the wings of detachment, soar beyond all created things. Thus biddeth you

33. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 85.
34. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 215.
35. Ibid., 6–7.

the Lord of creation, the movement of Whose Pen hath revolutionized the soul of mankind."[36]

THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS AND THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

"The earth," Bahá'u'lláh says, "is but one country, and mankind its citizens."[37] Today, His teachings find expression in the life of a united worldwide community representing the entire diversity of humankind and established in every part of the globe. Its achievements in such matters as racial integration, the equality of the sexes, and the promotion of education are particularly noteworthy.

The distinguishing feature of the Bahá'í community, however, is the administrative system with which its Founder endowed it. Operating on consultative principles taught by Bahá'u'lláh, the community is administered by democratically elected councils at the local, national, and international levels. It has no clergy. Its activities are supported solely by the financial contributions of its own registered membership.

The system is based on explicit provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: "The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established ... It behoveth them [its members] to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth."[38]

To the Faith's international governing body, the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'u'lláh entrusted the function of deciding on all matters not explicitly revealed in the Text itself. Thus He ensured that, until the advent of the next Manifestation of God a thousand or more years hence, the World Order He founded will be equipped with a legislative authority able to keep it abreast of the needs of a rapidly changing world.

36. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 39.
37. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 250.
38. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 29.

The new pattern of society which He inaugurated, Bahá'u'lláh says, will unfold in the same gradual and inexorable fashion that characterizes all the phenomena of the evolutionary process: "Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light."[39]

39. Bahá'u'lláh cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 117.

Selected events around the Bahá'í World during the 1992–1993 Bahá'í Holy Year.

CHRONOLOGY

APRIL 1992

BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTRE

The Universal House of Justice announced the formation of ten new National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies: the National Assemblies of Albania, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Greenland, Hungary and Poland; the Regional Assemblies of the Baltic States; Central Asia, comprising the republics of Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; and Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. The re-establishment of two National Spiritual Assemblies was also announced: the Congo Republic and Niger. These formations brought the total number of Assemblies to 165.

MARIANA ISLANDS

The Bahá'í Women's Association of Guam (BWA) participated in Earth Week (18–24 April) with a display and the distribution of copies of the Bahá'í International Community's Statement on Nature. Seedlings provided by the Department of Agriculture were distributed by the BWA to children and adults visiting the display as a symbol of the earth's regeneration.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

A Bahá'í stamp was issued on 21 April by the Postal Service as part of a five-stamp series in recognition of the Inter-Religious Organization of Trinidad and Tobago and its efforts to foster harmony among the country's religious organizations.

UNITED STATES

Prime Minister Hamilton Green of Guyana addressed the Bahá'í National Convention in the United States. He also addressed a reception in his honor sponsored by Health for Humanity, an organization founded by Bahá'í physicians operating under the aegis of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. During an interview on public radio, Prime Minister Green highlighted

the services provided by the Bahá'ís in Guyana.

The Bahá'í community of Los Angeles mobilized emergency relief units in the wake of the violent race riots in their city. The Bahá'í Center, which survived in one of the hardest hit areas of the city, became a hub for food and clothing distribution and a dispatch for calls for transportation and other assistance.

MAY 1992

ALBANIA

A Liaison Office was established in the Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Tirana to enhance, coordinate and facilitate academic and cultural relations between the University and Landegg Academy, which operates under Bahá'í auspices in Switzerland.

At the request of the Institute of Pedagogical Studies of Albania, the Institute of International Education and Development of Landegg Academy organized a second national symposium on the role of the family in moral education, which was held in Tirana from 15 to 17 May. The purpose of the symposium was to present Albanian educators and parents with alternative approaches to the moral education of children following the change in Albania's political climate.

Clockwise from Top Left: The newly elected NSAs of Azerbaijan, Hungary and Niger (reformed) were among ten formed at the start of the Holy Year.

CENTENARY OF THE ASCENSION OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

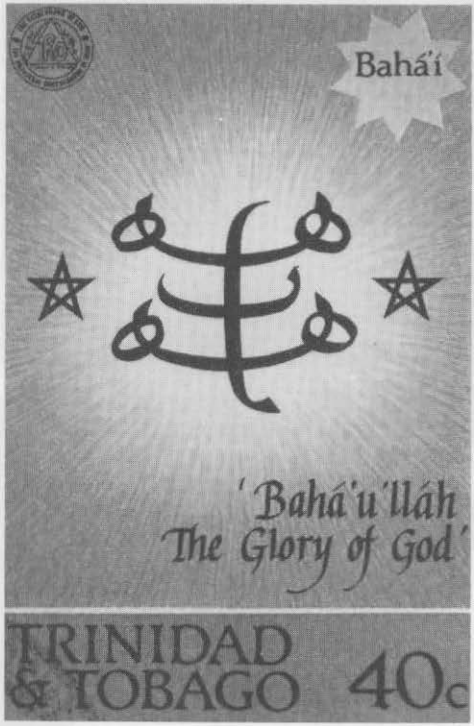
Some 3000 Bahá'ís from more than 165 countries and dependent territories and a wide array of ethnic backgrounds gathered in the Holy Land to commemorate the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. At 2:00 am on 29 May, after a program of prayers and readings, the solemn assemblage of believers circumambulated the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh along paths lined with thousands of flickering candles. Observances were also held by Bahá'í communities worldwide.

BRAZIL

The Federal Chamber of Deputies held a special two-hour "solemn session" on 28 May to observe the 100th anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. Deputies representing twelve major political groupings gave addresses in tribute to Bahá'u'lláh, which were published for distribution to all federal departments.

CANADA

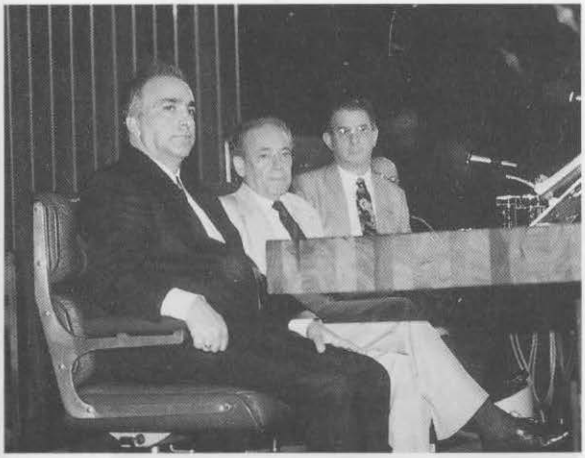
Live Unity: Toronto 1992 was held on 26 May at Massey Hall, Toronto. The concert featured internationally-known performers including Red Grammar, Dan Seals, Seals & Crofts, Buffy Saint-Marie, Flora Purim and Airto. The aim of the concert, a tribute to Bahá'u'lláh on the centenary of His ascension, was to manifest cultural unity through music. Similar events are planned for Berlin and Beijing.



Right: The Bahá'í stamp issued as part of a five-stamp series in recognition of the Inter-Religious Organization of Trinidad and Tobago.

GERMANY

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany hosted a tribute to Bahá'u'lláh attended by more than 900 people on 26 May. The event took place in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt which was chosen for its significance as the site of the first sessions of the first democratically-elected German parliament which passed the democratic constitution of Germany in 1948. Messages in recognition of the event were sent by Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who assured the Bahá'ís of continued governmental efforts in human rights issues, and former Chancellor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Willy Brandt.



Above: The solemn session of the Federal Chambers of Deputies of Brazil in Commemoration of the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh.

GUYANA

A series of postage stamps in various monetary denominations, displaying an orchid design and overprinted with "Bahá'í Holy Year 1992," was released on 29 May by the postal service in Guyana.

KIRIBATI

The Bahá'í community of Kiribati commemorated the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh at 2:00 am on 29 May with a one-hour service broadcast on national radio and a meeting and banquet held on 30 May. Among the guests attending the banquet were the president of Kiribati, several government ministers, and the New Zealand high commissioner.

Below: More than 900 people attended a tribute to Bahá'u'lláh hosted by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany in Frankfurt's Paulskirche.

LUXEMBOURG

A photo exhibition on the theme "The Promise of World Peace" was shown during International Exhibition Week, 22 to 30 May, in Luxembourg City. The exhibit attracted thousands of visitors.

MALAYSIA

At the request of the National Council of Women's Organizations, the State Bahá'í Women's Committee of Perak organized a one-day AIDS Awareness Training Programme held on 17 May. The program, funded by WHO, featured presentations by well-known medical specialists and discussions on solutions to the AIDS problem.

NETHERLANDS

The Dutch Bahá'í community was officially represented for the first time at a meeting of the Dutch Women's Council, the most influential women's organization in the Netherlands, on 21 May. The agenda included a presentation about the Bahá'í International Community.

UKRAINE & MOLDOVA

The Health Care Professionals Project took place in the Ukraine and Moldova from 16 to 29 May. A group of professional women from several countries visited medical facilities, professional associations, and institutes and spoke about health care from a Bahá'í perspective.

VANUATU

Afemata Moli Chang, a high chief of Samoa, led a traditional presentation to the people of Tanna, Vanuatu as part of the Ocean of Light Campaign designed to share the message of Bahá'u'lláh with the Pacific peoples. A reenactment of the arrival of Samoan Christian missionaries in Tanna in 1850 was undertaken by the visiting Bahá'í chiefs. The paramount chief on the island presented the visitors with a kava root as a symbol of the fulfillment of a prophecy that a "special message" would be brought to the people of Tanna in 1992.

Below: A member of the Health Care Professionals tour presents information to a U.S. Embassy official.

JUNE 1992

AUSTRALIA

Twelve-year-old May Eshraghi, a Bahá'í, was chosen as a member of a delegation of 20 Australian children and youth to represent their country at the Global Children's Hearing held during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

BELIZE

The National Arts Council sponsored a showing of calligraphy by Bahá'í Tommy Oliver entitled "To the Glory of God." The exhibit, held in Belize City, featured quotations from the Bahá'í Writings. The show received significant television and radio coverage.

At the request of the Human Rights Commission of Belize, a representative of the Bahá'í community was included in the Belize delegation to the Human Rights and Religion regional conference held in Honduras, 10 to 13 June.

Above: Members of the Ocean of Light Project in Port Vila, Vanuatu.

BRAZIL

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brazil, and Bahá'í communities around the world, assisted by the Bahá'í International Community's Office of the Environment, made many contributions to the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), known as the Earth Summit, and the parallel non-governmental organizations' event, the Global Forum, in Rio de Janeiro, from 3 to 14 June.

CAMEROON

For African Child Day, 16 June, the Bahá'í community of Bamenda participated in a radio program called *Kid's Special*, a parade, and a round-table discussion on "Abandoned Children and the Right of a Child to a Home."

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

A school in Bata recognized the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion, allowing Bahá'í students to take their mandatory religion classes, with regular exams, at the local Bahá'í Centre.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

On 11 June, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the 18 March execution of Bahman Samandarí, a Bahá'í, in Evin Prison, Teheran, Iran. The resolution urged the European Community "to support the Bahá'í struggle for the right to practice their religious beliefs without fear of persecution or execution," and expressed concern that the Islamic Republic might return to the "brutal persecutions" it inflicted on the Bahá'ís during the first decade following the revolution.

INDIA

The Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women in Indore received the prestigious United Nations Environment Programme's Global 500 award in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on World Environment Day, 5 June. The non-profit educational program was one of 74 individuals and institutions to receive the award. The Institute was honored for its success in the complete eradication of guinea worms through educating villagers on prevention tactics. When the program began 752 people were infected and 211,813 were at risk.

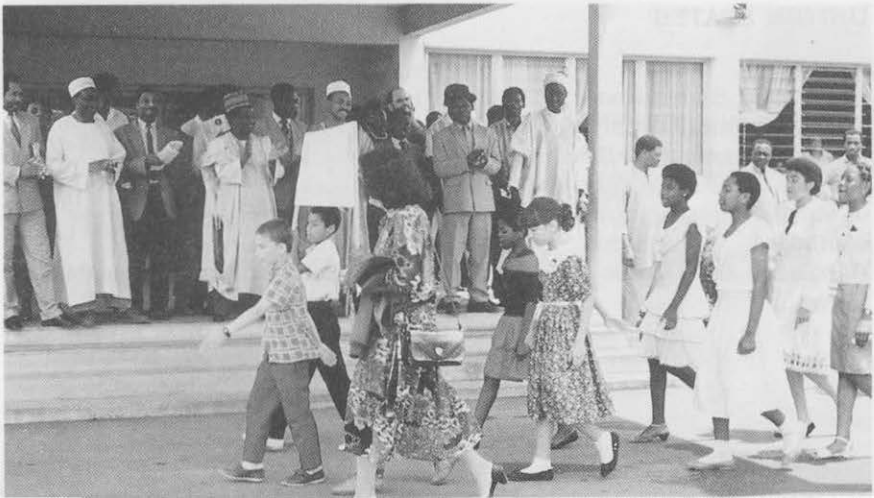
MALAYSIA

To aid the blood bank at the General Hospital in Kangar, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Perlis organized a highly successful blood donation campaign on 19 June. Various public officials, including the State Director-General of Health, commended the Bahá'ís for their efforts.

MAURITIUS

The Bahá'í community hosted a commemoration of the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh at the University of Mauritius on 17 June. The Prime Minister of Mauritius addressed the gathering of nearly 700 people, commenting that

Below: As part of African Child Day activities in Cameroon, Bahá'í children participated in a parade.



Bahá'u'lláh has "given the world a strong spiritual basis to bring about unity and peace among the human race." The Minister of Arts and Culture also addressed the audience which included mayors and other prominent persons.

NEW ZEALAND

The Auckland Bahá'í community hosted a luncheon for women on 20 June to honor the heroine Ṭáhirih, a disciple of the Báb. Among the guests were members of Parliament, magazine editors, academics, and authors. Actress Ilona Rodgers served as mistress of ceremonies for the program which included prayers in several languages, musical entertainment, and an account of the life of Ṭáhirih.

SWITZERLAND

The Swiss government officially exempted Bahá'í children from school on six Bahá'í Holy Days.

UNITED STATES

The United States House of Representatives unanimously passed the Bahá'í Emancipation Resolution on 2 June condemning the execution of Mr. Bahman Samandari and the continued persecution of the Bahá'ís in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

ZAMBIA

Community leaders and a Senior Chief participated in the William Masethla Bahá'í Institute's observance of World Environment Day on 6 June. The guests were introduced to the Institute's environment-related activities, including a tree plantation, an agro-forestry demonstration plot, a wood-saving mud cooking stove, and a market garden maintained through sustainable agriculture methods. The Senior Chief announced his decision to encourage his headmen to work with the Institute on projects related to fuel conservation and the planting of trees.

JULY 1992

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Kevin Locke, a native American Indian dancer and musician, toured four cities in ten days in the Czechoslovakia sharing his culture and the Bahá'í teachings with his audiences.

GREECE

In Volos, a seminar on "The Environment as a Divine Element" was held on 29 July in conjunction with an exhibition on Bahá'u'lláh.

MALAYSIA

Three Bahá'í communities (Malaysia, Bolivia and Cameroon) were

chosen by the Bahá'í International Community to participate in a joint two-year project with UNIFEM to enhance the status of women in society. First on the agenda was to identify through consultations the important issues facing the women of Malaysia. Then consultants will be trained through workshops and practical experience to monitor related projects.

PANAMA

The National Post Office held a ceremony on 9 July for the official stamping of a commemorative envelope entitled "Commemorations of the Bahá'í Faith in 1992." The issue was in commemoration of the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'í World Congress, and the 20th anniversary of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Panama.

UNITED STATES

The United States Senate approved a resolution urging Iran to grant religious rights to Bahá'ís in that country. The United States State Department specifically criticized Iran's "continuing repression of the Bahá'í religious community."

AUGUST 1992

BANGLADESH

A seminar on "Building a New World Economy" was held at the National Bahá'í Center on 27 August, in Dhaka. The Minister of Commerce was the keynote speaker for the event.

Below: A stamp, featuring the Bahá'í House of Worship in Panama, was issued by the country's National Post Office in commemoration of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh.

CANADA

A university colloquium, organized by a Bahá'í professor, was held at the University of New Brunswick on 17 August and featured presentations on various Bahá'í topics by professors of several Canadian universities. The president of the University of New Brunswick opened the colloquium by highlighting some of the goals the university and the Bahá'í Faith have in common.

CANARY ISLANDS

A group of Bahá'í artists held an exhibition of their works in G'aimar from 15 to 30 August which was visited by a broad representation of the public.

GHANA

The Bahá'ís of Ghana, in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Council of Ghana, organized a symposium in Accra on 5 August entitled "After Rio—Finding Roles in Sustaining Ghana's Environment." More than 100 participants from government departments, non-governmental organizations, public corporations and the general public formulated recommendations to the Government and NGOs suggesting ways to protect Ghana's environment.

TANZANIA

Five Bahá'í community health workers were acknowledged by regional authorities for their success in educating 260 village families in primary health care.

VANUATU

A local Bahá'í began a grass roots literacy project on the island of Tanna for adults with a training institute held on 15 to 16 August which was attended by several villagers desiring to assist their localities. Another Bahá'í on the island of Santo offered literacy classes in an area currently without schools. Several youth were trained to teach their own classes. The villagers were taught skills to improve the quality of life in their own villages with the ultimate goal of alleviating the need for them to move to the towns to survive.

SEPTEMBER 1992

BOTSWANA

Botswana's Bahá'í community organized a celebration in honor of Bahá'u'lláh on 2 September. More than 200 guests attended including the acting president and the minister of works and communications. The local television station produced and aired a 30-minute program about the event.

CHINA

The International Association of Bahá'í Publishers participated in the 1992 Beijing International Book

Fair from 2 to 7 September. Contacts were also made with about 20 Chinese publishing companies to explore future business cooperation.

EL SALVADOR

The Jamaliyyih Bahá'í Institute inaugurated its Mobile Library on 25 September in the city of Arce. The mayor participated in the event, as did several school marching bands and cultural centers.

HONDURAS

An awards ceremony was held on 4 September to announce the winners of the national essay contest, "Woman for the Year 2000," sponsored by the Bahá'í community of Honduras, UNICEF, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and the Ministry of Culture.

HONG KONG

On 17 September, the Bahá'í Professional Society was founded with the aim of providing the Hong Kong professional and business community a forum for exploring social, economic, philosophical and spiritual issues as they relate to current trends of thought.

Bahá'í Children of the World, a performing group of 13 children from different ethnic backgrounds, attending the School of the Nations in Macao, toured Hong Kong from 5 to 6 September. The children were also invited to perform at the studio of one of Hong Kong's leading television stations.

INDIA

The Bahá'í community of India was asked to present a paper at the International Religious Conference on World Peace held from 17 to 19 September in Sandila, Uttar Pradesh.

A seven-month long Unity Message March sponsored by the State Bahá'í Council of Kerala began on 6 September in an effort to combat the growing communalism in the state by sharing Bahá'u'lláh's message of the oneness of humanity.

MAURITIUS

The minister of Rodrigues officially opened Bahá'í Week during a ceremony in Baie-aux-Huitres on 19 September. The minister spoke about Bahá'u'lláh's vision of world unity and the values and principles He promulgated. During the week, cultural and informational events were sponsored by the Bahá'ís of the island.

PORTUGAL

On 15 September, a representative of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Portugal was asked to address thousands of participants at a World Peace Day demonstration organized by Brama

Kumaris University and supported by the Municipal House of Lisbon.

SOUTH AFRICA

The National Spiritual Assembly of South Africa officially opened its new National Center in Johannesburg. Among the guests were the deputy to the mayor of Johannesburg and the former president of the African National Congress, Mr. Oliver Tambo.

TANZANIA

The Bahá'í community of Dar es Salaam had a booth in the Fourth National Book Week Festival. More than 15,000 people visited the Festival.

UNITED KINGDOM

Hand of the Cause of God and widow of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Madame Rúḥíyyih Rabbani, was the honored guest at a reception at the British Museum on 15 September. The reception inaugurated the first exhibition of Bahá'í manuscripts from the British Library's Oriental and India Office Collection. Assistant Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, Dr. Sheila Canby, welcomed the guests with a warm tribute to the Bahá'í community. Among the 180 guests were Princess Hélène of Romania and various foreign diplomats. Representatives of the media were also present.

Above: The Bahá'í community of India presented a paper at the International Religious Conference on World Peace held in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Left: The Tanzanian Minister of Education and Culture visits the Bahá'í booth at the country's 4th National Book Festival.

ZAMBIA

A three-year literacy program was launched on 8 September by the Bahá'í community to mark the occasion of World Literacy Day. The program began with teacher training at the William Masethla Bahá'í Institute in February 1993. The program is funded by the Swedish Bahá'í community and the Swedish International Development Agency.

OCTOBER 1992

AUSTRALIA

The Bahá'í community of the Gold Coast sponsored a United Nations Day celebration on 24 October which was attended by more than 900 people, including many dignitaries and media. Prime Minister Paul Keating and Opposition Leader John Hewson both sent congratulatory messages. Former Youth of the Year and Olympic athlete, Kathy Freeman, an aboriginal Bahá'í, and former Australian of the Year and Humanist of the Year, Professor Fred Hollows, addressed the audience.

BANGLADESH

The Bahá'í community was asked to address the participants of a seminar on women and the environment sponsored by the Association of Business and Professional Women's Clubs on 16 October. The Bahá'í representative spoke about the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í International Community's environmental activities.

Above: Madame Rúḥíyyih Rabbani and Princess Hélène of Romania at the official opening of the Exhibition of Bahá'í Manuscripts at the British Museum.

CANADA

Representatives of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada were invited to make a presentation on the Canadian Bahá'í views of public religious broadcasting to the Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission. The presentation was broadcast on cable TV stations and on the VisionTV network.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Charles University of Prague included in its course offerings "The Bahá'í Faith—An Introduction to its History and Teachings." The course was taught by visiting assistant professor, Dr. Vahid Behmardi, of the Department of Near Eastern and African Studies and translation was provided for non-English speakers.

GHANA

A Peace March sponsored by the National Commission on Democracy was held in Accra on 30 October. The march, organized by various religious groups, including the Bahá'ís, ended with a tree-planting ceremony at Parliament House.

INDIA

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India issued a statement entitled "Communal Harmony: India's Greatest Challenge" in Hindi and English. The statement was distributed to about 6000 senior government officials, ministers, university chancellors, state chief ministers and governors, and other prominent leaders in India.

IRELAND

"The Earth is but One Country: A New World Order, the Environment and Development" Conference was held in Dublin from 10 to 11 October. Speakers included environmentalists, representatives from UNCED-Geneva and the Association of World Federalists, as well as prominent Bahá'í scholars.

JAPAN

Prince Alfred von Lichtenstein toured ten cities in Japan from 25 October to 11 November delivering "Memorial Lectures" celebrating the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh. Nearly 3000 people attended his talks.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The deputy prime minister, a former prime minister, a representative of the governor-general, two members of the cabinet and other government officials attended a dinner to commemorate the Bahá'í Holy Year hosted by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Papua New Guinea. The deputy prime minister, Sir Julius Chan, spoke about the life of the first Bahá'í of Papua New Guinea.

RUSSIA

The "New Jerusalem Musical Autumn Festival," the first recorded cultural event in Russia to be organized according to Bahá'í principles, was held on 4 October at the New Jerusalem Monastery 50 kilometers from Moscow. Participating musicians were selected because of their commitment to the unity of humankind. The New Jerusalem Monastery, built in the 17th century, was chosen as the site of the Festival because it symbolizes the unity of the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity.

SWITZERLAND

The Second International Music Forum from 22 to 25 October, entitled "The Role of Music in a Changing World," attracted artists from nine countries who gathered to hear lectures on music, ethics and creativity. A concert, featuring Bahá'í musicians, virtuoso violinist Bijan Khadem-Missagh and composer/pianist Michael Neunteufel, both from Austria, and concert pianist Mark Ochu from the United States, opened the forum.

The "Role of Women in a United Europe" was the theme of another conference held at Landegg Academy from 28 October to 1 November under the auspices of the secretary-general of the Council of Europe, Catherine Lalumière, and the president of the Swiss National Council of Women's Organizations, Regula Lanz-Bauer. Among the speakers were Helvi Sipilä of Finland, who was the first woman to be appointed assistant secretary-general of the United Nations.

TURKEY

A representative of the Bahá'í International Community joined the Head of Bosphorus University's Institute of Environmental Sciences and various Turkish officials in presenting papers at a conference on "Globalization and Environment" which was held on 3 October at the University. The conference was attended by prominent people including the district governor of Fatih, Istanbul, and a representative of the Sisli Town Council.

Six Bahá'í doctors of various professional specializations donated their services for the examination of 600 patients in two days as part of a health check program supported by the mayor and Municipality of Keçiören.

UGANDA

The Bahá'í community participated in the national observance of World Food Day in Kapchorwa on 16 October, setting up an exhibit with the theme "The Farmer Comes First" and marching in the parade.

UNITED STATES

Hmong Bahá'í, Mr. Chue Chang, was one of 68 Southeast Asian community leaders invited to discuss the situation of Southeast

Asian refugees in the United States and in the refugee camps of Thailand and the Philippines at the White House and at a meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations at the United Nations in New York.

NOVEMBER 1992

ARGENTINA

Ecología y Unidad Mundial (*Ecology and World Unity*), a magazine published by the Bahá'í community of Buenos Aires, dealing with ecology in a broad sense and covering development, indigenous culture, urbanization, and world peace, began publication. The magazine is sold in the kiosks of main cities in Argentina and nearby countries.

AUSTRALIA

A special service to observe Universal Children's Day was held at the Bahá'í House of Worship on 8 November. Children from various religious scripture classes in the area served as readers during the service.

AUSTRIA

The Esperanto film "Sheepfold of the Ninth Prophet," about the Bahá'í World Centre, was presented to the 77th Universal Esperanto Congress in Vienna. The film originally premiered on television in Poland with an estimated audience of 15 million.

BOPHUTHATSWANA

The anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh was celebrated by a gathering of the Bahá'í community and its guests at the National Bahá'í Center in Mmabatho on 11 November. Guests included the governor of Molopo and senior academics of the University of Bophuthatswana.

BRAZIL

A "Culture, Education, Peace" contest was organized by the Nucleus for Social Well-Being (*Lar Linda Tanure*) and supported by the Bahá'í community, the Secretary of Education and Culture, the Municipal Secretary of Education and the Brazilian Society of Education for Peace. The first lady of the State of the Amazon, who is also State Secretary for Social Action, contributed the prizes to be given to the winners of several disciplines. The awards ceremony was featured on a Manaus television channel, TV Globo.

CANADA

The Canadian government declared the second week in November of every year to be Unity in Diversity Week through an act of Parliament. The Bahá'í community of Canada had initiated the proposal.

CAPE VERDE

The Bahá'ís of Cape Verde commemorated the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh with a public conference on "The Mission of Bahá'u'lláh" in the Parliament Hall. Representatives of the president of Cape Verde and the president of the Municipal Council of Praia, UNICEF workers and other community leaders attended. A pictorial exhibition about the life and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh was displayed in the entrance of the Hall.

GERMANY

Friedrich-Wilhelms University initiated a series of talks on the Bahá'í Faith which were presented by professors from several German universities and included the topics "Origin and Implication of the Bahá'í Religion," and "The Bahá'í Approach to Peace and Their Christian-Islamic Background."

The Bahá'ís of Berlin participated in a demonstration of more than 100,000 people, convened by the President of Germany, on 8 November. Called the "Chain of Lights," the event was a public show of solidarity of the German people with foreigners living in their country. The Bahá'í delegation carried a banner reading, "Bahá'u'lláh: The Earth is but One Country."

HAWAII

The East-West Center received the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Hawaiian Island's Martha Root Award for Achievement and Community Service in honor of the role it has played in providing a research and resource base for the countries of the Pacific Rim.

Right: The Bahá'í community of Brazil supported the "Culture, Education, Peace" contest organized by Brazil's Nucleus for Social Well-Being (*Lar Linda Tanure*).

INDIA

"The Prisoner of Akka," a video documentary about Bahá'u'lláh, was broadcast on the government-run national television channel to approximately 85 percent of the Indian television audience.

SINGAPORE

During the national Clean and Green Week 1992, the Ministry of the Environment honored a Bahá'í with a Green Leaf Award recognizing her environmental activities. The Bahá'í community participated in the Week by adopting the West Coast Park and Beach to clean up.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

The Bahá'í community mounted a photo and book exhibit about the Bahá'í Faith in the Departure Lounge of Piarco Airport to run from 15 November to 10 December.

TURKEY

Bahá'í publisher, Baha Joint Stock Company, represented the Bahá'í community in the Traditional Book Fair in Istanbul from 7 to 15 November. More than 200,000 people visited the Fair.

UGANDA

The Bahá'í House of Worship for the African continent in Kampala was reopened after completion of restoration on 12 November. More than 1000 attended the public ceremony, including the German ambassador, the wife of the Russian ambassador, the USAID director, and several religious leaders. Press coverage was extensive.

UNITED STATES

The second Bahá'í World Congress was convened for four days, 23 to 26 November, in New York City with some 27,000 participants. Congratulatory messages were received from the president of the United States, George Bush, and the governor of New York, Mario Cuomo. Mayor David Dinkins of New York welcomed the Bahá'ís to New York City during the opening session of the Congress. Two celebratory concerts, one classical and the other jazz, were held at Carnegie Hall in conjunction with the event.[1]

ZAIRE

The Bahá'ís of Zaire held a private reception in Kinshasa in honor of the Bahá'í World Congress on 26 November. Among the 70 guests were the president of the Human Rights League, the secretary general of the prime minister's party, the superintendent of the American School, the secrétaire rapporteur of the National Unity Conference, and five ambassadors.

1. See "The Second Bahá'í Holy Year," page 95.

DECEMBER 1992

ALBANIA

The Bahá'í community was invited to attend several meetings of the special commission in charge of drafting Albania's new constitution. The document, "Some Thoughts on Drafting of a National Constitution," was presented to the Commission members.

AUSTRALIA

A Statewide Women's Conference was held in Melbourne at the request of the National Bahá'í Women's Committee to educate, inspire and encourage both women and men to build equality between the sexes as a step towards world peace.

BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTRE

The Universal House of Justice announced the initiation of a new phase of the Mount Carmel projects. This phase involves excavation for the International Teaching Centre building and the terraces above the Shrine of the Báb.[2]

The Universal House of Justice also announced the formation in New York of the Office for the Advancement of Women, as an agency of the Bahá'í International Community. The Office will coordinate worldwide Bahá'í activities and will collaborate with international organizations that deal with the rights and status of women worldwide.

BRAZIL

Tomorrow Belongs to the Children, a collection of children's artwork and essays centering on environmental themes and published for the Earth Summit, was presented to Mrs. Raisa Gorbachev by representatives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brazil during the Gorbachevs' visit to the National Congress in Brasilia on 9 December. Mrs. Gorbachev warmly received the gift.

A representative of the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil was invested as a counselor of the National Council on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (CONANDA) of the Ministry of Justice on 16 December. CONANDA's directive is to formulate a national policy in defense of the rights of children and adolescents and to oversee the execution of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent.

Os Sete Vales e Outros Escritos (*The Seven Valleys and Other Writings*) by Bahá'u'lláh was presented to the Museum of Image and Sound in São Paulo during a ceremony on 18 December. An exhibition about the Bahá'í Faith and the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh was featured in the Museum until the end of the month.

2. See "The Mount Carmel Projects," page 169.

HONG KONG

The first Hong Kong Award for Service to Humanity was presented to Mr. Tong Chaifong by the Bahá'í community of Hong Kong. Mr. Tong has worked for nearly two decades with the city's street people and drug abusers. Former senior government official, Mr. Denis Bray, offered the award during a banquet.

LUXEMBOURG

The Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Bahá'í communities of Luxembourg participated in an ecumenical prayer service for peace in the former Yugoslavia sponsored by the Council of Luxembourg for Refugees and the Catholic Association for the Abolition of Torture. Representatives of all the religions signed a final statement urging peace in the region.

PAKISTAN

The Bahá'ís of Peshawar hosted a *Mushaira* with the theme "World Peace" in which well-known poets were invited to recite their poetry. The chief guest was Mr. Mohsin Ahsan, head of the English Department at Islamia College in Peshawar and a prominent poet.

PHILIPPINES

A concert dedicated to environmental protection was organized on 22 December by the Bahá'í communities of the Mindoro Islands, with the support of the Community Environment and Resources Office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. More than 3000 attended the event which featured folk and modern music.

PORTUGAL

A 30-minute program about the Bahá'í World Congress in New York was aired on the national television channel, RTP, on 26 December. The footage was filmed by a Portuguese television crew which asked the Bahá'í community to assist with the editing and preparation of the script.

SWITZERLAND

Landegg Academy hosted a Forum for Young Professionals from 27 December to 2 January. One hundred participants from 22 countries attended lectures and discussed the theme "Ethics for a Global Society."

TCHAD

Tchad-Television invited the Bahá'í community to participate in a televised round-table discussion on AIDS on 5 December. The Bahá'í community was the only religious organization in the country running organized information seminars on AIDS and training rural health agents to deal with the disease.

TUVALU

During their visit to the Bahá'ís of Tuvalu, several high chiefs of Samoa called on the prime minister to pay their respects with a traditional *sua* ceremony. The prime minister had recently rejected a suggestion by the Christian Tuvalu Church to ban all other religious organizations.

JANUARY 1993

BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTRE

The revelation by Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, the United Nations' special representative in charge of monitoring the human rights situation in Iran, of a secret document written by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council (ISRCC) in February 1991 sparked a worldwide information campaign organized by the Bahá'í International Community to inform governments, human rights agencies, and non-governmental organizations about the document. The Iranian memorandum details government practices for the treatment of the Bahá'ís. Mr. Galindo Pohl highlighted the contents of the document in his 22 February report to the 49th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. [3]

3. See "The Case of the Bahá'í Minority in Iran," page 247.

BOLIVIA

The first Latin American Bahá'í Social and Economic Development Seminar took place from 29 to 31 January in Santa Cruz. Representatives from 16 countries attended and discussed projects in the areas of health, education, environment, child welfare, literacy and the advancement of women.

FRANCE

The Bahá'ís of Monaco sponsored a Symposium on Environment from 16 to 17 January in Monte Carlo. Featured speakers were Dr. Arthur Dahl, deputy coordinator of the Earthwatch program of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and Dr. Frédéric Briand, Director of CIESM (International Commission for the Scientific Exploration of the Mediterranean). The Symposium was covered by both print and television media.

GERMANY

The Senate of Berlin published a booklet entitled "Unity in Diversity—World Religions in Berlin" which includes a section on the Bahá'í Faith.

GUYANA

The new president, His Excellency Cheddie Jagan, received a delegation from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Guyana. They discussed several issues

including racial harmony and the country's water supply problems and how the Bahá'í community is working towards their solution.

INDIA

Mrs. Naina Yeltsina, wife of President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation, accompanied by the wife of the Russian ambassador to India, visited the Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi. The delegation was received by Mrs. Zena Sorabjee, member of the Continental Board of Counsellors, and Mr. R. N. Shah, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India. As an architect, Mrs. Yeltsina was impressed by the unique architecture of the lotus-shaped temple.

MOZAMBIQUE

The Bahá'í community sponsored a celebration of World Religion Day in Maputo on 17 January 1993. Invitations were sent to 94 religious groups in Maputo. A representative of the Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice welcomed the more than 100 participants, and talks and prayers from seven religions were presented.

PANAMA

The Bahá'í community of Roberto Durán held a march to commemorate World Religion Day. Accompanying the marchers was the Radio Bahá'í truck which carried banners stating "Religion must be the cause of unity." The march concluded with a public devotion service at the Bahá'í House of Worship.

SIERRA LEONE

The Bahá'ís of Sierra Leone contributed to a week of prayer and fasting, called for by the head of state, by creating a twenty minute devotional program for National Radio. The program consisted of prayers and meditations on subjects such as the security and protection of nations.

UNITED STATES

St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City was the setting for the funeral on 9 January of world-renowned jazz musician and Bahá'í, John Birks (Dizzy) Gillespie. The Bahá'í community of New York and the Bahá'í International Community participated in the funeral.

More than 700 Bahá'ís from around the country participated in the National March of Celebration in honor of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Atlanta, Georgia on 18 January. Robert Henderson, Secretary-General of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, was a Co-Grand Marshal and spoke to a rally of some 150,000 about the Bahá'í principle of the oneness of humanity and the need for racial unity.

The Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland in College Park was officially

inaugurated on 19 January. Dr. Soheil Badi Bushrui is the first professor to hold this Chair, which resides in the University's Center for International Development and Conflict Management. The goal of the Chair is to promote non-violent resolution of conflict using the Bahá'í experience as a basis.

ZAMBIA

The Banani International Secondary School for girls, 80 kilometers north of Lusaka, was opened with a ceremony on 31 January. The school was built by the Bahá'í community and features six classrooms, a 120-bed dormitory, and a dining hall. The curriculum concentrates on practical training in science and agriculture and follows the University of Cambridge Exams Syndicate to provide the students with the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) upon graduation. Because only 20 percent of girls in Zambia have the opportunity to pursue and complete a basic education, the Banani School accepts only girls.

FEBRUARY 1993

BRAZIL

"Tomorrow Belongs to the Children—Phase II" was initiated on 1 February by the Office of the Environment of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brazil in collaboration with UNICEF. The six-month environmental education

Right: Naina Yeltsina, wife of Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin, visits the Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi during a visit to India.

project involves 3000 students and 120 teachers in the outskirts of Brasilia and will result in the production of 1000 educational kits, each including a video and a book of materials to be used in environmental education courses for students and teachers. The courses will teach environmental issues through the arts.

GERMANY

The mayor of Offenbach dedicated a Bahá'í Holy Year Exhibit on Bahá'u'lláh as a permanent exhibition in the City Hall during an official ceremony. The mayor himself chose two quotations from Bahá'u'lláh's writings which he hoped would influence understanding among the people of 106 nationalities living in Offenbach.

ISRAEL

A stamp featuring the Seat of the Universal House of Justice was issued by the Philatelic Service of the Israel Postal Authority on 16 February as part of an ongoing series of stamps in honor of the religions represented in the Holy Land. The design for the stamp was chosen in a national contest.

NEW ZEALAND

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand sponsored a national celebration of the Bahá'í Holy Year. Among the honored guests were the Maori Queen of New Zealand and leader of the Kingitanga Movement (a loose federation of Maori tribes), Dame Te Ata-i-rangi-kaahu, Sir Thomas Davis of the Cook Islands and Princess Tosi Malietoa of Samoa. Queen Te Ata-i-rangi-kaahu uncharacteristically chose to address the audience herself rather than through her spokesperson to thank the Bahá'ís for inviting her and for addressing the issue of unity in diversity.

A tribute concert to Dizzy Gillespie was held in the Auckland Town Hall on 17 February. The program, hosted by the Auckland Bahá'í community, included big band music led by international composer-conductor, Russell Garcia, video tributes from Oscar Peterson, George Shearing and Mike Longo and a live tribute by actress Ilona Rodgers. The concert was attended by 1400 jazz fans.

TAIWAN

The 130th anniversary of the introduction of the Bahá'í Faith in China was marked by a banquet hosted by the Bahá'ís of Taiwan. Guest speakers were the Minister of the Interior, who spoke about the contribution the Bahá'ís have made to Taiwan, and Mr. Douglas Martin, director-general of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, who spoke about the importance of religion in society. Among the 130 guests were dignitaries from the Taiwanese government as well as representatives of embassies and consulates.

TURKEY

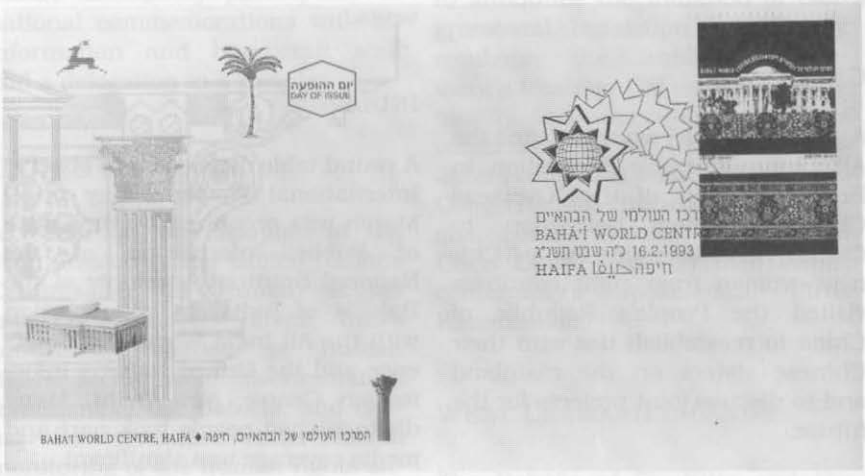
The Bahá'í youth of Iskenderun and Antakya, in collaboration with the Municipality of Iskenderun, planted 1500 trees in an area designated by the municipality as an environmental project.

UNITED KINGDOM

As a result of her activity as a member of the Bahá'í Women's Committee, a Bahá'í from Newtownabbey, Northern Ireland was invited to participate in a meeting in Belfast with the president of the Republic of Ireland, Mrs. Mary Robinson.

UNITED STATES

As part of its observance of Black History Month, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States presented the ninth annual David Kellum Awards to OMNI Youth Services of Buffalo Grove, Illinois and Oscar H. DeGruy, founder of the Los Angeles Bahá'í Youth Workshop, on 27 February. The awards recognize individuals or groups that serve as role models for youth and help to build understanding between the races.



Above: A Bahá'í stamp and accompanying first day cover were issued by the Israel Postal Authority as part of a series of stamps in honor of the religions represented in the Holy Land.

Left: Paul Bennett performs at the tribute to Dizzy Gillespie sponsored by the Auckland Bahá'í community in New Zealand.

MARCH 1993

BRAZIL

The School of the Nations in Brasilia was loaned a videophone by the Hawaiian Teleclass International Company to foster cultural exchanges between Hawaiian schools and the School of the Nations. The first telephone call, which transmits both audio and visual signals, took place on 4 March. The director of the School of the Nations explained that these exchanges help to "create a consciousness of world citizenship in the children," which is the school's goal.

CHINA

A group of Bahá'í women visited the All China Women's Federation in Beijing as part of the "Overseas Chinese Women Delegation to China—A Homecoming Party." Chinese women from eight countries visited the People's Republic of China to reestablish ties with their Chinese sisters on the mainland and to discuss joint projects for the future.

GERMANY

Mr. Volker Neumann, member of the German Federal Parliament and vice-chairman of the Subcommittee for Human Rights and Humanitarian Assistance, issued a press release urging the Federal Government to protest against Iran's persecution of the Bahá'ís and for the immediate retraction of the policies outlined in the confidential document issued by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council.

GUYANA

A symposium to commemorate International Women's Day was sponsored by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Guyana. First Lady, Janet Jagan, welcomed the nearly 120 participants who represented many civic and religious groups. Workshop sessions focused on various issues related to women including education, mothering, and equality of the sexes.

INDIA

A round table discussion to observe International Women's Day on 9 March was organized by the Office of Public Information of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, in collaboration with the All India Women's Conference and the United Nations Information Centre, New Delhi. Many distinguished people took part and media coverage was significant.

NORWAY

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Norway collaborated with the Høvikodden Art Center to present an exhibition of the paintings of Mark Tobey. The opening ceremony on 27 March was

attended by nearly 200 including the Egyptian Ambassador and the attache of commerce for the Chinese Embassy. The director of Høvikodden spoke on the art and life of Mark Tobey, highlighting the change in his art when he became a Bahá'í. The exhibition ran until 2 May.

UGANDA

The Bahá'í community was involved in several observations of International Women's Day. On 1 March, the Bahá'í community sponsored a seminar on the Bahá'í Faith and gender issues. On 8 March, the Bahá'í community participated in national commemorations with an information and handicraft stall and a delegation in a parade.

UNITED NATIONS

A resolution was adopted at the 49th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights expressing concern about Iran's continued violation of human rights, including its discriminatory treatment of the Bahá'ís, and calling for continued international monitoring of the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic. The mandate of its special representative, Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, was extended for another year.

The Bahá'í International Community mailed the book *Tomorrow Belongs to the Children* to all Heads of State or Government and to United Nations agency heads. The gift from the Bahá'í International Community and UNICEF was presented in honor of the first anniversary of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.[4]

UNITED STATES

Vice-President Albert Gore, Jr., issued a press release on 4 March expressing the Clinton Administration's concern about Iran's continued violation of human rights, specifically mentioning the "systematic repression" of the Bahá'í community. Also on 4 March, a press conference was called to denounce Iran's human rights violations and to announce the initiation of congressional legislation to officially condemn the Iranian Government's treatment of its Bahá'í community. Spokespersons at the press conference were Representatives John Porter and Tom Lantos of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Senators John McCain and Chris Dodd, and the U.S. Bahá'í community's spokesman, Firuz Kazemzadeh.

WEST LEEWARD ISLANDS

The Bahá'ís of St. Kitts and the Business and Professional Women's Club hosted a concert by world-renowned concert pianist and Bahá'í, Mark Ochu, on 20 March.

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4. See "Bahá'í Involvement at the Earth Summit," p. 177.

APRIL 1993

RUSSIA

The Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Russia, Georgia and Armenia was officially recognized by the Russian Government as the legal head of the Bahá'í Faith in Russia. All matters involving the approval for registration of Local Spiritual Assemblies henceforth are to be handled by the Regional Assembly and not by the Government.

SPAIN

The first Bahá'í Congress of Catalunya took place from 10 to 12 April in Barcelona. The Congress focused on Bahá'u'lláh and Bahá'í views and solutions for issues such as the environment, multiculturalism and the role of culture in a new world order, and socio-economic development. Many prominent people attended the Congress including representatives of the European Parliament and the National Congress of Spain, writers, journalists, scholars and academics.

Left: Bahá'ís march in a parade as part of Uganda's events in honor of International Women's Day.

WILLIAM P. COLLINS *looks at coverage of Bahá'í events and related stories in the general media during the Holy Year.*

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD: WHAT THE PRINT MEDIA REPORT ABOUT THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

Published information on the Bahá'í Faith in media outside of the Bahá'í community has steadily diversified as the understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching becomes more firmly and broadly developed in the public mind. The public's perception of the Bahá'í Faith is a bellwether of humanity's developing social concerns, and a sign of the organic evolution of the religious community that claims to address these concerns. The past year's eruption of news articles is not a phenomenon isolated in time. It is rather the most recent stage of a slow and steady increase in the powers and capacities of Bahá'ís to communicate possible solutions to the problems of a distracted humanity. The 1992–1993 period, witness to an explosion of public awareness of the Bahá'í Faith, follows upon a century and a half of emerging Bahá'í capacities and society's increasing sense of its inability to cope with the demands of our time. A brief overview of that development will put in perspective the media attention focused upon Bahá'í activities in the Holy Year 1992–1993.

1844–1921

Since its inception, the Bahá'í Faith has been the subject of news reporting, comment, analysis and interest in the press and in other publications. Almost all of the early

reporting was exceedingly inaccurate until the establishment in the West of Bahá'í communities that were able to defend and explain their own beliefs. Within months of the Báb's declaration of His mission, a newspaper article appeared in *The Times* of London reporting on the dire punishments visited upon four of the Báb's disciples after they had altered the Islamic profession of faith to include recognition of their leader. The *Literary Gazette* and *Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, Etc.* later reprinted the *Times* article. The Bábís and Bahá'ís then disappeared from the press and popular magazines until the appearance of one singularly influential book—*Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale* (Paris, 1865) by the Comte de Gobineau. Gobineau, aristocratic and fearful of social degeneration, became a preeminent racialist of his time and a marked influence on Wagner and eventually on Hitler. His book on religion in central Asia was largely dedicated to a history and description of Bábism, about which he had learned while serving as French minister to Persia. Though Gobineau was inimical to the unifying principles for which Bahá'ís have come to stand, his writing on Bábism was the most influential report on the origins of the Bahá'í Faith during the religion's first forty years. Gobineau's volume inspired a large literature in popular periodicals and was the impulse for much of the scholarship on the religion from 1865 through the 1910s. Edward G. Browne, who had read Gobineau's work, became the most illustrious Western scholar on the religion, publishing books and many articles on the subject. The intellectual history of Browne's enormously influential work is detailed by other authors.

A particularly rich period of public attention in the press began with the growth of the North American Bahá'í community, particularly from about 1897 through 1921. The period was marked by the highly-publicized visits of prominent Iranian Bahá'í teachers in the first decade of the century, and was dramatically punctuated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels in Europe and North America in 1911–1913. Major newspapers across the United States and in Canada gave prominent coverage to the visit. A widely inclusive approach characterized the Bahá'í community's mission throughout this quarter century,

with many Bahá'ís maintaining allegiance to their earlier religious affiliations while taking part in the Bahá'í "movement."

1921–1963

Scholarship by those outside the Bahá'í community began to decrease sharply after the First World War. For some time after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing and Shoghi Effendi's assumption of the mantle of Guardianship of the Bahá'í Faith, press publicity waned perceptibly as well. The community had embarked on a process of institutional consolidation and the establishment of community boundaries that clearly delineated membership. The energy devoted to these developments, and the relative smallness of the Bahá'í community, tended to limit media publicity to certain major activities. One of these major activities was the forty-year process to complete construction of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois. The unique design of the building, and the creativity needed to make use of concrete aggregate in a new way, created a steady stream of media attention. A second major media focus was the attacks on Bahá'ís in Iran in 1955 and in Morocco in 1962. These two brief outbreaks of persecution threw light on Bahá'í status in Islamic states. The diplomatic and media campaigns of organized communities of Bahá'ís outside of the Middle East also made clear the religion's extent and diversity. A third focus, though not yet a source of public attention, was the Bahá'í presence at the United Nations as a non-governmental organization. Bahá'ís supported many of the U.N.'s public commemorations such as Human Rights Day and United Nations Day, and many local Bahá'í communities fostered media stories that associated the Bahá'í Faith with support for international organizations and their humanitarian goals. A fourth and most important occurrence was the launching of the first international plan for propagating the religion—the Ten Year Crusade (1953–1963)—intended to establish the community's presence in dozens of unopened countries and

territories. Bahá'í activities received coverage as the community began to grow in newly-settled locales and as the local societies met its growth with both skepticism and acceptance. The completion of this plan laid the groundwork for its crowning achievement, the election for the first time of an international governing body for the Bahá'í community.

1963–1991

The Universal House of Justice was first elected in 1963. Since its establishment, that body has been concerned with the proclamation of the message of Bahá'u'lláh and its diffusion amongst humankind. The Universal House of Justice inaugurated a global campaign in 1967 to place in the hands of world leaders a copy of *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh to the Kings and Leaders of the World.*[1] This volume contained the text of Bahá'u'lláh's letters and writings to the rulers of the world in 1867—to Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, Franz-Josef of Austria, Pope Pius IX, Napoleon III of France, Alexander II of Russia, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, the Shah of Iran, and the presidents of the American republics; to the religious elite of his day; and to humanity in general. A result of this proclamation was the laying of groundwork for a wider diffusion of the Bahá'í teachings through the media. Bahá'í communities had to arrange meetings with dignitaries to deliver the volume, and they also had the opportunity to notify the press of the reasons for the meeting. The centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's public declaration of his mission to the world was a perfect opportunity to obtain press coverage.

This was followed by a slow increase of interest in the Bahá'í community, but little in the way of significant breaks in the general obscurity accorded it in the media, until the systematic oppression of the Bahá'í community in Iran after the rise of the Islamic Republic became a principal instrument in the creation of a new and more comprehensive image in the

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh to the Kings and Leaders of the World* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1967).

press. The presence of Iranian Bahá'ís refugees along with their co-believers in many localities around the globe, the well-organized network of Bahá'í public information representatives, the sympathy of national parliaments, and the visible Bahá'í presence in United Nations forums have all contributed to a burgeoning coverage of the Bahá'ís. From 1979 to 1988, reporters and writers were more interested in the fact of persecution and what it suggested about Iranian society, than in what the Bahá'í Faith's own profound culture meant for the world. The temporary lull in the most egregious acts of repression between 1988 and 1991 lessened press coverage of the Iranian situation. The hiatus did not, however, decrease the level of total coverage. Authors and reporters had begun to grasp that there were other stories that underlay the human rights angle. In April 1985, the House of Justice created an international agency to coordinate relations with the media and other information sources, the Office of Public Information, with its headquarters in Haifa and a branch office in New York.

Two important events in the Bahá'í community focused media attention. The first was the release in October 1985 of a statement addressed to the peoples of the world by the Universal House of Justice entitled *The Promise of World Peace.* Millions of copies of the statement were distributed to government and religious leaders, prominent people, and to individuals in other walks of life. *The Promise of World Peace* is a manifesto for a new model of thinking and action on peace. It resulted in numerous articles in many languages during the latter half of the 1980s, some of which printed part or all of the text, and others of which focused on its ideas as expressed in Bahá'í life. Media began to form a sense that the Bahá'í community has a fresh approach to world order issues, including a commitment to sexual equality, economic justice, elimination of racism, human rights, and religious tolerance. The second event was the completion and dedication in late 1986 of the Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi, India. The edifice—an architectural marvel of consummate beauty and symbolism—achieved critical acclaim from the start, and soon received

many awards for its outstanding artistic merit. The House of Worship revolutionized public reporting on the Bahá'ís, not only in India generally, but also in architectural and artistic circles around the world. The premier interest of the media had been the treatment of Bahá'ís in Iran. The consciousness thus generated disposed the media to accept and to search out other stories. Thus prepared, the media found the peace statement and the House of Worship to have inherent interest.

Within the same period as the renewed persecution of Iranian Bahá'ís, a new trend became apparent in the treatment of the Bahá'í Faith in reference works. David Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia*[2] included statistics for all religions, by country. The encyclopedia raised the Bahá'í community to the level of statistical visibility. David Barrett became an editor of the articles on religion in the *Britannica Book of the Year*, the annual update volume to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. It was in the pages of successive volumes of this yearbook that statistics steadily brought the extent of the Bahá'í community to the attention of scholars, leaders and media. Whereas the Bahá'í Faith had not previously appeared with an independent statistical listing in reference works, by the late 1980s all major general almanacs in English were using the religious statistics from the Britannica publications. Those statistics confirmed two things: the Bahá'í Faith had over five million adherents, making it one of the dozen major independent religions in the world—larger than Jainism, Shinto or Zoroastrianism; and, it had significant communities in more countries and territories than any other world religion except Christianity. This development in statistical reporting had thus placed before the public and the media firm evidence of the Bahá'í Faith's claim to be an independent major world religion.

Scholars, publishers and librarians had seen the need for a clear, accessible, yet scholarly encyclopedia on religion. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*,[3] edited by eminent religious scholar

2. David Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1982).
3. Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987).

Mircea Eliade, was widely acclaimed as the finest such encyclopedia since *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics.*[4] The volumes included articles on "Bábí" and "Bahá'í" by Alessandro Bausani, erudite Italian Bahá'í who had already established his fame as an Islamic scholar. He had already written articles on the Bahá'í religion for the new edition of *The Encylopedia of Islam.*[5] This treatment of religion was matched by the still unfinished *Encyclopedia Iranica,*[6] to which a virtual "who's who" of Bahá'í scholars have contributed articles on aspects of Bahá'í theology, history, doctrine and administration. Editions of other reference works on religion, peace, history and the like have sought out Bahá'í articles.

Scholarship on the religion began to flourish again around 1970, as more Bahá'í and other scholars began to do research in newly-organized archival collections, and in response to internal initiatives to encourage Bahá'í scholarship. The Association for Bahá'í Studies journals, the Bahá'í Studies Bulletin, and proceedings of Bahá'í studies seminars all added to a growing level of sophistication. The results of this new research were carried into the pages of other academic journals such as *Religion* and the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*; and into book-length works too numerous to mention. It is worth noting that a growing number of Bahá'ís have themselves engaged in respected academic scholarship on their religion's history and development.

A third trend was apparent in the references to the Bahá'í Faith in other published volumes. A significant proportion, well over half, appeared in works about Iranian or Middle Eastern history and politics. The persecution of the Iranian Bahá'ís made its inclusion in studies of modern Iran virtually obligatory, set in a long and largely unbroken history of repression since the founding of the religion in 1844.

Works other than those on Iran started to show developing concerns in three areas. First, the Bahá'í community began to

4. *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1908–[1928]).
5. *The Encylopedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1960–)
6. *Encyclopedia Iranica* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982–)

appear as a model of political processes. Bahá'í communities began after 1985 to provide, where possible, statements to government and international bodies. These statements formulated Bahá'í approaches and practice regarding election principles, the drafting of new constitutions, and the conduct of state policy. Bahá'í bodies in Brazil, South Africa and other countries began to offer framework documents on constitutional reform. A prime example is *Comparative Electoral Systems and Political Consequences: Options for Namibia,*[7] which described the Bahá'í electoral process as more creative and more democratic than most national elections. A second emerging area was the environment, where Bahá'í groups were involved in a wide range of activities. Participation in the Worldwide Fund for Nature since the middle of the 1980s placed the Bahá'ís squarely in the arena of environmental activity. A third emerging view of the Bahá'ís began to be expressed in polemical writings by politicized Christian evangelists or various types of conspiracy theorists. This view was not based primarily on earlier theological arguments that the Bahá'í Faith is non-Christian, deficient in correct understanding of Christ, or doctrinally false, though these were undercurrents. Rather, the opposition involved a political argument with undertones of apocalyptic millennialism and conspiracy. Representative of this view is Pat Robertson's *The New World Order*[8] and Malachi Martin's *The Keys of this Blood.*[9] Though the references are brief, the authors are part of a steadily rising current that associates the Bahá'í community with supposed political conspiracies to rule the world in an anti-Christian dictatorship. Advocacy of peaceful resolution to conflict, of global federation, of international order, and of appreciation for diversity are seen as conspiratorial, anti-Christian and implicitly demonic. All three of these views,

7. *Comparative Electoral Systems and Political Consequences: Options for Namibia* (Lusaka, Zambia: United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1989), 6–7, 9.
8. Pat Robertson, *The New World Order* (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1991), 156.
9. Malachi Martin, *The Keys of this Blood* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1990), 139, 300–301, 306, 307.

significantly, place the Bahá'í Faith in a locus of influence, as a prized or feared agent of change in the development of society.

1992–1993 HOLY YEAR

The Bahá'í Holy Year marks a turning point in the public information activities of the Bahá'í community, and in the media reception of stories about its adherents. Three major international events punctuated the Holy Year, generating fully half the newspaper coverage: (1) the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, commemorated on 29 May 1992 throughout the world, and at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh by 3,000 people representing every national Bahá'í community; (2) the second Bahá'í World Congress in New York in late November 1992, where 27,000 Bahá'ís celebrated the community's unity in diversity and the centenary of the inauguration of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant; (3) the seventh International Bahá'í Convention in Haifa, Israel at which the Universal House of Justice was elected for the next five-year term by the members of 165 national Bahá'í administrative councils.

The idea of the Holy Year itself, and the significant events to occur during the period, required the Bahá'í community to develop a clear concept of what it wanted to tell the world. A media task force helped an internationally organized network of national Bahá'í public information officers to communicate three fundamental ideas to the press and public: (1) that the Bahá'í Faith is, according to the *Britannica Book of the Year*, the second most geographically widespread religion in the world; (2) that it is one of the fastest-growing independent world religions; (3) that it is the newest world religion, with unique features that set it apart from the religions which have preceded it. The Holy Year was also a year in which the Bahá'í International Community embarked on a project to inform the world about the life and mission of Bahá'u'lláh. The Office of Public Information published a statement on the life and work of Bahá'u'lláh just before the inauguration of the Holy Year, a document subsequently translated and published by National

Assemblies in scores of languages. It was evident in the newspaper reports on the Holy Year that the Bahá'ís had successfully communicated in the media who Bahá'u'lláh is, what He taught, and that the Faith He founded is a growing world religion of wide geographic diffusion.

Newspapers too numerous to mention reported on the plans of local communities to undertake activities during the Holy Year—devotional programs, exhibitions, parades, picnics, writing contests, service and education projects. Those Bahá'ís who were interviewed expressed their faith both as personal experience and as social model—as a source of inner peace and confidence for themselves, and as a framework for the creation of international unity. In most countries, and most dramatically in the developing world—from Guyana to Papua New Guinea, Bangladesh to Rwanda, Mauritius to Fiji—newspapers remarked on the enthusiastic participation of their own compatriots in the three international events of the year, and implicitly lauded the inclusive attitude of Bahá'ís toward indigenous peoples, minorities, and the poor. That such people received special invitations to participate in the year's historic events in other countries was widely noted. Articles frequently highlighted the presence of high-ranking dignitaries at local Bahá'í gatherings commemorating the Holy Year. Heads of government, government ministers, parliamentarians and mayors paid tribute to Bahá'u'lláh's teaching and to the laudable citizenship of Bahá'ís.

Comprehensive articles on the meaning and purpose of the Holy Year appeared the world over, focused on the international activities of the Faith. Newspapers as far apart as the *Cameroon Tribune* (15 June 1992) and *The Huntsville Times* (Alabama, U. S. A., 23 May 1992) referred to the centennial gathering at Paulskirche in Frankfurt, Germany and to the solemn observance of the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension held by the Brazilian Federal Chamber of Deputies. Yet it is in the most influential newspapers that we can discern some indication of developing attitudes to the Bahá'í Faith. *The Wall Street Journal* in New York reported on the Bahá'ís in a somewhat sensationalized but extremely important article entitled

"In Doom and Death Baha'i Faithful See Promise of Peace." Behind the polite skepticism of the published article, the text clearly communicated the general Bahá'í optimism in the future, that Bahá'u'lláh was the Faith's Founder, and that He teaches the oneness of humanity and the oneness of religion. A much reprinted article by Doug Struck of *The Baltimore Sun* bore the headline "Little-known Religion of Baha'i Gaining Visibility as Followers Mark Anniversary." It gave a complete report on the centenary commemoration, in Acre, of Bahá'u'lláh's passing. It fulfilled the public information goal to communicate the three fundamental themes mentioned above, while providing the reader information on the religion's history, its persecution in Iran, and its belief in racial and sexual equality. Jack Capica's report in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* was equally complete, concluding that "the distinctively modern tone of Baha'i may be just what the polls say North Americans are looking for." Dozens of major papers in India, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Germany, Switzerland's *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *La Presse*—Canada's largest-circulation French-language daily, *The Standard* of Nairobi, and hundreds of other news organs large and small gave space to an overview of the Holy Year's significance for Bahá'ís. All of them told who Bahá'u'lláh was, listed Bahá'í teachings on the unity of humanity and other social principles, and communicated that the Bahá'í Faith is a model for the solution of human problems. Since the days of the early twentieth century when 'Abdu'l-Bahá enunciated the basic social principles of the Bahá'í Faith, variously listed as ten to thirteen in number, there has been little change. Significantly, the Holy Year publicity added two very important principles to the standard summary of Bahá'í belief. These were: a "sustainable balance between nature and technology," no doubt the result of the growing Bahá'í involvement in environmental issues; and, the call for all individuals to exhibit a higher moral standard of conduct, a *sine qua non* for a community that offers itself as a model for humankind.

THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD CONGRESS

In 1963 when 6,000 Bahá'ís had gathered for the first Bahá'í World Congress in London, there had been fewer than half a million adherents worldwide. In November 1992, some 27,000 believers from nearly every country attended the second such congress, representing the diversity of a community over ten times more numerous than it had been three decades earlier. Fully a third of the year's publicity focused in some way on the World Congress. Congresses of 30,000 are considered large and noteworthy under most circumstances. This, the largest gathering in New York City during 1992, was the visible expression of the Bahá'í commitment to offer its experience as a model for unity. Where newspapers had not previously covered either the Holy Year or the centenary commemoration in the Holy Land, there was a surge of interest in the World Congress. *The New York Times* in two articles, *The Washington Post*, Associated Press, *The Boston Globe*, *El Pais* (Uruguay), *The Swazi News* (Swaziland), *India Abroad*, *Makedonia* (Greece), *Badisches Tagblatt* (Germany), *La Libération* (France), *Correio Braziliense* and *Turkish Daily News* reported the diversity of the Bahá'í community, its history and teachings, and the renewed reports from the United Nations that persecution continued against the Iranian community. A striking change in the reporting was the seriousness with which articles talked of human unity. Previous articles on this pivotal Bahá'í principle had tended to characterize it as utopian. The evidence of 27,000 people from over 200 countries could not so easily be dismissed. Hundreds of local newspapers around the world devoted considerable space to the stories of local attendees—particularly minorities and those who were to participate in the Congress Choir or as volunteers. The unseen result of the Bahá'í World Congress was closer ties to international, national and local media achieved by a widespread network of public information officers.

PERSECUTION IN IRAN

The continued repression of Bahá'ís in Iran remained a subtheme of the Holy Year. The year saw a renewal of physical violence against Bahá'ís, the release of further U.N. reports on human rights abuses, and the discovery and exposure of a hitherto secret Iranian official document detailing the government's plan for dealing with the "Bahá'í question." The execution of Bahman Samandari in March 1992 began the year, a major U.N. report appeared at the time of the World Congress, and the release of the secret Iranian document came within weeks of the Holy Year's end. Influential international newspapers paid keen attention to the Iranian government document in particular. *La Stampa* (Italy), *The Jordan Times*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and many Indian newspapers wrote of it with a particular clarity and some vehemence. Inevitably, editorials and articles drew parallels with the "Wannsee Memorandum" and the Nazi's "final solution of the Jewish question." The succeeding response by governments, such as that of the vice-president and Congress of the United States, generated further media coverage of the plight of the Iranian Bahá'í community.

Several articles consisted of interviews, sympathetic portraits and human interest stories about expatriate Iranian Bahá'ís and their concerns for relatives left behind. Namibia's *New Era* of 11–17 June 1992 was one of few instances where a newspaper printed a statement from Iranian diplomatic representatives who repeated the usual inflammatory and outrageous accusations against the Bahá'ís as an "ideological group" that engages in espionage for Western powers. Several books published during 1992 also referred to the persecution. *Genocide Watch* contained a particularly enlightening chapter on how the Bahá'í community had learned about deterring genocide. The distinguished Iranian educator, Sattareh Farman Farmaian, in her widely-read autobiography, described appreciatively and respectfully her childhood educa-

tion at the Tarbiat School for Girls—a Bahá'í educational institution in Iran. She expressed her continuing amazement at the government pressure that had ultimately forced the school to close, and at the recrudescence of anti-Bahá'í religious fanaticism during the Islamic Revolution.

DIZZY GILLESPIE

The death of world-renowned jazz trumpeter John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie on 6 January 1993 generated worldwide media attention. Gillespie, a member of the Bahá'í Faith since 1968, was celebrated for his warmth of personality and his encouragement of new talent. World over—in Senegal, Grenada, Belize, Malaysia, Tanzania, Europe and North America—the press lauded Gillespie's talent. His commitment to the Bahá'í Faith received mention in most articles. "There is a parallel with jazz and religion," he once said. "In jazz, a messenger comes to the music and spreads his influence to a certain point and then another comes and takes you further." Gillespie turned his own and others' contributions to jazz into a metaphor for the Bahá'í teaching of God's progressive self-revelation.

LEGAL STATUS

The emergence of the Bahá'í Faith from obscurity is occasionally achieved through legal decisions. The Federal Constitutional Court of Germany decided, in early 1991, a case of singular importance for the German Bahá'í community and its sister communities in Europe. Lower courts had refused to register the bylaws of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tübingen, since the authority granted to the National Spiritual Assembly in the bylaws violated the principle requiring the autonomy of all incorporated associations. The Federal Constitutional Court decision, in which it upheld the appeal of the Spiritual Assembly of Tübingen, affirmed the right of the Bahá'í community to gain legal capacity in the form ordained in the

Bahá'í scriptures. The Court took the unusual step of issuing a press statement explaining its decision, and the case was widely regarded as highly significant. German legal periodicals published several articles referring to the court's ruling in what commentators called the "Bahá'í Decision."

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The full participation of indigenous peoples in the affairs of the Bahá'í community has already been noted in the discussion of major Holy Year events. The personal experiences of indigenous Bahá'ís were the focus of stories in widely scattered locations. Newspapers in Venezuela reported the election of two Guajiros to the National Spiritual Assembly of that country. Former Australian "Youth of the Year" Kathy Freeman, the first Australian aborigine to participate in the Olympic Games, was the subject of many articles. Her courageous resolve to face racial prejudice was frequently remarked, as was her commitment to her religious beliefs. The participation of Native Americans at the Earth Summit was also covered in several articles. North American media widely reported on tours by indigenous musical and dancing groups in the wake of the Bahá'í World Congress.

ENVIRONMENT

Bahá'í participation at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) was highly visible and widely covered in the press. The Bahá'í International Community was the sole religious organization invited to address the plenary session of that meeting, and was a major force in the organization of central and ancillary events. The community also sponsored the design and construction of a peace monument into which children representing the world's nations poured soil from their own countries. The creation of the monument was one of those symbolic acts that capture media attention, and was widely noted in countries that had

contributed soil to the monument.

The addition of an Office of the Environment in 1990 had helped to pave the way for the deep involvement of Bahá'ís in the Earth Summit, and for the growing awareness of the Bahá'í commitment to a global, unified solution to environmental problems. The preeminence of the Bahá'í role resulted in a *New York Times* interview with Rebequa Getahoun, Deputy Director of the office. Ms. Getahoun addressed several questions—government responsibility, the need to improve the Earth Charter, and the importance of spiritual principle—with diplomacy and sophistication. Elsewhere, articles featured examples of existing projects, such as an interview with Dr. William Baker, founder and director of the Dorothy Baker Environmental Study Center in Bolivia. The center draws on the principles of the Bahá'í Faith for its philosophy, as it attempts to improve the lives of Aymara and Quechua peoples of the Altiplano through appropriate technology and sustainable development. The Rabbani Bahá'í School in Gwalior received public attention in major Indian newspapers for its programs for wasteland conversion.

RACIAL HARMONY

In the Bahá'í writings, elimination of racial prejudice is a fundamental principle. The United States, with its legacy of racism resulting from centuries of slavery and discrimination, receives a particular mission in Bahá'í texts. Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, called it the "most challenging issue" facing the United States. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States prepared a statement on race unity in 1991, launching a campaign to make the Bahá'í community an active force in bringing about racial unity. Local communities sponsored walks for unity, Race Unity Day gatherings, workshops, seminars and institutes to promote racial harmony. Exemplary of the positive press for Bahá'í efforts was an article in the influential newspaper of the Southern Baptist Convention. When the Ku Klux Klan scheduled a march in Boone, North Carolina, the Bahá'ís of that city were prime

movers in bringing together community and religious organizations in a Unity Week to display the power of unity in diversity. The Bahá'ís were characterized as "a completely different source of moral energy."

The encouragement of interracial marriage is central to Bahá'í beliefs on this subject. Such a principle is the centerpiece of a personalized study of interracial marriage by South African Mark Mathabane and his wife Gail, whose work includes several references to interracial Bahá'í couples known to the authors. Paul and Marcia Lample, an interracial Bahá'í couple from Florida, wrote a short history of the Bahá'í approach to racial harmony and intermarriage in the journal *Interrace*.

WOMEN

In 1993 the Universal House of Justice announced the formation of an Office for the Advancement of Women to coordinate the widespread Bahá'í activities supporting this major principle of the Faith, and this coincided with increased press coverage of Bahá'í views on sexual equality. India in particular, where women labor under very serious discrimination, has shown a keen interest in home-grown Bahá'í projects. The Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women received wide public attention for its work to uplift the condition of poor women in rural Madhya Pradesh. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India jointly sponsored an International Women's Day roundtable with the All-India Women's Conference. Remarks made at the meeting received considerable coverage in *The Times* of India (10 March 1993) and *The Hindustan Times* (10 March 1993). In Malaysia, one newspaper found a simple story important enough to merit an article. Mrs. Mariannah Pannusamy could attend the Bahá'í World Congress in New York because her husband, in an unusual move for a Malaysian man, decided to forego his prerogative to attend the meeting. Mr. Pannusamy quietly arranged for her travel and then took over the household duties so his wife could attend.

Opposition and Defense

Not surprisingly, opposition also finds expression in print. This is most likely to appear in the press of those countries where some significant element of the population views the Bahá'í Faith as threatening. Those who are fearful call upon others to wipe out "false teaching" or to remain aloof from religions "incompatible" with the prevailing local culture. Thus *Kayhán Havá* (Teheran, 20 Jan. 1993) repeated the essential points of a report in *al-Muslimán* (London) cataloging efforts to counteract the growth of the Bahá'í community in North Cyprus. A Greek and a Malaysian daily similarly reported opposition to positive publicity about Bahá'ís in their countries. North American and Australian publications from some of the more extreme Christian groups appeared during the year. The basis of such opposition was, again, fears of international federation and of the Bahá'í role in world affairs.

It is with some joy, therefore, that Bahá'ís point to an article in the Algerian newspaper *L'Hebdo* as an example of independent press coverage trying to set the record straight. The Bahá'ís have labored under restrictions in Algeria for some time. Yassine Merzougui, a journalist with some experience of Algerian religious and political life, expressed dismay at a report in the same newspaper where the Bahá'í Faith was associated with Islamic extremists. She wrote that "the Bahá'í Faith is no longer classified among sects, but is a monotheistic religion" and catalogued the Faith's history, teachings and international visibility. In an unusual step, she also discussed the introduction of the Faith into Algeria, its quest for recognition, the restrictions placed upon it by then-president Houari Boumedienne, and the extent to which Algeria's Islamic renaissance affected it negatively. Ms. Merzougui's conclusion: "As far as I know them, I can advance without the least risk of error that the Bahá'ís have nothing to do with extremist groups who constantly proclaim jihad for the installation of an Islamic state in Algeria."

POSTAGE STAMPS

The issuance of postage stamps of Bahá'í buildings and symbols is an evidence of the visibility and established character of the Bahá'í Faith. Panama issued the first postage stamp with a Bahá'í theme in 1983: a five-cent stamp of the Bahá'í House of Worship as part of the "Freedom of Worship" series. Sri Lanka prepared a World Religion Day stamp in 1985. India issued the New Delhi Diamond Jubilee stamp in 1991, portraying the India Bahá'í temple on New Delhi's skyline. A series of postage stamps on religions in Trinidad and Tobago appeared in 1992 and received appropriate public exposure in the philatelic press. In 1993, Israel issued the 3.50-shekel stamp illustrating the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa. Israeli, Jewish and philatelic publications featured the stamp along with clear and accurate explanations of Bahá'í history, extracted from the trilingual brochure prepared by the Israel Postal Authority.

LOCAL HUMAN INTEREST

Ordinary Bahá'ís who carried out their activities, visited new places, and spoke at events were the subject of literally hundreds of local articles. Bahá'ís prayed for peaceful national elections in Cameroon and received national coverage in *Cameroon Journal* (8 Oct. 1992). A young Bahá'í from Denmark who worked at the Bahá'í World Centre was featured in an article in *Berlingske Tidende* from Copenhagen (5 May 1992). Prominent Canadian Bahá'í author and clinical psychiatrist Hossain Danesh undertook a lecture trip to Guyana where he met the prime minister, with the encounter reported in *Guyana Chronicle* (16 Sept. 1992). An Iranian Bahá'í family in Ireland explained what Bahá'ís do at Christmas, for a reporter at Ireland's *Sunday Tribune* (29 Nov. 1992). Bahá'ís in Peshawar organized a meeting reported in *Pakistan Observer* (19 Dec. 1992). Travelers from Africa, Western Europe and North America were the topic of many articles in Hungarian newspapers. Newspapers in Yakutia, an ethnic region of Siberia, interviewed American Bahá'í youth who were traveling through

Russia for their Faith. An article on Mongolia in the Swedish paper *Trons Vørld* (Uppsala, 18 Dec. 1992) mentioned in passing that there are Bahá'ís in that country. A Taiwanese Bahá'í community presented humanitarian service awards at a banquet that was reported in the island's press. The breadth of individual experience among Bahá'í adherents made possible this accumulation of local articles that formed about 10 percent of the year's reporting.

RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

If there is one discernible trend foreshadowing the future, it is the extent to which the Bahá'í community has become known to public figures and leaders of thought. *One Country*, a newsletter published by the Office of Public Information, has helped bring the activities of the Bahá'ís to the public's attention. The award-winning publication, which started in 1989, covers activities of the community worldwide, with particular attention to its efforts in the field of social and economic development. In its bi-monthly selection of Bahá'í news stories, the Bahá'í World Centre reports the spontaneous accolades given by national leaders and prominent people to Bahá'í activities in nearly every country. This is confirmed in the growing amount of media coverage about such expressions of support. Respect for the Bahá'ís is of such profound character that in some places governments have sought out the Bahá'í community not only as an adviser, but as a manager for failing educational and social programs. The initial inspiration of such trust can only be attributed to the wide sympathy given to the plight of the Iranian followers of Bahá'u'lláh.

The persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran, more than any other single occurrence, has revolutionized the press coverage of Bahá'u'lláh's followers. It accompanied a widening of the network of Bahá'í public information representatives. A contemporaneous series of initiatives on the international level placed the Bahá'ís in the forefront of spiritual and social concerns: the publication of *The Promise of World Peace* in 1985;

the community's energetic efforts in the fields of ecology and the advancement of women; the centenary effort to inform the world's people of the life and mission of Bahá'u'lláh, "the most precious Being ever to have drawn breath on this planet"; and the three major gatherings held for the Holy Year. The Bahá'í social principles, and the deep spiritual life enshrined in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, are yet only dimly and imperfectly communicated to a world every day more deeply distressed by the recrudescence of fanaticism, rampant nationalism, and religious intolerance.

The construction of the international Bahá'í institutions on Mount Carmel within the next half decade will signalize a new stage of maturation in the operation of the community, and will itself create interest from the press. With the appearance of the first authorized translation into English of Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the press and the Bahá'í community face a striking challenge. Bahá'ís firmly believe that God has spoken again, and that His Word will remake the world. The generality of humankind are not all disposed to accept this idea. Print media are among several vehicles—radio, television, and electronic networks—that will mediate Bahá'u'lláh's message to the society he has come to redeem. There will inevitably be a deep encounter between the principles advocated by Bahá'ís and the entrenched ills of human society. The press, Bahá'u'lláh states, must observe justice and equity, and must fully probe situations to learn the truth. Bahá'ís expect the external affairs of the Bahá'í community, and its public visibility in national and international forums, to increase sharply within the near future. The press is going to play a significant role in characterizing this involvement so that Bahá'ís can make a full contribution to the world's steadily-evolving maturation.

A review of the progress of the Bahá'í construction projects on Mount Carmel in Haifa.

THE MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS: THE ARC AND TERRACES

The Bahá'í Faith is unique among the world's independent religions in having its spiritual and administrative centers in the same location. This circumstance gains added significance from the fact that the site is in a Land uniquely sacred to the religious history of much of humankind. The Haifa/Acre area of modern Israel is home not only to the Shrines of both Bahá'u'lláh and His Forerunner, the Báb, but also to the rapidly expanding complex of institutions that administer the international affairs of the Faith. These structures are set in the midst of magnificent gardens that have become one of the leading tourist attractions of the Near East.

The development of their International Centre has been one of the great undertakings uniting Bahá'ís of the world ever since 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assumption of the leadership of the Faith on His Father's passing in 1892. During his own subsequent ministry as the Faith's Guardian, Shoghi Effendi regularly devoted a significant portion of his time and attention to the successive building projects that beautified the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, erected the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb and the seat of the International Archives, and beautified and extended the settings of these and other Bahá'í sacred sites in the area surrounding the Bay of Haifa.

The World Centre conceived by Bahá'u'lláh Himself was developed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi as a focus of pilgrimage for the Bahá'í world, a place whose

spiritual significance and outward beauty would awaken in the hearts of the individual Bahá'ís the deepest sense of identification with the mission of the Founders of their Faith. As well, the nine days the present-day pilgrim spends there, visiting the Shrines and other Bahá'í sacred places and historical sites, in the company of fellow Bahá'ís who have come together from the four corners of the globe, provide an experience of the oneness of humankind that lies at the heart of Bahá'u'lláh's message.

Four times, following His eventual release from confinement, Bahá'u'lláh visited Mount Carmel. On one of these visits, towards the end of His life, He set in motion the process that was intended to transform the face of the mountain and prepare it to serve as the spiritual and administrative focus of the World Order He was calling into being. On a promontory near the cave of Elijah, Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Tablet of Carmel, the document that was to serve as the charter for the development of the institutions of the Faith at its World Centre:

> Haste thee, O Carmel, for lo, the light of the countenance of God, the Ruler of the Kingdom of Names and Fashioner of the heavens, hath been lifted upon thee ... Rejoice, for God hath in this Day established upon thee His throne, hath made thee the dawning-place of His signs and the dayspring of the evidences of His Revelation ... Hasten forth and circumambulate the City of God that has descended from heaven ... Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.[1]

On another occasion, as He stood on the slopes of Mount Carmel, Bahá'u'lláh pointed out to 'Abdu'l-Bahá the very spot which was to serve as the site for the construction of the permanent resting place for the remains of the Báb, His martyred Herald—a task completed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1909.

Acting on the guidance of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi took two major design decisions that have guided the developments that have slowly unfolded on Mount Carmel during the years since his passing. The first was to trace the outline of a path, in the shape of an arc

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), 3–5.

stretching across gardens east of the Shrine of the Báb and immediately above the group of monuments that mark the resting places of the daughter, the martyred son, and the wife of Bahá'u'lláh. The "far-flung arc," as Shoghi Effendi termed it, was to serve as the site along which buildings for the principal administrative institutions of the World Centre would be erected. The second decision was to choose a classical Greek design for the International Bahá'í Archives Building, the first of the edifices on the Arc which, he announced, would follow a "harmonizing style of architecture." The Greek style, he said, had "stood the test of time," and he regarded it as befitting the nature of the administrative institutions to be housed at the World Centre.

In 1975, ground was broken for the erection of the central edifice on the Arc, the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the institution established by Bahá'u'lláh as the supreme legislative body of His Faith. This institution occupied its new home in January, 1983. The building's rooftop promenade offers not

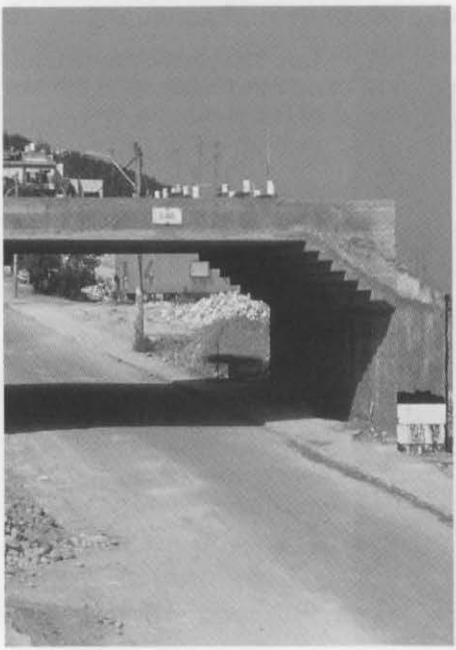
Left: Excavations for the terraces above the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel.

Below: The large supporting wall for the Centre for the Study of the Texts, located between the Seat of the Universal House of Justice and the International Archives Building.

Above: Excavations for the International Teaching Centre where 175 micropiles were installed during the Holy Year.

Left: Earthwork on the five terraces immediately below the Shrine of the Báb was completed during the Holy Year.

The Holy Year witnessed significant progress on the construction on the new bridge spanning Abbas Street below the Shrine of the Báb.



only a stunning view of Mount Carmel and the curve of the Bay of Haifa beyond, but also a vantage point from which the visitor can gain a perspective on the complex of gardens and buildings taking shape across the slopes of the mountain.

On 30 April 1987, the House of Justice announced that the way was now open for the erection of the remaining administrative edifices. The Bahá'í world was called on to respond sacrificially to the financial needs of this vast undertaking. In addition to an extension of the International Archives and initial preparations for the eventual erection of the International Library, the Arc Project would entail construction of the Centre for the Study of the Texts and the International Teaching Centre, as designed by architect Husayn Amanat.

A parallel project, designed by architect Fariborz Sahba, would involve the raising of a series of nine majestic terraces leading up Carmel from the bottom of the mountain to the Shrine of the Báb, and nine additional terraces continuing on to the ridge of the mountain. Gardens, sweeping stone balustrades, monumental staircases and fountains will transform the face of the mountain into one of the most spectacular beauty spots on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Left: The public promenade on Yefe Nof street at the top of the mountain overlooking the terraces.

To a greater extent perhaps than any other feature of this enormous project, the terraces dramatize 'Abdu'l-Bahá's and Shoghi Effendi's vision of the role that the Bahá'í World Centre will play in the emergence of the global society that Bahá'u'lláh's writings describe. Up this majestic ascending avenue will come those pilgrim kings and rulers who will in time recognize and accept Bahá'u'lláh's message. Having paid their tributes at the Shrine of the Founder of the Faith, across the Bay in Acre, as Shoghi Effendi has written:

> They will then make their way to this august and venerated city, and climb the slopes of Mount Carmel. With the utmost rapture, ardor and devotion, they will hasten toward this Sacred Spot and, with reverence and submissiveness, humility and lowliness, ascend these terraces to approach the luminous precincts of the sanctified and holy Shrine.

PROGRESS DURING THE HOLY YEAR, 1992–1993

The Holy Year was marked by a significant acceleration of the work on both the Arc and the terraces project. By Riḍván 1993 the entire face of the mountain had taken on the appearance of a vast construction site extending about one kilometer in width. The enormous excavations, some 35 meters deep, are among the largest of their type in Israel.

Earthwork on the five terraces immediately below the Shrine of the Báb was completed during the Holy Year, and work began on the next two terraces, entailing the construction of a new bridge extending across 'Abbás street, which bisects the flight of lower terraces.

A new phase of the projects began in December with the signing of contracts for excavations for the International Teaching Centre and the earthworks required for four of the upper terraces to rise above the Shrine. Within an impressively short time a wall of 200 micropiles had been installed on the site of the International Teaching Centre and some 10,000 cubic meters of rock, which had been removed from this location, had been used to supplement the support needed for several of the upper terraces.

The design aspects of the enterprise moved ahead with equal speed. By Riḍván 1993 the design for the International Teaching Centre had been completed and the production of the required drawings and associated technical specifications had begun in earnest. Drawings for the Centre for the Study of the Texts and the extension to the Archives arrived during the Riḍván festival itself.

No less important in the overall process was the publication in February 1993, in the official Gazette of the Government of Israel, of the proposed town planning scheme for the area covering the Bahá'í properties on Mount Carmel. The original town plan had not recognized the Bahá'í development and beautification projects, and the major revision in the February publication makes it possible to go ahead with the steps needed to secure the approval of the remaining government agencies.

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When completed, the Arc and Terraces, together with the monumental edifices for which they provide the setting, will stand as an embodiment of the will and commitment of a global community that represents a cross-section of humanity itself.

Below: The extension of the terrace of the Shrine of the Báb.

The Bahá'í community made several contributions to UNCED and the '92 Global Forum which took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

BAHÁ'Í INVOLVEMENT AT THE EARTH SUMMIT

By any account, the Earth Summit and its companion conference, the '92 Global Forum, were history-making events. The mere fact that over 100 heads of state, more than on any other occasion, gathered to discuss global concerns with the depth and complexity of environment and development issues represented a milestone for humanity. The parallel gathering of some 27,000 representatives from thousands of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was likewise unprecedented, not only for its numbers but for its diversity.

Government delegations to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), as the Earth Summit was formally known, agreed on two major treaties aimed at slowing global warming and preserving the earth's biological diversity. Governments also adopted the principles of "Agenda 21," a 500-page, 40-chapter, global action-plan to guide the world community into the 21st century, and agreed to create a United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development.

Non-governmental organizations at the Global Forum, too, can point to many achievements. They succeeded in negotiating several alternative treaties and adopted an Earth Charter—a declaration of principles on environment and development. The cross-sector and cross-border networking among various groups was extensive, laying the groundwork for future collaboration.

From the preparatory meetings held around the world

before the Conference to the actual gathering in Rio, the worldwide Bahá'í community found itself playing an active and surprisingly prominent role in the entire UNCED process. Indeed, Bahá'í participation in UNCED and the Global Forum was on a scale greater than anything else the Bahá'í community had undertaken at a major United Nations conference—or any other comparable world event.

The community's role was significant in several ways:

- In the preparatory meetings to UNCED, there was extensive Bahá'í interaction with governments; substantive statements were made to UNCED bodies; and Bahá'í representatives had frequent and productive high-level contacts with many delegates. The extent to which Bahá'í themes emerged in the final conference documents was highly gratifying.
- At UNCED itself, nine Bahá'í delegates were accredited as NGO representatives and nine other Bahá'ís were members, usually as technical advisors, of government delegations.
- The Bahá'í International Community was one of only thirteen NGOs invited to address the UNCED plenary itself. The Community's statement, titled "The Most Vital Challenge," stressed the importance of spiritual principles in bringing about the attitudinal changes necessary to promote sustainable development and was chosen to reflect the view of religious NGOs to the conference.
- Bahá'ís also took a leading part in the Global Forum. The Bahá'í International Community in collaboration with the Bahá'í community of Brazil sponsored several major artistic events including the construction of a "Peace Monument" and the publication of a book of children's artwork on environmental themes. It also offered behind-the-scenes support for various Forum activities.

"The increased recognition of the Bahá'í International Community, coupled with growing acceptance of the principle of the oneness of humanity, are some of the most significant

outcomes of our participation in the UNCED process," said Lawrence Arturo, Director of the Office of the Environment of the Bahá'í International Community, which coordinated the overall worldwide involvement of Bahá'ís in UNCED.

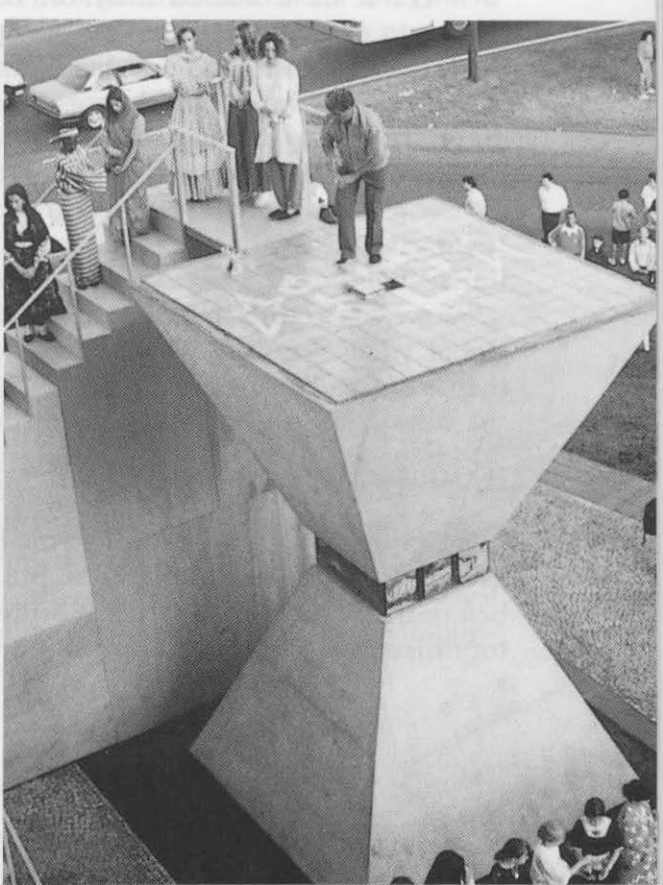
ACCEPTANCE OF THE THEME OF ONENESS

Central to the Bahá'í message at Rio was that the world should focus on the principle of the oneness of humanity. This theme was gradually picked up by others and appeared in various statements and publications related to the UNCED process. Ultimately, in several speeches at the Earth Summit and Global Forum, NGO and government leaders alike embraced this principle as critical to the establishment of sustainable development in the world.

Warren Lindner, international coordinator of the '92 Global Forum, made reference to the words of Bahá'u'lláh during the dedication of the "Peace Monument"—a five-meter-high

Right: The inauguration of the Peace Monument, a sculpture initiated by the Bahá'í International Community as a monument to the Earth Summit.

Below: The Peace Monument contained the soils of more than 40 nations, pictured here before being deposited in the sculpture.



sculpture initiated by the Bahá'í International Community as a lasting monument to the Earth Summit. "The '92 Global Forum and the Earth Summit were not really about environment and development," said Mr. Lindner on 14 June 1992, the final day of both conferences. "What they were really about was proving the point made on the monument. The fact that 'the earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.'" He was quoting the words of Bahá'u'lláh as inscribed on the monument.

In other statements and addresses by world leaders and prominent thinkers, the same theme of oneness was emphasized as essential to sustainable development.

"Rio and Brazil have become milestones on the path of men to one world," said H. E. Ruud F. M. Lubbers, the prime minister of the Netherlands, in his speech to world leaders at the Earth Summit. "Now that the East-West conflict is over, all efforts must be directed even more vigorously to the relationship between North and South and to the cooperation of the world as a whole."

"Let it be a sacred duty, in the knowledge that we all belong to one mankind and that no person and no nation can enjoy lasting peace and well-being unless they act as members of the human family with respect for the integrity of creation and in harmony amongst ourselves," Mr. Lubbers added. "This requires new forms of cooperation and global partnership."

The theme also emerged in interviews with delegates. "Before UNCED, there were different sectors—wildlife, forests, trade," said Mr. Raymond Kwerepe, a delegate from Botswana. "Now we are trying to integrate them. We are dealing with the global village—South, North, East and West. That is the real theme of this conference."

BAHÁ'Í PARTICIPATION IN UNCED

The Summit must be seen in terms of a process. UNCED was, in reality, many separate events. Starting more than two years before the actual Rio Summit in June of 1992, various preparatory meetings were held around the world—meetings designed

to prepare the agenda and agreements that would be signed in Brazil.

Several National Spiritual Assemblies, as well as the Bahá'í International Community's Office of the Environment, were involved from the beginning. Representatives attended all of the major international preparatory conferences, as well as many subsidiary conferences sponsored by NGOs.

At the international level, the Bahá'í community presented statements at each of the four preparatory meetings (known in United Nations parlance as PREPCOMs). These statements addressed such issues as the importance of adopting an "Earth Charter" to establish common values on the issue of sustainable development, the need for "bold and creative approaches" to create the "international legislative machinery" necessary to direct and coordinate international activity aimed at solving world problems, and the importance of the principle of the oneness of humanity in any global effort to solve the problems of sustainable development.

As well, national Bahá'í communities around the world participated in national and regional meetings held in preparation for the Summit. Under the terms of UNCED, for example, each participating country was to submit a report outlining its concerns on the state of environment and development. The input of NGOs was stipulated in this process, and Bahá'í communities in many countries, ranging from Brazil to Swaziland, responded. In the process, they sought to demonstrate that the teachings of their Faith and the social and community life of its followers offer to the world intriguing models for action in the effort to create a sustainable world.

At the "Global Assembly of Women and the Environment," a special pre-UNCED international conference organized in Miami, Florida, USA, in November 1991 under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and implemented by the WorldWIDE Network, an international network of women in environment, some 500 women and men from nearly 70 countries gathered to discuss grassroots-level "success stories" of environmental management and sustainable development.

The goal of the gathering was to showcase affordable, repeatable and environmentally sound development projects undertaken by women, thereby demonstrating capacity and leadership. Two of the projects were started by Bahá'í women. The story of the Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women in Indore, India, which has been very successful in its effort to eradicate guinea worm disease in 302 villages in central India, was presented to the Global Assembly by Janak Palta McGilligan, the director of the Institute.[1] A second Bahá'í, Irma A. Allen of Swaziland, was also recognized by the Assembly for her work in helping to launch a national anti-litter campaign.[2]

Bahá'í community representatives also participated in subsidiary conferences sponsored by NGOs. At the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, also held in November 1991 in Miami, Florida, USA, the Bahá'í International Community made available a statement entitled "Women and Men: Partnership for a Healthy Planet." The statement outlined the importance of the principle of equality between the sexes in any attempt to establish sustainable development, suggesting that only through a partnership between men and women will it be possible to "create the moral and psychological climate in which peace can emerge and environmentally sustainable civilization can advance and flourish."

Prior to UNCED, the Bahá'í International Community had prepared a statement for presentation. Because it stressed broad spiritual principles and ideas, it quickly emerged as the one that representatives of other religious bodies could support. Accordingly, the statement was presented to the plenary on behalf of religious NGOs generally.

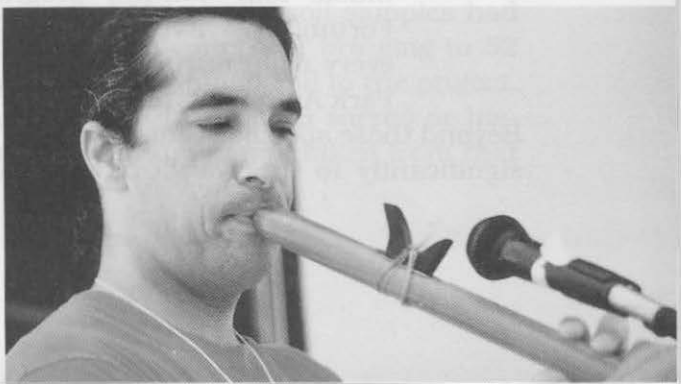
Entitled "The Most Vital Challenge," the statement took a global view of the problems facing humanity, emphasizing that above all else the problems of environment and development cannot be solved unless humanity can "commit itself to enlightened cooperation and long-range planning on a global

1. In 1992, the Institute was among 74 individuals and institutions honored with a Global 500 Award by UNEP in ceremonies at UNCED on 5 June.
2. Ms. Allen received a Global 500 Award in 1988.

scale." It noted the interdependence of the world's problems and said that worldwide cooperation on the scale needed to solve them is possible only through a deeper understanding of human nature: "For, although economics, politics, sociology and science offer important tools for addressing the interdependent crises facing humanity, a true resolution of the dangerous state of affairs in the world can only be realized when the spiritual dimension of human nature is taken into account and the human heart is transformed."

The statement concluded by saying that the fundamental spiritual truth of our age is the oneness of humanity. "Universal acceptance of this principle—with its implications for social and economic justice, universal participation in non-adversarial decision-making, peace and collective security, equality of the sexes, and universal education—will make possible the reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind."

Right: The Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women in India was the recipient of the UNEP Global 500 Award.



Below: The Bahá'ís organized a series of cultural evenings as part of the Global Forum. Pictured here is Kevin Locke, a North American Indian, performing at one of these events.

PARTICIPATION IN THE GLOBAL FORUM

Apart from its participation at UNCED itself, the Bahá'í International Community played a major role in supporting the Global Forum, the parallel conference in Rio for NGOs. More than 27,000 NGO representatives, representing roughly 11,000 NGOs from at least 171 countries, took part in the '92 Global Forum—making it the largest and most diverse NGO event ever held. At least 140 Bahá'ís, from all continents of the world, including two members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, members of several National Spiritual Assemblies, and representatives of the Bahá'í International Community, took part in the Global Forum. Much of the credit for this participation rests with the Bahá'í community of Brazil, which devoted intense effort to supporting a range of Bahá'í contributions:

- The construction and dedication of an hourglass-shaped "Peace Monument," which since UNCED has come to be seen as the enduring monument to the Conference in Rio. Designed to symbolize the new spirit of global cooperation inspired by the Earth Summit, samples of soil from more than 40 nations were deposited in the monument as part of the closing ceremonies in Rio.
- The preparation and production of a book of artwork and essays by children from around the world about the need for greater environmental protection and for peace. This book, entitled *Tomorrow Belongs to the Children*, was sent to all heads of state in 1993.
- The sponsorship of a day-long symposium, held at the '92 Global Forum, on "Values and Institutions for a Sustainable and Ever-Advancing World Civilization."
- The responsibility for organizing a series of evening music and cultural programs for the '92 Global Forum. The "Evening Series in the Park" took place every night during the Global Forum in the Flamengo Park Amphitheater.

Beyond these specific events the Bahá'í community contributed significantly to the overall direction and shape of the Global

Forum. In August 1991, for example, the community was approached by Mr. Warren Lindner, Co-Chairman of the Global Forum, for assistance in setting up the Global Forum offices in Rio. "We were able to offer to the Forum the full-time assistance of Ms. Amanda Gurney, a Brazilian Bahá'í who is fluent in both English and Portuguese, as an assistant to Mr. Lindner," said Mr. Arturo. "Our hope was that early involvement by Bahá'ís would help to infuse a unifying spirit to the Forum, and we believe this was accomplished."

THE PEACE MONUMENT

The conception and construction of the "Peace Monument" represented a particularly gratifying opportunity for Bahá'í initiative. The inauguration held on 14 June attracted more than 400, including more than 30 media representatives and at least a dozen representatives from government delegations to UNCED.

The five-meter high concrete and ceramic monument was designed by, and built under the supervision of, the renowned Brazilian artist and sculptor, Siron Franco, who became very committed personally to the project. Indeed, in the final weeks of its construction, Mr. Franco declared his belief in Bahá'u'lláh during a live radio interview broadcast throughout Brazil. His design combines two pyramids, one inverted on top of the other, creating an hourglass shape intended to symbolize the fact that time is running out for humanity unless it unites in a new spirit of global cooperation.

During the inauguration ceremony, a line of children dressed in the costumes of many countries passed from hand to hand the soil of 42 nations for deposit into the monument, which is hollow. Contributions of soil were solicited from nations the world over and, as of May 1993, soil samples had been received from an additional 10 countries, bringing to 52 the number of nations that have contributed soil to the project. Many of the soil samples have been taken from sacred or historic sites. Soil from Iceland, for example, was taken from that

country's most sacred and historic spot, the site of the first parliament, which was founded 1100 years ago. Soil from India was taken from Shakti Sthal, the site of the monument to the late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who was the only head of state to attend the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Environment.

Representatives of the Ethiopian government noted that their willingness to donate soil to the monument was especially symbolic because of its sacred nature. One representative said that when European delegations visited Ethiopia a hundred years ago, the Emperor decreed that their feet should be washed before they left, to prevent any of the country's sacred soil from being carried away. "In the past, we did not allow anyone to take our soil out of the country willingly," said Zegeye Asfaw, Ethiopia's Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Development, in a press conference before the inauguration ceremony. "But our determination is to see a peaceful and prosperous earth, and that is why we have delivered our soil to the peace monument."

Etched in four languages on the four sides of the upper pyramid are words written by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century ago: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." The quotation is displayed in English, Portuguese, Chinese and Terena, an indigenous language of Brazil. On the lower half of

Left: Mr. James Grant, executive director of UNICEF, receiving the book *Tomorrow Belongs to the Children.*

the structure the words "world peace" have been engraved in more than 35 languages. A glass strip at the monument's midpoint displays multi-colored soils taken from the contributing nations.

Constructed near the Santos Dumont Airport, just north of Flamengo Park and the site of the '92 Global Forum, the monument will stand as a lasting symbol of the Earth Summit and the Global Forum.

THE CHILDREN'S BOOK

The book, *Tomorrow Belongs to the Children: Contribution to Earth Summit '92*, brought together the concerns of children from more than 25 countries and offers an inspiring glimpse of what the world could be like if the peoples and nations of the world can learn to cooperate in building an environmentally sustainable future. Produced by the Bahá'í International Community, with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Masrour Association for Family Welfare and Education (ASMA), the book includes contributions from children of virtually every religious and cultural background.

The publication was officially released at the Global Forum on 12 June. For the first edition of the 78-page book, 15,000 copies were printed, half being donated to UNICEF in support of children's environmental programs. The remaining copies were distributed to non-governmental organizations, government delegations, United Nations officials, and heads of state.

"The artwork and essays in this book poignantly reflect the heartfelt concerns of the world's children as they face a world threatened by the potential of environmental degradation, uneven development, and continued political conflict in which the future seems so uncertain," said Roberto Eghrari, the secretary-general of the Bahá'í National Assembly of Brazil, which also assisted in the book's preparation and publication. The 80 selections of artwork and essays in the book were done by elementary school children in 26 countries. They were chosen from thousands of submissions.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FORUM

In many ways, the "Evening Series in the Park" nightly musical and cultural performances during the Global Forum also organized by the Bahá'í community, became the heart and soul of the Global Forum, providing a time and place where diverse people could come together without any particular agenda. Its intention, in the words of the Forum organizers, was "to reflect the cultural diversity of the Human Family with different musical genres from around the world." Between 2,000 and 4,000 people gathered each night to see these shows. On 13 June, the final night of the Evening Series, six acts featuring Bahá'í performers were presented as a "Unity Show."

A GREATER ROLE FOR NGOS

In general terms, the Earth Summit helped to show how NGOs have become important players in the development of world policy and cooperation. It was clear that governments have developed a new respect for the expertise and capacities of non-governmental organizations. Many government delegations to UNCED included representatives of NGOs. "This is really one of the first ideas to have come out of this conference, that we need to cooperate more with NGOs," said Mme. Lansiri Nana Haidara, a member of the Mali delegation to UNCED. "NGOs are really the ones that work with the people at the basic level. And the governments recognize that they have to work with NGOs."

Representatives from NGOs agreed. "That is one of the areas of achievement of this conference," said Sir Shridath Ramphal, president of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). "UNCED was different from other UN conferences. The diplomatic closed-door style was opened up. The entire process was opened up. This could be the beginning of a global dialogue at the level of the social partners, rather than at the level of the international bureaucrats. The world needs this."

For the Bahá'í community, the Earth Summit provided a

unique opportunity to demonstrate the universal nature of the beliefs that guide it, the unity of its approach, and a range of activities which offer potential models for action in the quest for sustainable development.

This statement was read at the plenary of UNCED in Rio de Janeiro on 4 June 1992 by a Bahá'í International Community representative. It was one of thirteen statements read by representatives of non-governmental organizations at UNCED.

THE MOST VITAL CHALLENGE

Beyond such technical and political questions as what limits should be placed on greenhouse gases, how can sustainable development be promoted, and who will pay for it all, the fundamental question facing the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) is this: Can humanity, with its entrenched patterns of conflict, self-interest, and short-sighted behavior, commit itself to enlightened cooperation and long-range planning on a global scale?

The UNCED process has highlighted both the complexity and the interdependence of the problems facing humanity. None of these problems—the debilitating inequities of development, the apocalyptic threats of atmospheric warming and ozone depletion, the oppression of women, the neglect of children and marginalized peoples, to name but a few—can be realistically addressed without considering all the others. None can be fully addressed without a magnitude of cooperation and coordination at all levels that far surpasses anything in humanity's collective experience.

The potential for such cooperation is, however, undermined by the general debasement of human character. Although not commonly discussed in relation to the challenges of environment and development, there are current in the world certain trends—including the widespread lack of moral discipline, the glorification of greed and material accumulation, the increasing breakdown of family and

community, the rise of lawlessness and disorder, the ascendancy of racism and bigotry, and the priority given to national interests over the welfare of humanity—all of which destroy confidence and trust, the foundations of collaboration.

The reversal of these destructive trends is essential to the establishment of unity and cooperation. This reversal will require a deeper understanding of human nature. For, although economics, politics, sociology and science offer important tools for addressing the interdependent crises facing humanity, a true resolution of the dangerous state of affairs in the world can only be realized when the spiritual dimension of human nature is taken into account and the human heart is transformed.

Although there are mystical aspects that are not easily explained, the spiritual dimension of human nature can be understood, in practical terms, as the source of qualities that transcend narrow self-interest. Such qualities include love, compassion, forbearance, trustworthiness, courage, humility, cooperation and willingness to sacrifice for the common good—qualities of an enlightened citizenry, able to construct a unified world civilization.

The profound and far-reaching changes, the unity and unprecedented cooperation required to re-orient the world toward an environmentally sustainable and just future, will only be possible by touching the human spirit, by appealing to those universal values which alone can empower individuals and peoples to act in accordance with the long-term interests of the planet and humanity as a whole. Once tapped, this powerful and dynamic source of individual and collective motivation will release such a profound and salutary spirit among the peoples of the earth that no power will be able to resist its unifying force. The fundamental spiritual truth of our age is the oneness of humanity. Universal acceptance of this principle— with its implications for social and economic justice, universal participation in non-adversarial decision-making, peace and collective security, equality of the sexes, and universal education—will make possible the reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind.

ROBERT WHITE *looks at the spiritual foundations of an ecologically sustainable society as the human race moves towards the development of a planetary culture.*

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS FOR AN ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

The evolving consciousness of humanity is moving inexorably to the development of a new planetary culture. In an ecological sense, humanity has appeared, in many respects, to be a delinquent species running out of control. Within a larger vision of humanity's spiritual and social evolution, however, the present environmental crisis and the race's reaction to it may be seen as portending a momentous transformation. In the emerging knowledge in physics, ecology, psychology and other fields of science lies the promise of a mature cooperative relationship between humanity and the ecosphere that gave it birth.

REVISIONING CULTURAL ATTITUDES TO NATURE

The dominant response to environmental issues over the past several decades has been mitigative. Environmental legislation, particularly in industrialized countries, has helped to ameliorate some of the worst forms of air and water pollution while research has focused on developing better methods of monitoring environmental change. Environmental groups have focused largely on protecting endangered species and wilderness areas. They have also been effective in sounding the alarm on the ideology of consumerism and unbridled industrial growth.

While visible national and local issues have received

much attention, the more ominous cumulative effects of human activities on the planetary ecology as a whole have emerged to overshadow these efforts. Rapidly progressing environmental alterations—global warming, ozone depletion, soil degradation, forest depletion, and species extinction—threaten the delicate ecological balance of the ecosphere. As the twentieth century draws to a close, the threat of irreversible degradation of planetary life systems by these and other possible unanticipated dangers has come to replace nuclear war as the primary concern of collective security.

The predominant response to these issues has focused on the concept of sustainable development. For development to be sustainable, social and economic decisions need to recognize the finite biological and chemical limits of ecosystems and the ecosphere as a whole.[1] Continued economic growth, however, is still considered necessary particularly if non-industrialized nations are to raise large segments of their population out of poverty. Sustainable development thus links environment and development issues and focuses on minimizing the environmental impact of production activities.

Attracting support from a broad spectrum of interests, sustainable development has moved environmental policy from a corrective approach to an anticipatory or preventative approach. Nevertheless, while agreeing with sustainability as a value, many ecologists and social critics feel that sustainable development does not really go far enough in examining the cultural attitudes to Nature which are at the root of environmental problems. They argue that technical and social adjustments to current models of development are inadequate to forestall deteriorating environmental conditions. What is needed is a "radically new metaphysic" which supports a more fundamental reconciliation between humanity and Nature.[2]

1. William D. Ruckelshaus, "Toward a Sustainable World," *Scientific American: Special Issue: Managing Planet Earth*, vol. 261, no. 3 (Sept. 1989), 167–8.

2. John Livingston, "Ethics as Prostethetics," *Environmental Ethics: Philosophical and Policy Perspectives*, Philip P. Hanson, ed. (Burnaby: Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University, 1986), 67–81.

Among the several schools of thought which exemplify this view are *deep ecology*, *ecofeminism* and *eco-philosophy*.

Deep ecologists see the environmental crisis as stemming primarily from a faulty world view and insist that we need to *re-vision* our relationship to Nature. In *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, Devall and Sessions argue that the dominant world view of modern industrial society is ecologically destructive because it views the earth as a "collection of natural resources" with no value other than use for human exploitation.[3] This utilitarian or resourcist view of Nature, they assert, is arrogantly anthropocentric and needs to be replaced by a "biocentric" view in which other forms of life are seen as having intrinsic value. What is needed, deep ecologists suggest, is the development of an "ecological consciousness"—an inward transformation that alters our perception of being separate from and above the rest of Nature.

In the search for common ground between the highest aims of civilization and the beauty, complexity and mystery of Nature, deep ecology draws on a diversity of philosophical, cultural, and spiritual traditions as well as the science of ecology. It asserts that beyond our "narrowly scientific understanding of reality the spiritual and material aspects of reality fuse together."[4] For Naess, who coined the term deep ecology, its essence is to ask deeper questions—"We ask which society, which education, which form of religion is beneficial for all life on the planet as a whole."[5] Norms for deep ecological thinking include valuing Nature as having intrinsic worth; tolerance for diversity; decentralized, non-hierarchical, self-regulating social structures; small-scale, community-based technologies and economies; simplicity of wants; and appreciation for religious/spiritual dimensions.[6]

Ecofeminism, like deep ecology, rejects the anthropocentricism that elevates humanity above non-human Nature. Some

3. Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: G. M. Smith Books, 1985), 43.
4. Ibid., 66.
5. Quoted in Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, 74.
6. Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, 18.

ecofeminists argue that to the extent that women are more naturally attuned to the interrelatedness of life, the development of an ecological sensibility in modern culture requires a revaluation of women's experience and greater involvement of women in the production of knowledge.[7] Ecofeminism also shows how the domination of Nature and of women are linked patterns rooted in the patriarchal heritage of most cultures.

In eco-philosophy, as described by Henryk Skolimowski, ecological values and life-oriented human values come out of a vision of an evolving cosmos.[8] In much the same tradition as Teilhard de Chardin, Skolimowski sees the spiritual or sacred becoming actualized in human consciousness as a fulfillment of evolution.[9] One expression of this is new values or moral imperatives in relation to the earth as the evolutionary matrix of life and consciousness. The position is one of "enlightened" anthropocentrism—all claims made for the protection of other forms of life are necessarily informed by human values of justice and compassion.[10] In addition to being ecologically conscious, eco-philosophy is holistic and global and it is concerned with wisdom, quality, and health. Instead of our current emphasis on objectivity and detachment, eco-philosophy sees human beings as spiritual agents in an evolving world endowed with grace and meaning and thereby emphasizes participatory commitment, compassion, and responsibility.

Perhaps the most eloquent presentation of a new ecological vision is in the writings of Thomas Berry (*The Dream of the Earth*). Berry sees the present as a transition period to an *ecological age* in which the rediscovery of the subjective capacity to relate to the divine in all of creation will radically alter all aspects of human life.

Within this context of the search for new concepts and

7. Marti Kheel, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference," *Trumpeter*, 8:2:Spring 1992, 63.
8. Henryk Skolimowski, *Eco-Philosophy: Designing New Tactics for Living* (London: Marion Boyars, 1981), 54.
9. Daniel A. Kealey, *Revisioning Environmental Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 43.
10. Henryk Skolimowski, "Comment: The Dogma of Anti-Anthropocentrism and Eco-philosophy," *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 6 (Fall 1984), 284.

world views that support an ecological praxis the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh have a significant contribution to make. In their emphasis on unity and evolutionary thinking, they offer a view of Nature that embraces both animistic wisdom and contemporary ecological understanding. At the same time these teachings affirm divine transcendence and the essential unity of religious expression throughout history. Furthermore Bahá'u'lláh presents a challenging interpretation of what religion is and its role in transforming the current world order. In addition, many of the tenets and principles for an alternative society based on ecological wisdom found expression within the writings and institutions of the Faith that Bahá'u'lláh founded. This paper will go on to explore first the philosophical and then the social implications of the Bahá'í understanding of Nature and of human purpose in relation to it.

Relationship with Nature: A Bahá'í Perspective

In an examination of Bahá'í principles as they apply to agriculture, Paul Hanley articulates a three-fold relationship between humanity and Nature involving principles of unity, detachment, and humility.[11] These same principles will be explored in depth below.

Unity with Nature: Wholeness and Cooperative Interrelationship of Creation

'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that all parts of the creational world are of one whole. "... All the parts are subordinate and obedient to the whole. The contingent beings are the branches of the tree of life while the Messenger of God is the root of that tree."[12] A recognition of this essential unity is restated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in several passages:

11. Paul Hanley, "Agriculture: A Fundamental Principle," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 3:1:1990, 11–12.

> You are well aware, praised be the Lord, that both interaction and cooperation are evident and proven amongst all beings, whether large or small. In the case of large bodies interaction is as manifest as the sun, whilst in the case of small bodies, though interaction be unknown, yet the part is an indication of the whole. All these interactions therefore are connected with that all-embracing power which is their pivot, their center, their source and their motive power.[13]

> Association, harmony and union are the source of life ... Shouldst thou reflect on all created things, thou wilt observe that the existence of every being dependeth upon the association and combination of divers elements the disintegration of which will terminate the existence of that being.[14]

> Liken the world of existence to the temple of man. All the limbs and organs of the human body assist one another; therefore life continues ... Likewise, among the parts of existence there is a wonderful connection and interchange of forces, which is the cause of the life of the world and the continuation of these countless phenomena ... From this illustration one can see the base of life is this mutual aid and helpfulness ...[15]

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the cooperative interrelations of creation as a manifestation of Love, which is the secret of God's holy Dispensation.[16] Through God's love the world of being receives life.

> Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things ... Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms.[17]

Further, the mineral, plant, and animal are seen to possess various grades and stations of spirit. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote in 1921:

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12. Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith: Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956), 364.
13. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in *Bahá'í Peace Program*, p. 31.
14. "Epistles of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," cited in *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 2 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1928), 50.
15. *Star of the West*, 8:11 (27 September 1917), 138.
16. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), 27.
17. Ibid.

> ... it is indubitable that minerals are endowed with a spirit and life according to the requirements of that stage ... In the vegetable world, too, there is the power of growth, and that power of growth is the spirit. In the animal world there is the sense of feeling, but in the human world there is an all-embracing power ... the reasoning power of the mind ... In like manner the mind proveth the existence of an unseen Reality that embraceth all beings, and that existeth and revealeth itself in all stages ...[18]

There is a cohesiveness within life's ever-increasing differentiation—an underlying spirit that animates all of existence. The prevailing view of Nature as *environment* made up of material components of air, water, soil, and organisms is therefore inadequate. The very word environment implies that which is external and peripheral to what is assumed to be the central object of concern, human beings. This human self-preoccupation ignores the reality that life and spirit are properties of the whole and characterize its reciprocal interactions.

Spiritual Detachment from Nature: A Requirement of Conscious Spirituality

Humanity, too, is part of the whole of a creation that in turn reflects, in its harmony and unity, a divine and "unseen Reality." At the same time, paradoxically, human beings occupy a unique station that can only be consciously realized through detachment from Nature. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the human being is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality.[19]

Creation in the Bahá'í view is a progression of increasingly complex orders from the mineral kingdom to vegetable and animal life to human beings. Humanity, however, has the capability and the power of spiritual advancement, our very purpose being to advance towards God.

In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

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18. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to Dr. Auguste Forel, 1921, cited in *Bahá'í Peace Program*, 31.
19. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), 235.

> God has created all earthly things under a law of progression in material degrees, but He has created man and endowed him with powers of advancement toward spiritual and transcendental kingdoms.[20]

All other created things are "captives of nature and the sense world," but human beings, created in the "image of God," occupy a unique station in creation. We have evolved through all the physical kingdoms and contain all of their capacities plus our distinguishing capacity for rational and self-reflective thought. The development of this unique capacity of the mind, a capacity that allows us to mediate between the material and spiritual dimensions, has required that we separate ourselves from Nature, both externally and internally. Through this separation humanity has gained the capacity to comprehend Nature from outside it and to unravel its secrets. In an internal sense, too, by partially removing ourselves from the physical and instinctual responses that guide all other life forms, we have developed conscious faculties of judgment and volition.

The freedom these capacities give us involves a commensurate responsibility to recognize the unseen Reality that embraces all beings.[21] Our spiritual evolution depends on the degree of our attunement to that greater reality, which is described by Bahá'u'lláh and all the great Prophets as limitless and eternal. Thus, to truly develop a conscious spirituality and to awaken to our full potential we are called to sever our immediate identification with the physical dimension of Nature. 'Abdu'l-Bahá discusses this concept:

> And among the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh is man's freedom, that through the ideal Power he should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature ... Until man is born again from the world of nature, that is to say, becomes detached from the world of nature, he is essentially an animal, and it is the teachings of God which converts this animal into a human soul.[22]

The development of human consciousness remains limited

20. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 302.
21. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to Dr. Auguste Forel, 1921, cited in *Bahá'í Peace Program*, 31.
22. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, 288–90.

if it is oriented only to the material reality. Thus, numerous references are made in the Bahá'í writings, as in the scriptures of many religions, to the necessity of separation from the influences of the world of matter. In this context Nature has often been referred to as a world of darkness. However, neither human beings nor Nature, in and of themselves, are evil. For example, when Bahá'u'lláh urges "esteem as nothing the world, nay, the entire creation," He explains that "by 'the world' is meant your unawareness of Him Who is your Maker, and your absorption in aught else but Him."[23] The physical world is problematic only to the extent that it is seen as an end in itself. Thus detachment from the physical world is a means of gaining conscious access to the spiritual realities that lie behind and beyond the physical. Paradoxically, this very detachment allows us to see that the physical world perfectly and fully reflects the spiritual world. This is demonstrated, as John Hatcher has pointed out, in our growing awareness of ecology.[24] As we begin to understand the ecological principle that everything is connected to everything else in the physical world, we are learning the truth of the essential spiritual law of unity that pervades and animates all of creation.

The paradox between our oneness with the rest of existence and our detachment from it can be seen on deeper reflection as representing the multidimensionality of our humanness. The recognition of our unity with the earth, which in a very real sense gestated us, reflects both animistic wisdom and contemporary ecological understanding. At the same time, as was emphasized in earlier Revelations, we must reach beyond the material world to discover our spiritual potential and to fulfill our destiny as conscious beings. That potential and destiny, which has been reflected to us by a progression of divine Messengers, is an unfolding one in an ongoing process of creation. Ultimately, knowledge of the Divinity is impossible and unattainable. However, faith in and vision of our perfect-

23. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, 65,134.
24. John Hatcher, *The Purpose of Physical Reality* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), 69.

ibility gives us the strength to progress towards fulfillment of all our potential and to participate in spiritualizing our social existence.

While the Bahá'í Faith is not the first belief system to recognize this tension between the material and spiritual dimensions, Bahá'u'lláh's teachings bring a fuller appreciation of the balance in this relationship. Matthew Fox perhaps seeks just such a balance in his call for "panentheism."[25] While, like pantheism, panentheism sees the spirit of God as present in all things, it insists that God is an independent Being above and beyond all things. Bahá'u'lláh writes on this point:

> The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. He Who is the Eternal Truth is the one Power Who exerciseth undisputed sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in the mirror of the entire creation.[26]

HUMILITY

In this delicate balance between unity and detachment, we are called on to honor creation, to recognize its sacredness, and to humble ourselves before it. In the miracle of life's evolution, God has acted through Nature in an emergent way. Creation is intrinsically endowed with meaning and purpose, and reflects the unity, beauty, and ultimate mystery of God. The earth itself reveals the attributes of God, as Bahá'u'lláh affirms in several passages:

> Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God ....[27]

> Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light.[28]

25. Fox, Matthew, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1983), 90.
26. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), 166.
27. Ibid., 184.
28. Ibid., 177.

> How all-encompassing are the wonders of His boundless grace! Behold how they have pervaded the whole of creation. Such is their virtue that not a single atom in the entire universe can be found which doth not declare the evidences of His might, which doth not glorify His holy Name, or is not expressive of the effulgent light of His unity. So perfect and comprehensive is His creation that no mind nor heart, however keen or pure, can ever grasp the nature of the most insignificant of His creatures; much less fathom the mystery of Him Who is the Day Star of Truth, Who is the invisible and unknowable Essence.[29]

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes creation as one of the two Books of God. The Book of Creation is in accord with the written Book, the sacred Revelations of all the prophets of God. Like the written book, the Book of Creation is the command of God and the repository of divine mysteries.[30]

The spirituality of the world's aboriginal cultures is based on understanding the primary "scripture" of the Book of Creation. In the revealed religions symbols of Nature such as trees, water, and mountains, also carry spiritual meaning. Both by direct contact and through symbolic reflection, the human soul is nourished by connection with the beauty, mystery, and grandeur of Nature. This connection is the basis of recreation as re-creation.[31]

An attitude of awe and gratitude towards the earth is part of attaining spiritual humility. Humility means literally of the ground or humus. Bahá'u'lláh describes this relationship:

> Humility exalteth man to the heaven of glory and power, whilst pride abaseth him to the depths of wretchedness and degradation.[32]

> Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation,

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29. Ibid., 62.
30. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makátíb-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1, 436–37. This quote from the Persian book *Makátíb* (unpublished in English) was cited by Bahíyyih Nakhjavání on page 13 of her book *Response* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981).
31. The concept finds echoes in the love for Nature demonstrated by Bahá'u'lláh and Shoghi Effendi. See Appendix, page 226.
32. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), 30.

> his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory.[33]

A New Vision of Wholeness in Our Relationship to Nature

Developing new attitudes of respect for and cooperation with Nature requires first of all a vision of wholeness in our relationship to Nature. This requires a perspective of human evolution and human purpose that unifies material and spiritual realities. The focus on transcending Nature, which has characterized Western civilization in particular, is reflected in the current species self-centeredness of the human race. The divorce of human destiny from the reality of physical life on earth now requires a reconciliation. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh warns, however, that this cannot be achieved through the replacement of our anthropocentrism by a biocentrism. Rather, our separation and detachment from Nature and our unity with it must be understood as a creative dialectic in the development of human consciousness.

The process of becoming conscious beings has required us to break away from our unconscious roots in Nature and to identify with a vision of our potential that transcends the physical. This separation has left us with no secure grounding for who we are and no clear vision of our wholeness. We retain only a dim memory of our unconscious wholeness with Nature (before we gained self-consciousness and broke the primal harmony of Eden) and a vague hope for the restoration of peace and wholeness in an abstract heaven or a future Kingdom of God. In this quandary, the negative self-concept we hold as fallen creatures breeds in us guilt, despair, and abasement of both ourselves and creation. However, Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that we came into being in a perfect creation and that our station in creation is a noble one. We are the fruit of creation, conscious beings given the responsibility of fulfilling creation

33. Ibid., 44.

by reflecting its perfections. 'Abdu'l-Bahá addresses the issue as follows:

> One of the things which has appeared in the world of existence, and which is one of the requirements of Nature, is human life. Considered from this point of view man is the branch; nature is the root. Then can the will and the intelligence, and the perfections which exist in the branch be absent in the root?[34]

He states further that humanity

> ... in the body of the world is like the brain and mind in man ... man is the greatest member of this world, and if the body was without this chief member, surely it would be imperfect. We consider man as the greatest member because, among the creatures, he is the sum of all existing perfections.[35]

Bahá'u'lláh comments on the same theme:

> To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed.[36]

We are, in other words, Nature becoming conscious of itself; but the gift of consciousness lifts us into another dimension. Nature is perfect in itself because it is governed by laws and rules ordained by God. This perfection is reflected in all the metaphors of Nature used in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and earlier prophets. The perfections of human nature, however, are unrealized. We must choose to realize them through the development of our latent spiritual potentials. Because the "attributes and names of God" are progressively reflected to us by a series of divine Messengers and their Revelations, our capacity to do so is always evolving. In the evolution of humanity towards conscious wholeness and completion, the Messenger of God is the key to the union of material and spiritual realities. Thus the centre of existence is neither humanity nor Nature (neither anthropocentrism nor biocentrism). It is

34. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 4.
35. Ibid., 178.
36. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 177.

God through his Manifestation that is the root of the tree of life.[37] In this era, the unification manifested by Bahá'u'lláh has released the potential for us to transform ourselves towards a more complete reflection of the perfections of God and the wholeness of creation.

In this light, the deepening crises of planetary destruction are seen not as the inevitable failure of fallen humanity but as marking a crucial stage in the evolution of human consciousness towards greater wholeness. The fear and pain created by these crises impel us to reflect profoundly on the incompleteness of our current vision and to respond with urgency to the forces of transformation. Let us, therefore, turn our attention to the social dimensions of this spiritual process of transformation.

Towards a Global Civilization: The Spiritual Evolution of an Ecologically Sustainable Society

Appreciating that creation is sacred and whole and understanding the role of human beings to be conscious, compassionate, and creative participants in the evolution of life are the fundamental conceptual requirements for achieving an ecologically sustainable society. Developing this society, however, requires not only a transformation in our individual attitudes and values but also a complete reformulation of our social structures. Most of the socioeconomic institutions of modern industrial societies are based on the pursuit of material progress through separation from and conquest of Nature. Nature is seen primarily as a storehouse of resources to be managed, harvested, and industrially processed for unmoderated human consumption. This resource appropriation has become the basis of economic growth, which, in turn, has become the dominant measure of social advance. The limits of this materialistic philosophy are now clearly demarcated in the accelerating destruction of planetary ecological systems. Yet our prevailing political, social, and economic institutions

37. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Bahá'í World Faith*, 364.

appear powerless to halt this destruction because they are implicitly based on the same values of separation from and conquest over Nature.

Such separation denies a meaningful relatedness to the whole of creation and thereby denies sacredness to life. This loss of meaning and the ensuing emptiness fuel, in turn, the search for fulfillment through consumption, competition, and other addictive behaviors. The separation from Nature underlying modernism corresponds to a division between the human mind and heart.

Incorporating a new vision of wholeness in our relationship to the earth requires a reincorporation of the spiritual dimension that was lost with the dissolution of religious cosmologies in the modern era. We cannot return to these older cosmologies. Science, secular humanism, and the resulting profusion of modern institutions have brought society to a completely new level of advancement. This outer material advancement, however, has blinded us to the loss of the spiritual dimension of human life. We cling, says Skolimowski, to the ideals of "secular salvation" because its many successes seem too hard-won to betray.[38] Even so, the prevailing world view of materialism is being undermined both by the proliferation of its problems and contradictions and by the emergence of more inclusive cosmologies that provide new organizing principles. The unity of the material and spiritual dimensions of existence is just such a principle; it provides a foundation for a vision of humanity in relation to the whole of creation. Discoveries on the new frontiers of science point to this kind of integration and provide analogies, for example, in physics in which light is understood as both a wave and a particle. The emerging world view must similarly account for human beings as both biological and spiritual beings. Skolimowski asserts that humans

> are the custodians of the whole of evolution, and at the same time, only the point on the arrow of evolution ... the sacredness of man is the uniqueness of his biological constitution which is endowed with such refined potentials that it can attain spirituality.[39]

38. Skolimowski, *Eco-Philosophy*, 71.

The Faith created by Bahá'u'lláh incorporates just such an integrated evolutionary perspective. As discussed earlier, it views our spiritual origin and destiny as part of the whole evolution of life on the planet. Spirit is expressed in all stages and processes of existence and is realized consciously through the distinctive capacities of human awareness. The development of civilization itself is seen as a progressive organic process of maturation in which all the great religious revelations and scientific advancements are integral components. This dynamic and holistic perspective can help us pierce the socially constructed dichotomy of humanity versus planet and, at the same time, to overcome the destructive divisions of the human race. In this larger evolutionary movement our current situation can be understood as a crucial stage in the birth of a new world order appropriate to humanity's spiritual and intellectual maturity. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh not only delineate the past and future dimensions of this process, but they also offer values, principles and new institutional forms that can guide us through this transition to maturity and the development of a global civilization. These values and principles will now be related to the requirements for an ecologically sustainable society.

EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

In the Bahá'í writings the evolutionary development of the human species is viewed as a purposeful organic process. Natural images, such as the earth developing in "the matrix of the universe" and the human species growing and developing in the "womb of the earth" are used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to describe the nature of this process.[40] The evolution of civilization is also viewed organically using the analogy of human developmental stages.[41]

39. Ibid., 74–75.
40. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 182–83.
41. Though a developmental sequence is suggested there is no indication of cultural superiority. Different cultural streams have explored and

Within this general framework of maturation it is possible to sketch out humanity's changing relationship to the earth. In the earliest phases of the human journey, human dependence on the earth was embodied in myths and cultural forms. Symbols of the life-giving earth as "mother" signified the bonding typical of childhood. This is illustrated by statements attributed to Chief Luther Standing Bear on the Lakota tribe's beliefs about Nature:

> The Lakota was a true naturalist—a lover of Nature. He loved the earth and all things of the earth ... Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky, and water, was a real and active principle ... Wherever the Lakota went, he was with Mother Earth. No matter where he roamed by day or slept by night, he was safe with her. This thought comforted and sustained the Lakota and he was eternally filled with gratitude.[42]

The degree of control over natural events was limited, and natural forces were understood in terms of magical or mythological powers. Ceremonies symbolized and celebrated human relationships with the elements of creation and the Creator. A sense of cyclical order predominated. This sense was often closely associated with an appreciation of the power and mystery of the "feminine" and the role of women as the guardians of the forces of generation and nurturance of life.

In the emergence of the great axial civilizations of recorded history, there was increasing emphasis on the rational mode of consciousness. In these civilizations, the drive was towards greater independence, order and abstraction representing the primacy of masculine energies. Human transcendence was also emphasized in the successive monotheistic revelations of the axial civilizations. In the process, Nature was gradually demythologized, earlier animistic and pantheistic views were abandoned, and spiritual and intellectual pursuits were abstracted from the world of Nature and its instinctive primal energies. Nature began to be subsumed as a resource for the

41. developed different capacities which are all integral to the current period of reconciliation.

42. Quoted in John Hart, *The Spirit of the Earth* (Ramsey: Paulist Press, New York, 1984), 49.

development of larger collective units of social organization. Trade, commerce, and artistic and intellectual pursuits were associated with urban dwelling and thus with an increased physical separation from Nature.

Western science developed in this context and took as its basic operating assumption the radical separation of subject and object, humanity and Nature. The earth ceased to be a community to which humanity belonged and was seen instead as a commodity for use and possession.

The expansion of the power of human knowing through science has allowed us to reduce the material world into its component parts devoid of mystery and the power to affect us. Our original dependence on the natural world has been replaced by alienation from Nature and by power over a meaningless material world.[43] As destructive as this alienation has been in terms of the domination of Nature, this mind-set can be understood in the larger evolutionary context as a necessary phase of humanity's maturing consciousness. Just as in adolescence, when individuation requires the fragile ego to emerge and assert itself against the regressive urge to be drawn back into the unconsciousness and dependence of childhood, so too the human race has had to break away from the primordial unity of our original unconscious wholeness with Nature.

Science can be viewed as humanity's collective ego asserting human will, creativity, and independence, breaking the limitations and superstitions which bound us in previous ages, and penetrating and commanding the world of Nature that previously encompassed us. However, to continue to assert the extreme degree of independence and "false sense of omnipotence" given us by our mastery of Nature now threatens to destroy all life.[44] Our evolutionary imperative is to leave this adolescent phase and progress to a more mature understanding of our true relationship with Nature—to the conscious

43. The word matter has evolved from our original understanding of the earth as "mother." The word for mother in Greek is spelled *meter*; in Latin, *mater*; and in Sanskrit, *matr*.

44. William Hatcher, "The Science of Religion," *Bahá'í Studies* 2 (1980), 16.

interdependence which will be the hallmark of our adulthood.

The full extent of this interdependence (felt and recognized by many tribal societies) is now coming to light in many areas of inquiry as the emergent paradigms in ecology, quantum physics, neurophysiology, and psychology demonstrate. Even if we no longer see the planet as sacred, advancing knowledge compels us to see that the ecological systems of the earth are all interconnected and human life is inextricably woven within the wholeness of the ecosphere. Life is a property of the ecosphere as a whole—an evolving, self-regulating system that can be understood as a living organism in which physical and biological components have evolved together over billions of years to maintain the delicate balance of temperature and other parameters necessary to support life.[45] Rowe suggests that the living ecosphere or "Gaia" be thought of as a supra-organism to indicate its "higher level of organization" within which humans are a conscious but dependent participant.[46] Quantum physics has demonstrated how the same principle of interconnectedness applies in the sub-atomic world where elementary particles cannot be observed except in their relationship with everything else including the observer. The Newtonian view of a clockwork-like world in which separate objects interact in mechanical fashion is giving way to a view of the world as a complex web of relationships which can only be properly understood in its wholeness.[47]

The human mind is also part of this interconnectedness. The quantum phenomenon of nonlocality shows that the connection between supposedly separate subatomic particles is instantaneous. In effect, they behave as a single entity, part of an unbroken whole. Thus, we are led to consider that "if our brains are made up of the same subatomic particles as the rest of the universe, then they're totally interconnected with the

45. James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (New York: Oxford, 1979).
46. Stan Rowe, *Home Place: Essays on Ecology* (Edmonton: NeWest Publishers, Ltd., 1990), 244.
47. Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

rest of the universe" at this very deep structural level.[48]

Further, all systems, from the subatomic to the planetary, exhibit inherent capacities for self-organization and self-renewal—in other words, for maintaining and restoring wholeness. Awakening to the fundamental wholeness of which we are a part can provide a rational foundation for becoming sensitive and conscious participants in planetary healing and maintenance. By placing humanity inextricably within the web of life's continuous creation, the holistic worldview allows human beings to realize both their powerful mastery and their child-like dependence with respect to the natural world. Instead of freezing humanity's quest for purpose and meaning into a position of hubris, human beings can be freed to appreciate the wealth, meaning, and responsibility that the evolution of life has given them.

The journey through duality—the development of the capacity for rational discrimination and the formulation of a separate identity—has been an inescapable feature of our development as conscious beings. Most assuredly, the price paid in terms of loss of meaning, fragmentation, and conflict has been a heavy one. But the intuition that there is unity and cohesion at the heart of life has remained within us.

The fact that science is now confirming the dynamic interconnectedness of life does not by itself restore a subjective relatedness or sense of wholeness. Restoration of that sense of wholeness on a conscious level is a process related to the root meaning of religion—to reconnect or bind back. Throughout history, religion has held up transcendent images of the sacred which have described the potential for human self-completion and for creating a social order based on spiritual principles. The highest and noblest aspirations of the human spirit have been drawn out in response to these visions. When positive and transformative images of the future have been lost individuals and cultures have atrophied.[49] That these sacred images of the

48. Paul Ray, "Changing Our Minds," C. B. C. Transcript 4-ID-079 (April 4 1984), 14.

49. Frederik Polak, *The Image of the Future* (Amsterdam, London and New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1973).

future have often become dormant or misdirected owes less to the failure of religion than to a misunderstanding of religion itself as an evolving force. In the Bahá'í view, the physical evolution of the cosmos and of all life on earth, the social and intellectual development of civilization, and the spiritual maturation of each human being are emergent processes expressive of one universal creative force. Within this emergent context, the truth revealed through religious revelation, like the truth discovered through science, is relative and progressive. Throughout the ages, the teachings of a succession of spiritual Luminaries have guided humanity's spiritual and social development and animated the evolution of human consciousness towards greater awareness and responsibility. While earlier Revelations provided the spiritual impetus for higher levels of social cohesion in accordance with the capacities of the time, the ultimate vision of a peaceful and unified human society remained a prophetic image.

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation renews this vision, amplifies its meaning, and prescribes specific principles and processes for its eventual realization. The formalization through scientific enquiry of an emerging general insight about the comprehensive unity of the universe and of the complex potential of human consciousness within that unity resonates with the vision Bahá'u'lláh reveals.[50] It is within this emergent unity paradigm—supported by a complementarity of religious and scientific perspectives—that current ecological and social issues need to be viewed. From an evolutionary perspective conscious unification on a planetary scale is the process appropriate to humanity's maturity and growing technological capacity. Planetary unity is the necessary and inevitable fruition of humanity's collective spiritual and material development—"the consummation of human evolution."[51]

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50. Michael Bopp, "Transformation amd Human Development: A Literature Review," Four Worlds Development Project, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge (Dec. 1988), 7; Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 46.
51. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), 43.

THE UNITY PARADIGM: PRECONDITION FOR AN ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

Unity is the pivotal principle of this stage of humanity's maturation. Its expression is the recognition and acceptance of the oneness of the human family. The oneness of humanity as enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh is not simply "an expression of vague and pious hope" or a renewal of traditional calls for solidarity. "It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced."[52] It calls for a reflection in the world of humanity of the fundamental oneness in the whole of creation and requires an altered understanding of the relationship of parts to each other and to the whole. This new degree of integration is part of humanity's maturing consciousness following upon its entire developmental process and its increasing levels of interaction and interdependence.

This coming of age requires not just a perceptual shift; it calls for institutional arrangements which acknowledge the primacy of the whole. Foremost among these is some form of world federal system guided by universally agreed upon values and laws which can reflect the reality of humanity's oneness and its integral dependence on the encompassing ecosphere, which is itself a unified whole.[53] Systems of thought and governance appropriate to humanity's adolescence must give way to new patterns and new institutions necessary to manage cooperatively an increasingly interdependent world. The international systems of commerce, trade, and communication must be reshaped within a cooperative framework oriented to justice, wherein the advantage of the part is best served by the advantage of the whole.

Candid admission of the consequences of disunity and the necessity of unity is a crucial stage of this transition. The costs

52. Ibid.

53. Bahá'í International Community, statement elements for inclusion in the proposed "Earth Charter" presented to the Preparatory Committee of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Geneva, April 1991.

of nationalism, racism, and other forms of disunity can be tallied in the social and ecological effects of war, inequality, and grossly irresponsible military expenditure. The global military budget continues to run at approximately $900 billion (U.S.) annually despite prospects of de-escalation due to the end of the cold war.[54] Less than five percent of this amount ($45 billion annually) would fund the most urgent global environmental requirements—preventing soil erosion, protecting and replanting forests, protecting the ozone layer, cleaning up hazardous wastes, developing renewable sources of energy, and stabilizing population.[55]

Not only has disunity manifested itself in a tragic misallocation of resources to militarism, but the degradation of ecological systems, itself often a result of war, and the resulting resource shortages have been a further cause of war. Further, the inequitable distribution of wealth and human rights has resulted in untold human suffering and has added to the stress on fragile ecosystems. This is apparent in Africa where food export-dependent countries facing trade barriers and low commodity prices overuse their fragile soils to feed burgeoning populations and pay mounting foreign debts.[56]

War and the pursuit of power are direct examples of disunity between classes, races, religions, and nations. At the same time, the tension of many other inequities in social and economic relationships has been deflected by our disunity with and pursuit of power over Nature. As growing technological might, often developed from military research, has been applied to exploiting the earth's resources, the promise of unending economic growth has been used to divert attention from the inequality of prevailing social orders. (In the process, irresponsible consumption and ever-expanding expectations of material benefits have been fostered. As the world's major industrial nations have pursued this path, they have come to

54. R. L. Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures* (Washington, D. C.: World Priorities, Inc., 1991), 43.
55. Ibid., 42.
56. World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

consume as much as 80 percent of the world's resources for 20 percent of the world's population.)

Current global issues—especially ecological concerns that transcend national boundaries—are, in effect, *forcing functions* requiring the community of nations to move beyond ad hoc and fragmented approaches to solving problems. The call for an integrated global ethic and policy of sustainable development raised in *Our Common Future* and further amplified through the Earth Summit process represents a tacit acceptance of the need for unity in solving global problems. With this acceptance, there is a growing search for ways to bring about the changes in attitude and motivation required for unified global action. The creation of a Sustainable Development Commission by the United Nations, as part of the implementation of Earth Summit's "Agenda 21" is one small but significant step in the recognition of the need for global goals and principles that anticipate and guide future development.

While all such steps are important, political and social reorganization can only become effective to the degree that the consciousness of the oneness of humanity is the operating premise. Only this spiritual and organic truth, once accepted, will release the constructive energy and will needed to make the far-reaching structural changes required for fostering sustainable patterns of development. With an understanding of the implications of the unity paradigm in human affairs the principle of unity becomes the foundation for building and mandating institutions that can responsibly address environment and development issues on a global scale. It is for this reason that a major emphasis of the Bahá'í International Community is to develop a consultative and institutional framework that demonstrates the viability of operating as a unified global community.

GLOBALISM AND DECENTRALISM

The call by deep ecologists and other social theorists for decentralized, small-scale, community-based technologies and economies, at first glance, seems to represent movement in a

direction opposite to the globalism discussed above. Ecological consciousness, it is reasoned, has mostly developed within a "minority tradition" that includes tribal cultures, utopian communities, and many religious traditions such as within the Benedictine Order, Taoism and Buddhism.[57] It is on a small scale that individual responsibility can be upheld within a participatory community democracy, and this is the level at which technology can be humanized and made more environmentally appropriate. These ideas are developed much further by Roszak (*Person/Planet*) and Schumacher (*Small is Beautiful*). There is concern that a global society would become just a more effective superstate for the conquest of the earth. What is needed, it is suggested, is to develop communities on an ecosystem-specific basis (bioregionalism) with people committed to "reinhabiting" and restoring that ecosystem and developing a renewed sense of place.

Some important human and ecological values are implicit in these ideas. Ecological systems are living systems to which patterns of production and habitation should adapt, rather than continuing our current approach of making land and people adapt to the technology. In agriculture the latter approach has resulted in the imposition of single-purpose, monocultural cropping systems, regardless of the biophysical and cultural contexts.

There are several aspects of the Bahá'í approach that relate to these decentralist concepts. First and foremost the Bahá'í concept of globalism places a high value on traditional cultures within a framework of global order and regulation. The Bahá'í concept of globalism "repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity ..."[58]

Already the structure of the Bahá'í International Community offers helpful guidelines for achieving a worldwide society whose vision is world-embracing but whose members and activities are exceedingly diverse. It comprises over 120,000

57. Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, 18.
58. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 42.

local communities in some 235 countries and dependent territories under the guidance of a single globally elected body, the Universal House of Justice. While following uniform guidelines for spiritual and social development, each community is expected to adapt its programs to the exigencies of its cultural and ecological context. This adaptation is fostered through local, elected, consultative institutions which develop community resources and can draw as well on the national and international resources of the larger community. Each community perceives itself as an element of a "global organism," which itself is a prototype for a future world community. Within that community Bahá'ís are encouraged to disperse and decentralize.

The Bahá'í concept of the relationship between global integration and local adaptation and differentiation is not unlike the relationship between the ecosphere and its component ecosystems.[59] Ecosystems vary greatly according to their locale but all operate by similar ecological principles and are organically interwoven in the larger encompassing ecosphere. The Bahá'í model of an organically structured social order also illustrates how, in general, spiritual and natural principles are correlative.

Aside from structural arrangements for coordinating global and local concerns there are several principles outlined in the Bahá'í writings that suggest a land- and community-based orientation. Agriculture is described as a "fundamental principle" and "village reconstruction" as the initial stage of economic development. "Statements ... to the effect that agriculture with its associated activities will reassert itself as the first industry of society" support the idea that, in future, society will be more decentralized and "harmonized with Nature."[60] Blueprints for the establishment of central community institutions to facilitate community self-reliance and development are also outlined in the Bahá'í writings. A key

59. Arthur Lyon Dahl, *Unless and Until: A Bahá'í Focus on the Environment* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), 81–82.
60. John Huddleston, *The Earth is but One Country* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), 131.

principle is that development should support and benefit whole communities rather than allow individuals or elites to monopolize wealth. Thus the Bahá'í view of a global society is one based on individual, family, and local self-reliance, integrated with sophisticated interdependence on the national and global levels.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION: A NECESSARY UNITY

The idea that both religious revelation and scientific investigation are progressive forces in the process of our maturation has been touched on above. However, the continuing separation between these two great areas of endeavour keeps humanity from pursuing a truly integrated approach to solving the ecological crisis. The division between science and religion which began in the Age of Enlightenment has resulted not only in separate religious and secular worlds and institutions but also in a vast gulf and antipathy between faith and reason, vision and technique, the longings of our hearts and the logic of our minds. The success of science in making Nature the object of analysis and of resource appropriation has forced the means for divine communion into a retreat to a peculiarly subjective realm separate from physical existence. No wonder then that the earth has become, in the minds of many, a shoddy way station en route to salvation in a nonphysical world.

Bahá'u'lláh's unifying vision of the roles of science and religious revelation in serving an ever-advancing civilization transcends this dichotomy. Science is appreciated as a systematic investigative approach to developing knowledge and as an indispensable expression of human intelligence and will. The reality that is investigated by science, through experimentation and reasoning, and that is illuminated through the progressively revealed truth of religion is ultimately one. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that "being one, truth cannot be divided ..."[61] There is

61. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), 129.

only one reality. Since the "two Books"—Creation and Revelation—are totally complementary, the forces propelling us to a consciousness of their unity are invested in the very structure of reality. In other words, the Word of God can be understood as the creative energy animating the world of matter and propelling the dynamics of evolving consciousness. The "realities of all created things are inebriated" and the "atoms of the earth have been illuminated" writes Bahá'u'lláh of the transformational energy released by His Revelation.[62]

The instrumentality of science is now confirming the unity of life, in which creation is seen as a dynamic configuration of one energy with the ability to organize itself in ever more complex and subtle forms.[63] This knowledge may itself help release and confirm deeper intuitions within us of the essential humanity-Nature bond that have been repressed in our cultural development. However, Bahá'ís believe this knowing can only be ultimately understood and celebrated within the birth of a mature religious consciousness. Humanity is distinguished by its self-awareness. As a result, William Hatcher points out, we know that the force of growth acting through creation is capable of subjectivity and intelligence because we are configurations of energy possessing those qualities.[64] The facts remain, however, that we did not create ourselves and that there is an ultimate mystery and question of meaning behind life. The role of religion is to render accessible to the individual the "experience of self-transcendence and mystic communion" with this mystery—to connect us to our Source and unfold each individual's purpose within the vast collective enterprise of evolving consciousness.[65] In our willingness to trust and respond to the forces of growth and transformation, we become part of an organic process that is encompassing and organizing the collective life of humanity yet is centered in each human heart. In this sense, religion is the "science of the love of God."[66]

62. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 324.
63. William Hatcher, "Science," 21.
64. Ibid., 22.
65. Ibid., 24.

The unity between science and religion is expressed in a metaphor employed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

> Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar ... Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism.[67]

It is through the balanced combination and cooperation of science and religion that humanity can be allowed to acquire a genuine humility and respect for Nature while applying the appropriate skills and technologies needed to advance civilization. In terms of both our spiritual growth and our common dependence on the ecosphere, we are called to be, fully and consciously, citizens of one earth home. Our total dependence on the encompassing ecosphere reflects and reinforces our dependence on God. Paradoxically, our detachment gives us the spiritual capacity to participate consciously in this role without being caught in a purely material existence.

Male and Female: Equality and Balance

Inevitably, given the history of civilization, the prevailing social order is seen as the symbolic expression of the male ego and its tendencies toward rationality and competitiveness. Qualities of nurturance, intuition, and emotional sensitivity, which are associated in popular thought with the feminine principle, however, are those most needed to heal our relationship to Nature. It is not surprising that the expansion of environmental awareness and the movement for women's equality have been parallel developments. Drawing on the idea that ecology is literally the study of the earth "household," Merchant suggests that our growing understanding of earth as home is linked with women's consciousness of the home as a habitat to be honored and cherished.[68]

66. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978), 52.
67. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 143.

Beyond the recognition of the feminine principle as an aspect of restoring ecological sensibility in both men and women it is also crucial that women be welcomed as full partners in all fields of human endeavour. Bahá'ís believe that, as the participation of women is encouraged and valued, "the moral and psychological climate" for the advancement of peace and environmental sustainability can be fostered.[69]

For Bahá'ís, the equality of women is seen as an essential objective and a precondition for the establishment of a just and peaceful world. While a full discussion of this important principle lies beyond the scope of this paper, the Bahá'í writings emphasize that as long as women are prevented from reaching their full potential, society is unbalanced. In 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá advanced the following proposition on this important theme:

> ... man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the scales are already shifting—force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals ...[70]

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW WORLD ORDER

The over-arching vision for the changes in values, institutions and social forms that are part of developing an ecologically sustainable society is the emergence of a new system of world order based on universally accepted spiritual principles. Over a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh envisioned such a fundamentally new world order and outlined institutional forms that it would require. These include a world legislature, a world tribunal, and a collective mechanism for safeguarding all member states from the threat of war. These institutions are seen as more

68. Quoted in Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, 229.
69. Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, October 1985), 12.
70. *Star of the West*, 3.3 (April 28, 1912), 4.

than just new structural arrangements for international cooperation on political, economic, and environmental issues—they represent a primary expression of the unity paradigm enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh as the hallmark of humanity's maturation. They will be effective to the degree that they both reflect and foster a consciousness of the oneness of humanity.

It is now becoming apparent in world affairs that collective order at the planetary level is necessary for effectively tackling environmental problems and for redressing the disparities which have relegated masses of humanity to poverty, despair, and the insecurities caused by war and environmental degradation. The establishment of norms of unity, mutuality and cooperation for the human family as a whole is necessary to create the climate both for sharing material well-being and also for fostering the development of the full potential of each individual. As Bahá'u'lláh's teachings clearly indicate, those structures which favor unity and cooperation create the most favorable milieu for spiritual growth and providing such a milieu is an essential purpose of society.[71] By contrast, materialistic value systems and social structures based on competition, power and dominance are antithetical to spiritual growth and have resulted in the exploitation of both Nature and other human beings.

What is being suggested here is an iterative process of social evolution based on spiritual principles. The establishment of institutions and social forms conducive to realizing world unity is essential for building a society that encourages the full intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development of its members. At the same time, the development of individual qualities of respect, compassion, selflessness, creativity, and motivation to serve are all essential to building a global society that can maintain higher levels of unity and motivate the fundamental changes in structures and values required by an ethic of sustainability. Such a degree of motivation cannot be achieved within a materialistic value system. In a more direct

71. William Hatcher, "The Concept of Spirituality," *Bahá'í Studies* 11 (1982), 26–27.

way, spiritual development and service to the greater whole, satisfy the inextinguishable human hunger for meaning and purpose that are the only antidote to the futile search for fulfillment through consumption, status-seeking, and other dysfunctional behaviors which are destructive towards self, society, and Nature.

It is within the context of this iterative process of social change, allied with the application of scientific knowledge guided by spiritual principles, that truly sustainable models of production and habitation can emerge. In other words, the advancement of a new set of values in relation to Nature and the unfolding of a global order which can effectively address environment and development issues both depend on the development of the only infinite resource in the face of depleting material resources—human spiritual potential.

SUMMARY

This in barest outline is the model of social evolution suggested by Bahá'u'lláh's writings. It is a model which the Bahá'í community itself is embarked on developing and demonstrating in its own efforts at the local, national, and international levels.

Bahá'u'lláh offers a vision of fundamental global transformation that embodies a new set of principles for understanding and guiding humanity's relationship to Nature. The religious impulse His writings contain is a comprehensive source of spiritual, social, and intellectual resources for meeting the challenges of that necessary transformation. They affirm that the realization of a spiritualized world order which has been the promise of the sacred scriptures of all ages is now the potential and requirement of our time.

Elements of this transformative vision include an affirmation of the divine within creation and an elaboration of the essential unity of the material and spiritual dimensions throughout the whole evolutionary process. Humanity, as a unique self-conscious part of this communion of life, has gone through a progressive developmental process. The prevailing

social order represents an adolescent stage of this development. Having passed from the dependence of childhood through the impetuous autonomy-seeking stage of adolescence, humanity collectively is now at the point of transition to conscious maturity. The long historical journey to becoming conscious beings through separation from Nature is culminating in a stage that will increasingly be characterized by a mature understanding of life's profound interrelatedness.

The Bahá'í writings suggest that this process of maturation requires an expanded religious consciousness both complementing and integral to our scientific advancement. It is only in this context that the latent capacities of the human spirit can be fully quickened and released. Spiritual growth is limitless and, being central to human fulfillment and a fruition of human purpose within the whole evolution of life, is a requirement for creating an ecologically sustainable social order.

In order to help foster the release of individual spiritual potential and focus it as a force for global transformation and moral regeneration, institutions founded on a comprehensive vision of unity need to be established. The emergence of a new world order requires appropriate institutions for global coordination and for fostering individual and community empowerment. The Bahá'í International Community itself offers an embryonic model for such a process of ordered social transformation.

This process of transformation is neither idealistic nor utopian. In the face of the disastrous ecological and human consequences that face us if we continue with "business as usual," it is no less than a new realism. Such transformation is possible because the forces that propelled life's evolution from the beginning are still operating within human society. There is no reason to believe that the mysterious forces that have "shaped the planet under our feet" and "guided life through its bewildering variety of expression" in natural ecosystems and human cultures have "suddenly collapsed under the great volume of human affairs in this late twentieth century."[72]

The work of Bahá'u'lláh offers a vision of wholeness in our

relationship to Nature and of spiritual purpose in the whole evolution of life. Its effect is to empower individuals and communities to become agents of transformation in developing an ecologically sustainable global civilization.

APPENDIX

This paper concentrates on the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith as they reflect on our relationship to the natural world. In addition to the ideational level, a positive relationship is enhanced by both symbology and practice. At the symbolic level innumerable references are made throughout the Bahá'í writings and prayers to organic analogies, such as trees, gardens, orchards, and the body. 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of "this earthly paradise," the "ocean of God's mercy," the "invigorating breeze of love and fellowship," and the "living waters of friendliness." Humanity's unity is represented as the "waves of one sea, as the leaves of one tree." Revelation itself is referred to as a "divine springtime" through which the earth becomes "verdant and blooming." In speaking of the principle of unity in diversity 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

> Consider the flowers of the garden: though differing in kind, color, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm and addeth unto their beauty.[73]

These metaphors are used to illustrate spiritual principles and invoke a particular feeling that the Founders of the Faith associated with Nature. They represent the fact that all the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith had a fond love and a strongly expressed need for contact with the beauty of Nature and the countryside. Bahá'u'lláh throughout His long years of exile suffered isolation from people and the countryside He loved so much. Knowing His love for plants, many of the Bahá'ís who travelled from Iran to visit Bahá'u'lláh in Acre

72. Berry, *Dream*, 47.
73. "Epistles of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," cited in *Bahá'í World*, vol. 2, 54.

brought plants with them, often refraining from drinking the little water they carried across the desert so that it could be saved for the plants. Denied access to the city, they made a garden with these flowers outside Acre. In the latter years of His life, when Bahá'u'lláh was allowed out of Acre under the conditions of house arrest, He took up residence in a country house outside the city. There, beautiful gardens were created and have been further developed today, as have other magnificent gardens at the Bahá'í administrative centre on the slopes of Mount Carmel. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi also maintained a deep love for gardens and Nature. Many of the Bahá'í gardens in the Haifa/Acre area were designed by Shoghi Effendi, who was fond of taking solitary treks in the mountain country of Europe.

HOLLY E. HANSON *looks at the evolution of Bahá'í involvement in social and economic development and highlights some current projects.*

AN OVERVIEW OF BAHÁ'Í SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The development activities of the Bahá'í community express a well-articulated alternative paradigm of development, of interest in its unusual approaches to the dilemmas of sustainability, of meaningful project design, and equitable North/South interaction. The singularity of the Bahá'í approach is rooted in Bahá'í scripture and is evident in the history of the Bahá'í community's efforts to create social progress since the mid-nineteenth century. Although most of the 1300 or so Bahá'í social and economic development projects are small in scale, they occur in over 100 countries throughout the world. The trends discernible in current Bahá'í social and economic development activities include increasing collaboration with U.N. organs, international aid agencies, and non-governmental organizations; a growing willingness to openly assert a Bahá'í origin for ideas and projects; an increasing recognition of the utility of Bahá'í administrative institutions in facilitating development with justice; and a shift towards a greater degree of coordination and systematic implementation of development possibilities throughout the worldwide network of Bahá'í communities.[1]

1. I am grateful to Monette Van Lith of the Office of Social and Economic Development and the reference library staff at the Bahá'í World Centre for their assistance in the preparation of this paper, and to Michael McCandless and Mark Gilman for their extremely helpful comments on draft versions of it.

A BAHÁ'Í DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

The Bahá'í paradigm asserts a central role for spirituality in development: the vision of how to create social well-being comes to humanity through the revealed word of God, and human beings develop the capacities to take effective action through their relationship with their Creator. Bahá'u'lláh states that "the purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony." Hence, Bahá'ís view their involvement in development activities as a fulfillment of this spiritual obligation to serve humanity.[2]

Bahá'ís orient their development efforts in terms of principles expounded in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the central work in Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, and other Bahá'í scriptures which call for universal education, the creation of mutually beneficial ties of economic interdependence, and the elimination of prejudices of all forms, and which exhort individuals to trustworthiness, to high moral standards in their individual lives, and to the voluntary sharing of wealth.[3] The most thorough exposition of Bahá'í beliefs regarding the process of development is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's treatise on the potential advancement of Iran, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.[4] Writing in 1875, 'Abdu'l-Bahá called for the mobilization of the masses through their own efforts to obtain education. He identified ignorance and the absence of genuine faith as causes of the perpetuation of injustice and oppression; outlined the characteristics of effective

2. Bahá'u'lláh, *Trustworthiness: A Cardinal Bahá'í Virtue* (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1987), 8.

3. Compilations of Bahá'í scripture on the Bahá'í paradigm of social and economic development are *Social and Economic Development* (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1988) and Holly Hanson Vick, *Social and Economic Development: A Bahá'í Approach* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989), 134. A definitive bibliography of Bahá'í scripture and writings about Bahá'í topics is William P. Collins, *Bibliography of English Language Works on the Bábi and Bahá'í Faiths 1844–1985* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990).

4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957).

administrators; and demonstrated that, throughout history, the coming of a new religion has brought about major societal transformation. In *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, further expounded on the relationship of the Bahá'í Faith to the social evolution of humanity, outlining the need to imbue human endeavors with spirituality.

The over-arching context for the design and implementation of development projects is Bahá'u'lláh's mission to weld the diverse elements of the human race into a dynamic and spiritually organic world community. This means that Bahá'ís are extremely concerned about development processes. As important, or more important, than the immediate concrete results of any development undertaking, is that people are drawn together, that they develop the ability to hear all of the voices in a community, and that they begin to learn the process of collective action.

Since Bahá'ís view development activities as practical expressions of the central tenets of their Faith, they focus their attention on those aspects of development which are not usually explicitly addressed in development discourse. Among these are the aspiration that development activities will contribute to a rehabilitation of human society and will eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth, a belief that a desire to serve others is ultimately the most sustaining motivation for participation in development activities, and the conviction that high standards of morality can and should be intentionally cultivated by every person.

Bahá'ís place a priority on cultivation of the moral qualities which they consider to be essential for successful development. "Material development may be likened to the glass of a lamp, whereas divine virtues and spiritual susceptibilities are the light within the glass."[5] In Bahá'í religious practice, each individual attempts to improve his or her character through daily prayer and introspection. Bahá'ís consider qualities such as trustworthiness, sincerity, and self-sacrifice

5. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 288.

to be the invisible infrastructure for development, and try to organize their efforts in ways that foster these qualities. The Ruhi Institute training course for teachers, developed in Colombia and adopted by Bahá'í communities all over the world, contains units on prayer, developing a sense of joy and radiance, and thinking about life after death, as well as units on how to organize a learning environment and how to promote healthy development of children.[6]

Bahá'í development activities are also based on the perception that initiatives which lead to social transformation begin inside the heart, in the human longing to express love for God through acts of service to humanity. This means that Bahá'ís care about the motivations which people bring to their participation in development activities, and direct significant attention to inculcating a system of values that affirms the spiritual nature and capacities of human beings. Developing attitudes and habits of service is a core element of curricula for Bahá'í schools and training centers. The Human Development Program of the Maxwell International Bahá'í School in Canada aims, for example, to train students to "develop self-knowledge, to work with diverse people, to solve personal and collective problems, to establish healthy relationships with others and to be of service to their community and the world through a comprehensive sequence on practical and transcendent subjects which include Knowing and Loving God, Living in a Material World, and The Role of Youth."[7] Each student contributes three hours of service each week in activities which have included constructing an interpretive trail in a provincial park, tutoring,

6. The Ruhi Institute, *Learning About Growth: The Story of the Ruhi Institute and Large-scale Expansion of the Bahá'í Faith in Colombia* (Riviera Beach: Palabra Publications, 1991). In their attempts to integrate religious conviction and practice with concern for material advancement, Bahá'ís find unique solutions to problematic issues in development. For Bahá'ís, the essential goal of any development undertaking is the implementation of Bahá'u'lláh's instructions regarding the creation of a united world, and projects are sustainable when they harmonize the inner need of human beings to understand their true reality with their outer needs for sustenance, shelter, and support.

7. "Human Development Program at the Maxwell International Bahá'í School," unpublished.

coaching, and finding ways to participate in children's classes or in literacy training with people from nearby Native American Reserves.

The centrality of social service in Bahá'í religious practice means that Bahá'í development projects are able to rely on volunteer participation from individuals and communities. The Guaymi Cultural Center in Panama, for example, operates a radio station, holds annual music and dance festivals, an annual children's festival, regional womens' conferences, regular consultations where Guaymi and other indigenous people can consult about their future, and other meetings. It provides training for teachers of the rural secondary curriculum and for adult literacy instructors, assists eleven village schools, and supports local Bahá'í communities in the area by disseminating information on health care, farming, and other development topics. Ten permanent staff (seven of whom are Guaymi), eleven volunteer teachers who are supported by their communities, and twelve volunteers who translate and do programming carry on the work of the Center on an annual budget of about $30,000.[8] The practice of seeking out volunteer staff, especially women and youth, enhances the ability of Bahá'í radio stations to serve as the voice of the people, and also reduces operating costs.[9]

Some Bahá'í projects, particularly those in non-formal education, have chosen to depend entirely on local volunteer labor and resources. Seen as a way to make religious principles effective in the world, this strategy to draw out people's capacities and to encourage community self-reliance, has had both positive and negative results. A network of almost one hundred self-sustaining literacy centers was established in Bahá'í communities in the Kivu region of Zaire in the early 1980s. On the other hand, the number of Bahá'í literacy schools in India has dropped from 262 in 1986 to slightly less than 200 in 1993,

8. Ovidio Carrasco, "Informe de las Actividades Relacionadas Con La Cultura," 1990, unpublished, and National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Panama, May 1992, unpublished.
9. Kurt J. Hein and K. Dean Stephens, "Radio Stations, Bahá'í," *Bahá'í Encyclopedia*, in press.

partly because of a lack of administrative support or funding.[10]

The experience of village Bahá'í schools in the Mangyan areas of Mindoro, Phillippines, suggests that well-trained rural teachers, however, can help to set in motion far-reaching processes of social transformation. In the past eight years, the number of Mangyan Bahá'í village schools has grown from five to eight. Five of the school teachers are now Mangyan, and students from the schools have received high marks on national examinations.

Bahá'í development projects such as these are encouraged and supervised by the Bahá'í administrative structure made up of Spiritual Assemblies. On the local and national levels they are elected annually by secret ballot from among the adult members of a Bahá'í community. Every five years all the members of National Assemblies gather to elect the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council. Assemblies organize devotional services, religious instruction and other functions carried out by clergy in other faiths, but Bahá'í Assemblies are also called on to consider themselves responsible before God for the material and spiritual well-being of their communities.

In well-established Bahá'í communities, Assemblies have become recognized, truly local, representative bodies, able to focus people's attention on actions that are conducive to their welfare. The capacity of Bahá'í administrative institutions to create order and inspire progress has been demonstrated in the past several years by the activities of 200 Liberian Bahá'í refugees in Côte d'Ivoire, who fled from civil war in their country in 1990. The Bahá'í refugees held a large gathering soon after their arrival, re-elected six Local Assemblies based on the communities that people had come from, and began to organize the spiritual and material dimensions of life in their new homes. They established regular Bahá'í meetings, choirs, classes for children and built several Bahá'í centers. In the fall

10. *The Seven Year Plan 1979–1986: Statistical Report* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1986), 109; Office of Social and Economic Development, "Bahá'í Social And Economic Development Projects: A Report on Activities and Trends," 1993, unpublished.

of 1991, they invested the equivalent of $20 in order to buy tools for the eleven vegetable gardens and four fish ponds which are now having a perceptible, positive impact on the local economy. The solidarity and self-assurance of the Bahá'ís has attracted attention, and there are now about 1,000 Bahá'ís and 25 Local Assemblies in the area. A Liberian Bahá'í who serves as community development facilitator explained the undertaking: "if work is done in the pathway of humanity, it brings a lasting result. We think development is the practical application of the spiritual potential that God has given man."[11]

The obvious creativity and strength of the Liberian refugee community in Côte d'Ivoire encourages Bahá'ís in their efforts to nurture the 20,000 Local Assemblies that now exist around the world. Bahá'ís are deeply committed to the principle that democratically-elected, spiritually-focussed local institutions are critical for social transformation and the creation of a dynamic and stable society. They have invested significant energy and resources in the development of these institutions since the 1920s, and continue to consider it one of their most important priorities.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

The earliest Bahá'í development projects were schools established by the Bahá'ís of Iran at the turn of the century in response to a stream of letters from 'Abdu'l-Bahá extolling the importance of education, especially for women.[12] More than ten schools in urban areas and approximately forty rural schools were operated by the Bahá'ís between 1888 when the first kindergarten opened in Ashkhabad, Russia and 1934 when all Bahá'í schools were forced to close because they

11. Henry Appleton, quoted in Frances Kazemi, "Liberian Refugees Strive for Self-sufficiency," *One Country: Newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community*, vol. 4, no. 4, 13.

12. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982); 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Compilation on Education* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976).

would suspend classes on Bahá'í Holy Days. The character of these institutions, and the other cultural, primary health, and agricultural activities of the early Iranian Bahá'í communities have been described elsewhere.[13]

During the forty-year period ending in 1963, Bahá'ís focussed on establishing Bahá'í communities around the world and erecting the global network of administrative institutions which are now so essential to its development work.[14] Although the Bahá'í community outside of Iran was small and its resources were extremely limited, a number of Bahá'í schools and student hostels were established around the world. The first of these was the New Era Bahá'í School in Panchgani, India, which began as a student hostel in 1945. It was followed by others in the Pacific, Latin America, and Africa.[15] During this same period, the Bahá'ís of Iran, constrained by religious intolerance and persecution from carrying out any publicly visible projects at that time, virtually eliminated illiteracy within the Bahá'í community and implemented an extensive program of moral education for children and adults.[16]

As hundreds of thousands of people living in the agrarian societies of the world have become followers of Bahá'u'lláh in

13. Anthony A. Lee, "The Rise of the Bahá'í Community of 'Ishqabad'," *Bahá'í Studies 5: The Bahá'í Faith in Russia: Two Early Instances*, January 1979; Holly Vick, "Bahá'ís of Iran Set Early Example in Social and Economic Development," *Bahá'í News*, no. 675, June 1987; R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, "American Bahá'í Women and the Education of Girls in Tehran, 1909–1934," in Peter Smith, ed., *In Iran: Studies in Bábi and Bahá'í History*, vol. 3 (Kalimát Press, Los Angeles, 1986).

14. In 1963, the Universal House of Justice was elected, culminating the process of the creation of the linked elected structures of the Bahá'í community.

15. Barbara Barrett. "The Development of Bahá'í Schools During the Seven Year Plan," *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVIII, 1979–1983 (Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 1986). Barrett's review of the development of Bahá'í schools from this middle period to the present is comprehensive and authoritative. A review with a thorough bibliography of early English-language sources is Will C. van den Hoonaard, "A Pattern of Development: an Historical Study of Bahá'í Communities in International Development," in *Bahá'í Studies Notebook*, vol. 3, nos. 3 and 4, February 1984, 107–127.

16. "A Survey of Current Bahá'í Activities" in *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XV, 1968–1973 (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976).

the last third of the twentieth century, Bahá'í communities have been impelled to find ways to make the kind of social changes that the term "development" implies. Well-defined plans to promote consultative decision-making and community structures for women, youth, and the education of children were pursued in about one hundred and fifty nations with Bahá'í administrative institutions.[17] Less systematic efforts to provide literacy training, health education, and agricultural technology were undertaken by Bahá'ís in a smaller number of countries. In India, an integrated rural development program in the Panchgani area of India began in 1975, and the Rabbani secondary school oriented to rural development was opened near Gwalior in 1977.[18] The Ruhi Institute near Cali, Colombia, whose programs draw participants into a systematically expanding pattern of service to their communities, began to operate in 1976.[19] Radio Bahá'í in Otavalo, Ecuador, began to broadcast in 1977, and established the patterns of providing community service and speaking in the voice of local people that now characterize six Bahá'í radio stations. Hein's monograph on Radio Bahá'í and his series of articles describing its community radio techniques in *Development Communications Review* are still the most detailed published account of a Bahá'í development project.[20]

The innovative but diffuse efforts of Bahá'ís, up to this point, were transformed by the 20 October 1983 letter of the Universal House of Justice which called on individuals and Bahá'í communities to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh systematically to the problems of their societies. This seminal statement points to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh as a source of

17. Descriptions of these activities can be found in *Survey of Bahá'í Education programs* (New York: United Nations Office and the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community, 1990); the "Survey of Current Bahá'í Activities" sections of successive volumes of *The Bahá'í World;* and *The Seven Year Plan, 1979–1986.*

18. "Rural Development in India," *The Bahá'í World,* vol. XVII, 1976–1979 (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1981), 227–228. Stephen H. Waite, "The Rabbani School at Gwalior," *The Bahá'í World,* vol. XVIII, 1979–1983 (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1989), 233–238.

19. The Ruhi Institute, *Learning about growth.*

order in the world, asserts the coherence of the spiritual and material dimensions of human life, praises the social and economic progress achieved by the Bahá'í community of Iran, announces the formation of an Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, and defines the role of various Bahá'í agencies in fostering development.[21] Together with *The Secret of Divine Civilization* and the *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* letters of Shoghi Effendi, it defines the Bahá'í approach to social and economic development. The concept is briefly summarized in *Social and Economic Development: A Bahá'í Perspective*, published by the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information and widely available in several languages.

The response to this letter of the Universal House of Justice was exponential growth in the number of development activities reported to the Bahá'í World Centre—a rise from 127 in 1979 to 1,344 in 1986.[22] Most of these were small-scale,

20. Kurt John Hein, *Radio Bahá'í, Ecuador: a Bahá'í Development Project* (Oxford, George Ronald, 1988). Kurt Hein, "Community Radio Thriving in Ecuador: Otavalo Indians Running Their Own Show," *Development Communications Report* 40, December 1982, 11, 13; Kurt J. Hein, "Community Radio in Ecuador Meeting People's Needs," *Development Communications Report* 42, June 1983, 2; and Kurt Hein, "Community Radio in Ecuador Playing Local Music, Strengthening Cultural Ties," *Development Communications Report* 44, December 1983, 2. A further source is Kurt Hein, "Popular Participation in Rural Radio: Radio Bahá'í, Otavalo, Ecuador" in *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, vol. 3, 1984, 97–104.

21. The full text of this message can be found in Holly Hanson Vick, *Social and Economic Development: A Bahá'í Approach*, 2–6; excerpts are published in Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983–1992*, compiled by Paul Lample (Riviera Beach, Florida: Palabra Publications, 1992), 139–141.

22. Statistical and general descriptive information can be found in Universal House of Justice, Statistics Department, *The Seven Year Plan, 1979–1986: Statistical Report* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1986); and Universal House of Justice, *The Six Year Plan 1986–1992: Summary of Achievements* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1993). A more thorough description of selected projects is provided by Bahá'í International Community, *Survey of Bahá'í Education programs* (New York: United Nations Office and the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community, 1990), and Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information, *Social and Economic Development: the Bahá'í Approach* (Haifa, Office of Public Information, 1987).

community-initiated activities, but the number of more ambitious projects, with physical infrastructure and full-time staff, also increased dramatically during this period. Some statistical and descriptive information regarding recent Bahá'í developments is available in publications of the Bahá'í International Community and the Bahá'í World Centre; several projects have produced written materials or videos about their work as well.[23]

At the present time, Bahá'í endeavors in development consist of a few dozen schools, colleges, and training centers, hundreds of communities participating in literacy or primary health projects organized on a regional or national scale, and innumerable activities carried out by local communities or individuals especially in village tutorial schools. Notable events in 1992 and 1993 included many literacy initiatives; a collaborative project with UNIFEM in Bolivia, Cameroon, and Malaysia (described below); and the involvement by institutions such as the Landegg Academy and Nur University in the design of curricula for moral education. The Banani School opened in Zambia, and the Maxwell International Bahá'í School in Canada held its first graduation. In India, a national literacy

23. Publications produced by Bahá'í communities about their development activities include Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women (Madhya Pradesh, India), *Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women* (New Delhi: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, Department of Social and Economic Development, March 1987); Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women (Madhya Pradesh, India), *Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women* (Indore, M.P.: Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women, 1992); National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brazil, Department of Social and Economic Development, *Bahá'í Development Projects in Brazil* (Brasília: Assembléia Espiritual Nacional dos Bahá'ís do Brasil, 1992), and National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Zambia, Social and Economic Development Committee, *Bahá'í Community Health Educators* (Lusaka: Social and Economic Development Committee, 1991). Videos produced by Bahá'ís in order to share their development experiences with others include Kamal Zein, *Villages Bahá'í [sic] de [sic] Kivu*, IBAVC [distributor], 1988 (1991 distribution) and Centro de Cultura Guaymí (Soloy, Panama), *Small Lights: Guaymi Tutorial Schools*, produced for the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Panama and the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Americas, with the assistance of the International Teaching Centre, Haifa, Israel (Deerfield, Ill.: International Bahá'í Visual Services [distributors], 1991).

program was initiated, the New Era Development Institute added new courses to its program, and the Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women won a Global 500 Environmental Action Award. These successes, and the less visible ones in towns and villages, indicate a community engaged in a process of recognizing its own capacities.

CURRENT TRENDS IN BAHÁ'Í DEVELOPMENT

More Bahá'í communities are gaining experience in carrying out collaborative projects with United Nations agencies, governments, and non-governmental organizations, and the size and complexity of these endeavors have also increased. The Bahá'í approach to collaboration with non-Bahá'í agencies is summarized in the words of the Universal House of Justice in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Bolivia in 1989: "External assistance and funds (Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í) may be used to make surveys to initiate activities, or to bring in expertise, but the aim should be for each project to be able to continue and develop on the strength of local Bahá'í efforts, funds and enthusiasm." Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies and the Office of Social and Economic Development which coordinates development activities for the Universal House of Justice, have maintained a policy that the decision to start a project should not be based on the availability of outside funds, but rather on the extent to which community support and commitment can sustain the project once external funding is terminated. Sometimes this policy has meant that Bahá'í communities have found it necessary to refuse funding that was offered to them.

Bahá'í collaborative endeavors in development began in 1980, when the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) awarded a small matching-funds grant to Radio Bahá'í in Ecuador. The purpose of the grant was to augment Radio Bahá'í's cultural and agricultural programming, resulting in the development of the highly successful "people's radio" techniques which are carried on at the six Bahá'í radio stations

now in operation. Beginning in 1985, Radio Bahá'í Bolivia collaborated with UNICEF to broadcast radio programs based on "Facts for Life" booklets, with the purpose of improving the health of indigenous children and reducing the infant mortality rate through regular vaccination programs. In 1991, Radio Bahá'í Ecuador also undertook a collaborative project with UNICEF in which they produced hundreds of radio spots and mini-programs on health issues.

Bahá'ís have also received assistance in their efforts to train community health workers. For example, a Canadian Public Health Association grant to the Bahá'ís of Kenya in 1988 enabled them to train community health workers to participate in the government's "Expanded Programme for Immunization." The Bahá'í contribution to this program has received praise from local health authorities and from the Ministry of Health. In 1992, an extension of funding by the CPHA was granted for a period of three years.

The National Spiritual Assemblies of India and Norway have established a productive working relationship with NORAD, the Norwegian Agency for International Development Cooperation. In 1988, NORAD began to fund India's New Era Development Institute (NEDI), with support for a two-year rural community development program. In 1989, funding was extended to cover a one-year community development facilitators course and short courses on agriculture, rural technology, literacy, and domestic science. The National Spiritual Assembly of Norway has reported that the NORAD representative in India was impressed with the Bahá'í community's ability to coordinate social and economic development projects, and approval for a further phase in the NORAD funding was given in 1993. Norway is the first European government to financially assist a Bahá'í social and economic development program and the support provided by NORAD has been instrumental in assisting NEDI to restructure its training program and to make a major shift in its evolution as an educational institution—from one which offered only short-term courses, to one which currently offers a variety of community development and rural technology courses lasting up to two years, including both

certificate and diploma programs. Within the next few years it is expected that NEDI will evolve into the New Era College of Human Services, offering degree programs along with a fully developed polytechnic institute.

The Bahá'í International Community (BIC) is now cooperating with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in a two-year project called "Traditional Media as a Change Agent." This project is funded by UNIFEM in Bolivia, Cameroon, and Malaysia and by the BIC in Brazil and Nigeria. The project aims at improving the status of rural women by using traditional media, such as music and dance, to stimulate village-wide discussion of women's roles. The long-term goal is to enhance the status of women in rural and semi-rural communities, primarily by improving their self-esteem and encouraging their participation in decision-making. Determined attempts are made in each program to include men in the discussion of issues relating to women's status, and to create a mutually supportive atmosphere which is conducive to constructive behavioral change by both men and women.

These projects, and other collaborative endeavors with CIDA, the Indian agency CAPART, and other donors, have enabled Bahá'í communities to extend their development activities more rapidly than otherwise would have been possible, and have helped them to develop the administrative skills they will need as greater opportunities for collaboration become open to them.

In the past decade, Bahá'ís have made more explicit the religious beliefs underpinning their development activities, although the ways that the connections have been articulated vary from project to project. The Bahá'í perception that the fundamental infrastructure for effective development is internal, that endeavors are only successful when participants are honest, self-sacrificing and concerned for the well-being of others, is expressed in various ways. In some cases, Bahá'ís have emphasized that their commitment to the elimination of prejudice and service to humanity make them reliable and sensitive agents of development. Another focus has been the capacity of local Bahá'í administrative institutions to mobilize

support for immunization or other public campaigns. Defining development broadly, some Bahá'ís have argued that all the activities undertaken in Bahá'í communities, including worship services and the religious instruction of children, contribute to a moral foundation that supports social development. All of these are distinguished from the practice, which was prevalent several decades ago, of attempting to promote development without any direct reference to Bahá'u'lláh or Bahá'í principles. The 20 October 1983 letter of the Universal House of Justice, which pointed to "a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth," encouraged evolution towards more direct approaches.

Bahá'ís are concerned, therefore, about how to conceptualize and present Bahá'í involvement in development. The need to assert the distinctive character of Bahá'í schools, and the ways to accomplish this in contexts where students and faculty in Bahá'í institutions may be members of other faiths, was one of the themes that emerged when administrators of Bahá'í schools from twenty-one countries met in British Columbia in 1992.[24] On the one hand, Bahá'ís have not wished to appear sectarian, to exclude anyone from their activities, or to alienate potential collaborators through their use of religious concepts that are not part of the mainstream discourse on development. On the other hand, they make use of the existing community structures of Bahá'í administration, the enthusiasm which religious commitment generates, and what they perceive to be the transforming capacities of spiritual conviction. It seems clear that there will be a wide range of solutions to the challenge of defining Bahá'í development, appropriate to the scope, context, and design of any particular activity.

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24. Stephen H. Waite, "International Bahá'í Schools Networking Conference: Overview and Summary of Recommendations: November 28 through December 6, 1992" (Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia: Maxwell International Bahá'í School, unpublished), ii. The appropriate scope for Bahá'í development has been discussed in several publications. See Farzam Arbab, "Development: A Challenge to Bahá'í Scholars," *Bahá'í Studies Notebook*, vol. III, Nos. 3 & 4, February 1984; Holly Hanson, "The Spiritual Framework of Development," *World Order*, vol. 23, nos. 1 & 2, Fall 1988/Winter 1988–89.

Bahá'ís have also recently begun to recognize the capacity of the worldwide network of Bahá'í administrative institutions to facilitate exchanges of knowledge and resources that go beyond patterns of exchange dominated by the world's wealthiest nations. Financial resources are channelled to development projects from wealthier Bahá'í communities through the Bahá'í International Fund and coordinated by the Office of Social and Economic Development—a system which allows recipients of funds greater freedom to control their own development processes. National, continental, and international conferences of Bahá'í development workers were held in New Delhi in 1991, Santa Cruz, Bolivia in 1991, and Shawnigan Lake, Canada in 1992 to enable people to consult and learn from each other.

Within the Bahá'í community, technical assistance and models for project implementation have gone from South to South, from North to South and also, although not as often as Bahá'ís might hope, from South to North. Kenyan materials developed for the education of rural mothers and Colombian techniques and materials for training teachers and stimulating community development are now in use all over the Bahá'í world. Patterns of integrating service activities into secondary school curricula were adopted for the Maxwell International Bahá'í School in Canada from the Rabbani School in India. The community service model for Bahá'í Radio was developed in Latin America and adopted at the Bahá'í radio station in South Carolina, U. S. A., while programming innovations that originated in Liberia spread to both North and South America. These are a few examples of what Bahá'ís hope will become a well-established pattern through which insights, knowledge, and experience flow freely from every part of the planet to the other parts. The structural means to effect this exchange are inherent in the consultative process of the Bahá'í administrative order.

Finally, a trend towards a greater international coordination of the possibilities for development is emerging in the Bahá'í community. This is evidenced by current initiatives to intensify literacy education within the Bahá'í community. In

July 1989, the Universal House of Justice asked all National and Local Spiritual Assemblies to make efforts to eliminate illiteracy among Bahá'ís. Pointing to the salience of reading for transformation of the individual soul and of society, the House of Justice called literacy "a fundamental right and privilege of every human being," and asked every Bahá'í community to institute their own literacy programs or join those organized by others.[25] In response to this call, a task force of Bahá'ís with experience in basic education met at the Bahá'í World Centre to create and disseminate effective literacy methodologies to Bahá'í communities worldwide. The task force prepared suggestions for utilizing spiritually empowering words and themes (called generative words) in literacy training, and arranged conferences in Nairobi and Bangkok in 1992 where Bahá'í literacy workers and leaders met to discuss the implications of this approach for languages and populations in their respective continents. These two meetings led to a number of workshops and the initiation of several new literacy programs.

CONCLUSION

Considering its small numbers and modest financial resources, the Bahá'í community's contributions to social and economic development are quite remarkable. Bahá'í participation in social and economic development has grown rapidly in the past decade, and in some nations, Bahá'ís have made a visible contribution in rural education, in community health worker training, and in programs for the promotion of equality of the sexes and the elimination of prejudice. From the perspective of Bahá'ís themselves, these actions are only the beginning of what they believe to be possible using the tools of vision, inspiration, and organization which they find available in their Faith.

25. Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 10 July 1989, unpublished.

DOUGLAS MARTIN *reviews the history of the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran and the success the community has had in using the U. N. system in their defense.*

THE CASE OF THE BAHÁ'Í MINORITY IN IRAN

The experience of the Bahá'ís of Iran is a classic case of the violation of human rights, produced by religious intolerance. Prior to the Islamic revolution a deep-seated prejudice against the Bahá'ís and their religion characterized not only Iran's Islamic clergy and the illiterate masses, but also many among the country's educated elite and middle class. The prejudice was widespread and communicated itself to many Western observers. Michael Fischer, a generally sympathetic commentator on the revolution notes, for example, that even the exercise of routine civil functions by Bahá'ís was seen as proof of a "Bahá'í conspiracy."[1] Richard W. Cottam, author of *Nationalism in Iran,* pointed out the problem of even discussing the subject of the Bahá'í Faith in a country in which the word "Bábí" has long been freely used as an epithet, along with such words as "infidel," to describe anyone to whom the speaker is strongly opposed.[2] This prejudice is probably the most important point to grasp for an observer wishing to understand the situation of the Bahá'ís in modern Iran.

The second point is that, in the land of the Bahá'í Faith's origin, the prejudice is, paradoxically, combined with an almost universal ignorance of the religion's

1. Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 281.
2. Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), 88.

nature, teachings, and history. For over a century a curtain of silence has surrounded the subject. The Bahá'í community has consistently been denied the use of any means of communication with the general public: radio, television, newspapers, films, the distribution of literature, or public lectures. The academic community in Iran has studiously ignored the existence of the worldwide Faith founded there; the subject has never been treated in any university courses or textbooks. Indeed, census figures which provided statistics on all of the other religious and ethnic minorities in Iran have consistently been omitted for the Bahá'í community, the largest religious minority of all.[3] Coupled with this calculated general neglect, the public mind has been subjected, for decades, to abusive propaganda from the Shí'ah Muslim clergy, in which the role of the Bahá'í community in Iran, its size, its beliefs, and its objectives have been grossly misrepresented.

Both the ignorance and the prejudice are connected with the tragic events that surrounded the beginning of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths in nineteenth-century Persia. It may help in clarifying the events of the past decade if this background is briefly reviewed.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Bahá'í Faith came into existence through the teachings of two successive Founders. The first, a young Persian merchant known to history as the Báb, announced in Shiraz, in May 1844, that He was the bearer of a Revelation from God, whom the Shí'ah branch of Islam had long expected under the title "the Twelfth Imám."[4] The world stood, He said, on the threshold of an era that would witness the restructuring of all aspects of life. The challenge to humanity was to embrace these

3. Prior to the Islamic revolution there were an estimated 400,000 Bahá'ís in Iran. The most recent (1978) census figures indicate that Iran has about 300,000 Christians, 80,000 Jews, and 30,000 Zoroastrians: *Europa Year Book, 1989*, 425–453.

4. The Báb (lit., "Door" or "Gate," i.e., of the expected universal revelation) was born 'Alí-Muḥammad, in Shiraz on 20 October 1819.

changes by undertaking a transformation of its moral and spiritual character. Central to the Báb's teaching was the announcement of the imminent appearance of yet a second Divine Messenger, one who would address all the peoples of the world.[5] During the course of widespread attacks on His followers, incited by the Muslim clergy, the Báb was executed in the city of Tabriz, in 1850. There followed throughout Pērsia a horrific series of massacres of followers of the new religion. These pogroms aroused the revulsion of Western diplomats and scholars, and deeply scarred the Persian psyche, inspiring an effort to justify the killing of thousands of innocent people by excoriating the victims' beliefs and intentions.

In 1863, however, one of the Báb's leading disciples, who had survived the pogroms, a Persian nobleman, Bahá'u'lláh, announced that He was the Messenger for whom the Báb had come to prepare the way. Partly because of the force of His own person and teaching, and partly because of unusual marks of distinction conferred upon Him by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh quickly attracted the allegiance of virtually all the Bábís. From exile in the neighboring Ottoman Empire, He began a thirty-year mission which brought into existence the worldwide religion and community that today bear His name and that are distinct from the Bábí religion out of which the Bahá'í Faith emerged.[6] Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are contained in a vast body of writings, in both Persian and Arabic, regarded by Bahá'ís as the source of authority in their Faith.

At the heart of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is the concept of the oneness of mankind: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."[7] Strong emphasis is placed on the abolition of prejudices of all kinds, on full equality between men and women, and on the responsibility of each individual to investigate truth for himself. The great religious systems of humanity

5. The Báb referred to this figure as "He Whom God will make manifest."
6. Bahá'u'lláh (lit., "Glory of God") was born Ḥusayn-'Alí, a member of a noble family, in Teheran on 12 November 1817. It was the Báb who first formally addressed him as "Bahá'u'lláh."
7. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), 250.

are seen as equally valid stages in the progressive revelation of the Divine Will, a process that will continue as long as the world endures. Bahá'ís are encouraged to apply the scientific principle to the study of all reality, including spiritual issues. Although forbidden by their beliefs to involve themselves in any form of partisan political activity, members of the Faith are urged to give all possible support to developments that conduce to global unification.[8] Some of Bahá'u'lláh's most important writings call upon the rulers of the world to create an "International Tribunal" to which nations will surrender whatever degree of sovereignty is necessary for the establishment of world peace and disarmament.

There is hardly a tenet of this credo that is not in conflict with some dogma promulgated by the clerics of Shí'ah Islam, the dominant religion of Iran. Muslim opposition was sharpened by Bahá'u'lláh's insistence that humanity has entered the age of its maturity, in which neither clergy nor rituals are any longer required. The central principle of the age, He says, is the process of consultation and group decision-making, the key to well-being for both the individual and society. To the clerics of Shí'ah Islam it seemed certain that the promotion of such ideas in Iran would bring to an end the system of tithes, endowments, social precedence, and political power which they have always regarded as their religious right. To religious bigotry was early added, therefore, the force of personal investment in the prevailing scheme of things.

Outside the Muslim world, however, the new religion began to attract a growing body of adherents. Communities sprang up across North America and Western Europe, as well as in India, and lands in the East and Far East. While Bahá'u'lláh's teachings forbid proselytism as an infringement on the spiritual integrity of the individual, great encouragement is given to activities that promote public awareness of the Faith and that attract new members. Large scale enrollments began in the 1950s and 60s, particularly in Latin America and

8. Bahá'ís regard the League of Nations and the United Nations Organization as initial stages in the gradual establishment of world government.

Africa. Today, the worldwide Bahá'í community numbers over five million members, representative of virtually all of the world's racial, religious, and cultural diversity. National administrative structures have been erected in 165 countries[9] on a foundation of over 25,000 locally elected councils or "Spiritual Assemblies." Beginning in 1963, acting on provisions laid down in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, the membership of the National Assemblies have elected regularly at five-year intervals the Faith's international governing body, the Universal House of Justice.[10]

As a consequence of this expansion, Iranian Bahá'ís now represent considerably less than ten percent of the world's total Bahá'í population. It is this highly diverse global community that sees itself as the target of an entirely unjustified attack on its members in the land of the Faith's birth.

THE PAHLAVI PERIOD, 1925–1979

With the rise of the Pahlavi Shahs in 1925, a number of important developments occurred in Iran which were to have major repercussions on the welfare of the country's Bahá'í community. Central to these developments was the policy which Reza Shah and later his son, Muhammad Reza Shah, adopted toward the Muslim clergy. Their objective was to transform their country, then known in the West by its historic name Persia, into a modern secular state. In pursuing this goal Iran's new rulers sought to exclude the clergy from all major areas of social and cultural influence, while continuing to pay lip-service to Shí'ah Islam as the country's state religion and to provide funding for religious institutions. The tensions which this policy engendered were managed by the regime's alternating suppression and appeasement of Islamic interests.

9. *The Six Year Plan 1986–1992: Summary of Achievements* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1993), 111–114.

10. *Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year*, 1992, shows the Bahá'í Faith, despite its relatively small membership, as one of the most widely diffused religions on earth, second only to Christianity.

Since the Bahá'í minority represented a major pool of educated people, they had, of necessity, been employed in the many branches of the civil service, while continuing to be denied formal constitutional rights. The intensity of clerical opposition to the "Bahá'í heresy," however, made of the issue an irresistible means of placating the mullahs. Repeatedly, during the rule of both of the Pahlavi Shahs, eminent mullahs were allowed to incite mob attacks on Bahá'í holy places and other properties. The ensuing loss of life, however, inevitably attracted foreign protest. In 1955, a particularly flagrant involvement of the government in one of the pogroms resulted in interventions at the United Nations.[11] The Shah was embarrassed when international pressure forced him to curtail the worst of the excesses.

THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

The collapse of the Pahlavi regime in February 1979 appeared to free the Shí'ah clergy from the restraints which international considerations had forced the Shahs to place on their political and social influence. After ecclesiastical pressure had led also to the overthrow of two interim revolutionary administrations,[12] the mullahs assumed the civil power they today exercise as cabinet ministers, justices of the Supreme Court, members of Parliament, heads of government departments, revolutionary judges, military commissars, and block wardens whose control extends to the details of daily life. Even the offices of president and prime minister were eventually filled by clergy. The media became organs of religious propaganda. Ration cards and other crucial permits were distributed at mosques. New legislation imposed rigid rules from the Islamic

11. For a more detailed treatment of the subject see Douglas Martin, *The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran, 1844–1984* (Association for Bahá'í Studies, Ottawa, 1984), 15–29.

12. The two administrations referred to are those of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, appointed by the Ayatollah Khomeini immediately following the revolution, and President Abol-Hassan Bani-Sadr, elected at the beginning of 1980, but overthrown and forced to flee in June, 1981.

Sharí'ah, the code of laws based on Islamic tradition, on day-to-day life, and used the courts and police to enforce these ordinances.

This theocratic regime confirmed the status of non-Muslims as second-class citizens. Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians were admitted to certain limited civil rights as "protected minorities" but were denied equality under the law with the Muslim majority. For the Bahá'í community, however, there was not even this protection. As early as December 1978, shortly before his return to Teheran, the Ayatollah Khomeini had made it clear that, in Islamic Iran, Bahá'í citizens would have no rights whatever.[13] While the Islamic Constitution, adopted in 1979, makes a general reference to the enjoyment of "equal rights" by all citizens, clauses assign the enjoyment of such civil rights to persons who belonged either to the state religion or to one of the tolerated minority faiths specifically named: Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism.

PERSECUTION INTENSIFIES

Encouraged by this formal exclusion of Bahá'ís from the protections of citizenship, fanatical elements in the society began a full-scale assault on the community. Prominent Shí'ah clergymen launched attacks on Bahá'ís from the pulpit and in the media, denouncing them as "enemies of Islam," "corrupt on earth," and persons "whose blood deserves to be shed." The effect was to unleash waves of violence. Members of the Faith were beaten, many businesses were confiscated or destroyed, hundreds of houses burned, and efforts began with a view to forcing Bahá'ís to recant their faith. By early 1980 this campaign had begun to enlist key organs of the government. Bahá'ís were hunted out and discharged from all forms of government employment. Prominent members of the community were dragged before revolutionary tribunals and, in June of

13. In an interview with Professor James Cockroft of Rutgers University, published in *Seven Days*, 23 February 1979.

1980, after summary mock trials, a series of executions began.[14]

With the assumption of full power by the mullahs that same month, horrors multiplied daily: Bahá'í girls kidnapped from their families and raped, the bodies of highly-respected Bahá'ís dragged through the streets, cemeteries bulldozed, their tombstones auctioned, widows forced to pay the price of the bullets which had been used to execute their husbands, and appalling tortures practiced on prisoners in the unending attempt to force the Bahá'ís to recant their faith.

The background of these outrages was a daily life in which Iranian Bahá'ís had become social outcasts with no recourse against whatever abuse the ill-disposed chose to commit. Bahá'í marriages, regardless of duration, were declared null and void, Bahá'í marital life was deemed prostitution (itself punishable by death), and Bahá'í children were judged illegitimate. A "Law of Retaliation" exempted crimes against Bahá'ís from any punishment under the law. Bahá'í holy places were seized and publicly desecrated, Bahá'í children were expelled from schools throughout Iran, and retired Bahá'ís were summoned to repay not only the pensions to which they had contributed during government service but also the salaries that had been paid to them during their years of employment.[15]

INTERNATIONAL PROTEST

Initially, during the Bazargan ministry, the first of the two revolutionary regimes which replaced Muhammad Reza Shah, the

14. Yusuf Subhani, a highly regarded member of the Teheran Bahá'í community, was executed on 27 June 1980. To date, a total of 162 Iranian Bahá'ís have been executed, an additional 27 have been killed while in government custody, and 26 have been killed by mobs. The great majority of the victims were members of the national or local Spiritual Assemblies, clearly chosen in a campaign intended to destroy the community's elected leadership. The Bahá'í Faith has no clergy.

15. For detailed documentation of these abuses see the successive submissions made by the Bahá'í International Community to United Nations human rights agencies. See also a detailed study of the persecutions in Douglas Martin, *Persecution*, 31–66.

Iranian Bahá'í community limited its protests to representations to the new government. Efforts were made to overcome the prevailing prejudice against the Bahá'í community and to reassure the government that Iranian Bahá'ís were loyal citizens of their country.

When these initiatives received no response from the civil authorities, Bahá'í communities around the world sought the intervention of their own governments in the hope that quiet representations might induce Iran to halt at least the worst of the abuses. The governments of Australia, Canada, and of several European nations were particularly supportive. The hostage crisis which began in the fall of 1979 sharply limited the role the United States could play in these initiatives.

By the time the Bazargan ministry fell, in November 1979, however, it was apparent that such efforts were meeting with very limited success. As violence increased, Bahá'í communities began to intensify efforts to bring the situation to the attention of the world's media. Supporting documents exposed the growing implication of Iranian government officials in the persecutions, as well as the absence of any evidence for the charges on which Bahá'ís were being condemned by revolutionary tribunals. Newspaper stories and radio news reports on the subject began to appear in a great many Western countries.[16] Television networks soon took up the case, several of them doing feature stories.

As attention given to the situation by the media increased, foreign protest became open. As early as September 1979 the Human Rights Commission of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland undertook an independent investigation which led it to denounce the treatment of the Iranian Bahá'ís as a clear example of a campaign of religious persecution. On 16 July 1980, the Canadian Parliament passed a unanimous resolution urging that the United Nations Commission on Human Rights should intervene. Two months later, on

16. See *New York Times*, 21 July 1980; *The Times*, London, 15 July and 30 August 1980; *Le Monde*, 29 August 1980; *The Sunday Statesman*, New Delhi, 20 July 1980; *Newsweek*, 24 March 1980.

19 September the European Parliament went on record as describing the attacks on Iran's Bahá'ís as "a systematic campaign of persecution," and urged member nations of the European community to bring pressure to bear on the Iranian regime to halt the abuses.

With political turmoil in Iran increasing, the accusations which were being made against the victims underwent a shift. For decades, the clerical leadership and their agents had focused on the dangers that "false religion" posed to the integrity of Islam and the purity of Islamic life. The growth of radical political rhetoric now led the mullahs to emphasize a second theme: the Bahá'í community was said to have been a clandestine ally of the Pahlavi regime and to have benefited from this alleged behind-the-scenes support. In the absence of any evidence for such accusations, the Muslim clergy argued that, under even the old Constitution, the Bahá'ís should have had no civil rights; the limited freedom they had to exercise civil functions, therefore, was proof that they had enjoyed a "privileged position." Significantly, these quasi-political charges were soon included in the efforts of Iranian embassies overseas to respond to press criticism of the persecution.[17]

ABSTENTION FROM VIOLENCE

Meanwhile, the government itself was becoming the target of violent opposition. It became apparent that the religious leadership was bent on establishing a theocratic regime in which its own members would hold all of the positions of power. Its political allies, particularly those on the left, considered this a

17. See for example, statements of the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires (26 September 1979), and the Iranian consulate in Manchester, England (21 September 1979). Similar charges were made on PBS's "McNeil-Lehrer Report," 12 February 1980, by Mansour Farhang, the regime's spokesman and later representative at the United Nations. Farhang subsequently rebroke with the regime and repudiated his allegations against the Iranian Bahá'í community (*The Nation*, 27 February 1982), claiming that he had been misled by what he now regarded as a "fascist totalitarian ideology" that had seized control of his country.

betrayal of the trust they had placed in the Ayatollah Khomeini and the sacrifices they had made for the revolution. Their reaction was to launch a campaign to overthrow those whose rise they had assisted. Since all of the principal organs of the State were in the hands of the mullahs, the opposition turned to political assassination. Hundreds of members of the new regime and several thousand of the revolutionary guards who supported them were killed by bombs, bullets, knives, and dynamite in a campaign of terrorism which quickly turned government offices into virtual prison-fortresses.[18]

The Bahá'í community remained entirely aloof from these controversies. Among the principles strongly emphasized by Bahá'u'lláh are obedience to government and the avoidance of involvement in partisan political activity of any kind. Although not pacifists in the more technical sense of the term, Bahá'ís are guided by Bahá'u'lláh's injunction that "it is better to be killed than to kill."[19] It is significant that, despite the extreme hostility of the regime to Bahá'ís, and the superstitions which had been carefully cultivated with respect to them, no suggestion has ever been made in any quarter that the community was implicated in assassinations or other terrorist acts.

The reason was the historical record that the community had established. While the early Bábís had believed they had the right to take up arms in self-defense against religious persecution, Bahá'u'lláh had called on Bahá'ís to refrain from armed resistance against attacks. Successive outbreaks of persecution during both the Qajar and Pahlavi periods had been met by appeals for the intervention of the civil authorities and, increasingly, of the international community. When the Islamic revolution occurred, therefore, although members of the community were regarded with superstitious fear and suspicion by the general population, they were also seen as non-violent.

Viewed superficially, this record of non-involvement in

18. The organization that took the lead in this campaign was the Mujahhidin-Khalq (Islamic Marxists).

19. Nabíl-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation* (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1932), xxxv.

partisan politics or civil violence had only seemed to weaken the position of Iran's Bahá'ís. In the words of Hamid Algar, a contemporary Shí'ah scholar whose writings reflect an attitude generally hostile to Bahá'ís, the minority group: "... came to occupy something of a position between the State and the Ulama (mullahs), not one enabling them to balance the two sides, but rather exposing them to blows which each side aimed at the other. The government, interested in maintaining order, would resist the persecution of the Bahá'ís by the Ulama, but would equally, when occasion demanded, permit action against the Bahá'ís."[20]

When the crisis provoked by the new Islamic revolutionary regime arose, however, the historical record which the Iranian Bahá'í community had scrupulously established for over a century was to prove a key element in the successful international campaign for its defense.

APPEAL TO THE UNITED NATIONS

As it became increasingly apparent that leading circles in the new regime were bent on the destruction of the Bahá'í community, and that other means of deflecting the campaign had failed, the Bahá'í International Community[21] turned to the United Nations. The appeal began in September 1980, and coincided with representations from a number of other sources about a range of alleged human rights violations in Iran. The work of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights is assisted by a sub-commission which deals with a range of concerns at the preliminary level. Responding to the representations of the Bahá'í International Community, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protec-

20. Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran: 1785–1906* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 151.

21. "The Bahá'í International Community" is a Non-Governmental Organization holding consultative status with ECOSOC and UNICEF. It collaborates with a range of other United Nations agencies in various social and economic development projects throughout the world.

tion of Minorities adopted a resolution addressing the Bahá'í concern and asked the Iranian authorities to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of this religious minority. There was no response from the Iranian government to this appeal.

The following year, with the encouragement of certain governments, including those of the European Community, Bahá'í representatives expressed their concerns to the 37th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which met in Geneva from 2 February to 13 March 1981. Later that same year a number of governments raised the matter of the human rights situation in Iran, specifically the persecution of the Bahá'ís, at the 36th Session of the United Nations General Assembly itself.

Within Iran the persecution intensified. Accordingly, the Bahá'í International Community now made a direct appeal to the Commission on Human Rights. On 24 February 1982, the Commission had before it the report of the secretary-general containing many serious allegations about human rights abuses in Iran, including the treatment of the Bahá'ís. The request for the submission of this information came from the Sub-Commission's resolution adopted at its 34th seminar, August/September 1981. In the face of determined efforts by the Iranian representatives, who argued that the report was motivated only by the desire of what they termed "United States imperialism and her European criminal friends" to interfere with the Iranian revolution, the Commission reviewed the Bahá'í submission. The latter included reproductions of official documents in which virtually every department of the Islamic Republic's government referred to the adherence of the victims to "the depraved Bahá'í religion" as its sole and sufficient reason for seizing property, discharging employees, revoking pensions, expelling schoolchildren, confiscating bank accounts, prohibiting business dealings, and passing death sentences. Copies of articles from major Iranian newspapers were provided, in which the details of the condemnations had been openly celebrated.

Following this presentation the Commission adopted a resolution, 5 March 1982: the secretary-general was directed to

begin an investigation of the human rights situation in Iran, and the Iranian government was asked to cooperate.[22]

THE IRANIAN RESPONSE

The discussions at the Commission on Human Rights had begun to reveal a certain unease among Third World nations with respect to Iran's human rights record. Some of these had earlier spoken out at Geneva and had expressed solidarity with the revolution. Pressure from such smaller and disadvantaged countries, however, had an equal potentiality to become a serious embarrassment to Iran's revolutionary government. Atrocities against law-abiding citizens could not be justified even on those grounds of necessity which might be advanced to explain efforts to protect the revolution from its political opponents.

An interesting feature of the debate at the 1982 Commission on Human Rights, therefore, was the development by representatives of the Iranian government of a new rationale for its treatment of the Bahá'í minority. The argument was to become the foundation for the regime's attempts to counter all criticism of its attitude toward its Bahá'í citizens.

For many years Bahá'ís had been identified by fundamentalist Iranian Muslims as among the elements in Iranian society which were "Westernizing" the country. The charge owed its origin to the popular tendency in fundamentalist circles to regard such principles of social development as the equality of men and women, reliance on democratic decision-making processes, and freedom in scientific investigation as "satanic" influences originating in Western lands. Such ideals were widely associated with the beliefs of the Bahá'í minority.

This prejudice was seized upon and elaborated into a conspiracy theory in which Iran's Bahá'ís were pictured as secret agents serving foreign governments. Foreign control of the

22. "Note by the Secretary-General," No. E/CN.4/1517, 31 December 1981, and "Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1982/27 on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," 11 March 1982.

community had much earlier been attributed to Tsarist Russia. Subsequently it passed, in a manner never explained, to the British Foreign Office. Now, however, the Bahá'í Faith was transformed, again through a process not revealed by those making the allegations, into an extension of "international zionism." At the meeting of the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee, in November 1982, Iran's Permanent Mission distributed copies of a booklet entitled *Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, in which these political accusations against the Bahá'í minority were explained in detail.

With international attention growing, the Iranian authorities also undertook elaborate efforts to conceal the continuing executions of prominent Bahá'ís. Between 30 December 1981 and 9 January 1982, however, *Le Monde* carried a series of stories exposing the secret executions of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í community in Iran. The stories eventually forced the Chief Justice of Iran, Ayatollah Moussavi-Ardibili into an embarrassing public retreat from earlier denials.[23]

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH FORMALLY BANNED

Initially, it appeared that the intervention of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights would have no more effect on the situation of Iran's Bahá'ís than had that of individual governments. Persecutions continued and, in some local cases, became particularly flagrant. On the night of 18 June 1983 the Islamic revolutionary authorities in Shiraz hanged ten Bahá'í women and teenage girls who had refused to recant their Faith and convert to Islam. Three days earlier the same authorities had hanged six men, including the husbands, fathers, and sons of four of the women. The Islamic judge who presided at the trials, Hujjatu'l-Islám Qazá'i, was quoted in the government-controlled newspaper *Khabar-i-Junúb* as warning that, if Bahá'ís did not recant their Faith, "the day will soon come

23. See series of articles in *Le Monde*, 30 December 1981, 1,5, 8, 9 January 1982.

when the Islamic Nation will ... God willing fulfill the prayer of Noah: 'Lord leave not one single family of infidels upon the earth'..."[24]

In August of that year, Iran's prosecutor-general announced the formal banning of all Bahá'í religious institutions in the country, and declared membership in them and service to them to be criminal offences. In accordance with the Bahá'í principle of obedience to government, the Iranian community immediately complied, dissolving both its National Spiritual Assembly and all of its local Assemblies throughout the country. In an open letter to the government, some two thousand copies of which were audaciously distributed by hand to the ministries, the press, and other public agencies, the community announced its complete submission, protested the treatment accorded to their Faith, and called on the government to fulfill the promise made by the prosecutor-general that Bahá'ís would at least be permitted, as individuals, to practice their religion in the privacy of their own homes.[25]

The worthlessness of this promise was quickly demonstrated when a new wave of Bahá'í arrests followed immediately on the heels of the ban. The majority of the victims were people who had formerly been members of the now dissolved institutions. It was clear that the authorities were making use of the ban as a legal device to sweep up large numbers of prominent Bahá'ís and charge them, retroactively, with crimes against the State.

THE UNITED NATIONS APPOINTS A SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE

The Iranian government may have been counting on the case eventually losing momentum in the United Nations system,

24. *Khabar-i-Junúb*, Shiraz, 22 February 1983.
25. After announcing the ban, the statement of the prosecutor-general goes on to say: "If a Bahá'í himself performs his religious acts in accordance with his own beliefs, such a man will not be bothered by us, provided he does not invite others to the Bahá'í Faith, does not teach, does not form assemblies, does not give news to others, and has nothing to do with the administration." (*Kayhan*, 21 September 1983).

simply because of the difficulties and complexity of maintaining international concern. If so, it was disappointed. At the meeting of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in 1984, a new resolution was adopted calling on the chairman to appoint a special representative to undertake a thorough study of the human rights situation in Iran, including that of the Bahá'ís. Subsequently, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) endorsed the Commission's decision. The report of the special representative, Mr. Andres Aguilar, expressed great concern at the number and gravity of the reported human rights violations in Iran. In endorsing these observations, the Commission extended the representative's mandate and requested him to present an interim report to the General Assembly at its 40th Session, including in its resolution "the situation of minority groups such as the Bahá'ís." Again, the Economic and Social Council endorsed the decision.[26]

In consequence of these initiatives the General Assembly of the United Nations itself went on record, in Resolution 40/141, as expressing "its deep concern over the specific and detailed allegations of violations of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," outlining in its statement some of the specific reported violations. The General Assembly decided "to continue its examination of the situation," by taking up the matter at its 41st Session, with the assistance of further reports submitted by the special representative of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

By 1986 Mr. Aguilar had submitted his resignation. The Commission on Human Rights appointed Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl to serve as the new special representative of the Commission, and had called on the Iranian government to extend its cooperation in his investigation by inviting him to visit Iran. For two years the Iranian government resisted this pressure to cooperate, insisting that the mission represented improper influence exerted on the Commission by various Western governments. With the assistance of one or two other delegations,

26. "Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1984/54 on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," 14 March 1984.

Iran was able to secure the introduction at successive sessions of the Human Rights Commission, of procedural motions which would have had the effect of sidetracking the case and freeing Iran from accountability. All of these efforts failed, however, and the Human Rights Commission continued to renew the mandate of the special representative and to press Iran on the issue.

By this time, political developments in Iran and the country's deteriorating economic condition produced a change in strategy on the part of the Iranian authorities. In 1988 it was announced that Iran would accept the visit of Mr. Galindo Pohl and lend its assistance to his investigation. After further delays the visit of the special representative took place from 21 to 29 January 1990.

THE FIRST VISIT BY THE U.N.'S SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE

The change in Iranian strategy included a number of steps to reduce some of those abuses of Iranian Bahá'ís which had attracted particular international protest. Beginning a year prior to the Galindo Pohl visit, the government began a systematic release of Bahá'ís from the prisons and jails where over 700 of them had been confined. While some new arrests would be made from time to time, the general effect was to reduce sharply the number of Bahá'í prisoners. At the same time, most Bahá'í parents were permitted to re-enroll their children in the school system without having to comply with regulations which had earlier made such re-admission dependent on the child's recantation of his Faith. Again, the new policy was hedged about with significant limitations: university students, for example, were not included in the permission.

Executions, which had aroused particularly sharp criticism in the international media and had been the object of vehement condemnation by foreign governments, came to a halt. The last two Bahá'í victims in Iran prior to the first visit of the special representative were Íráj Afshín and Bihnám Páshá, both executed in 1988.

In commenting on the situation in various public statements, the Bahá'í International Community acknowledged the improvements that had taken place in the situations of various of its members in Iran. The Community pointed out, however, that these improvements did not affect the status of the Bahá'í community in general, nor did they include any form of religious tolerance. The Bahá'í Faith remained a proscribed religion, its shrines and other properties confiscated, its members denied any right to practice their Faith, and the community excluded from all constitutional rights and protections.

The report submitted by Mr. Galindo Pohl after his visit, while candidly acknowledging the continued disabilities and abuses experienced by Iranian Bahá'ís, expressed the hope that the situation in Iran might be moving toward a kind of general "tolerance" of the community. This view was presumably based on statements made to the special representative by Iranian authorities, since only one Bahá'í witness was able eventually, and with enormous difficulty, to gain access to the building where the hearings were taking place.[27]

THE REPRESENTATIVE'S SECOND VISIT

Encouraged by the willingness of the Iranian government to permit the representative's visit to take place at all, and by a number of human rights improvements which Mr. Galindo Pohl felt he had observed, the group of nations which had taken the lead in framing the succession of resolutions over the past several years likewise adopted a change of strategy. After behind-the-scenes negotiation with the Iranian delegation, the Western group drafted a relatively mildly worded resolution, renewing the Galindo Pohl mandate and inviting Iran to continue its cooperative stance by welcoming a second visit by the special

27. "Report on the Human Rights Situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights ... pursuant to Commission resolution 1989/66" No. E/CN.4/1990/24, 12 February 1990.

representative. The resolution was carried unanimously, the Iranian delegation having indicated before the vote that it would not oppose adoption. The willingness of the Iranian delegation to give tacit consent to direct investigation of the situation, even where the Bahá'í concerns were specifically singled out for mention, marked an important turning point.[28]

The second visit occurred 9 to 15 October 1990. The subsequent report was, however, considerably more critical of the human rights situation in Iran than the first, concluding that "The enormous quantity and variety of allegations and complaints received from very diverse sources, even allowing for the fact that they may contain errors or exaggerations, provide a credible factual basis for the belief that human rights violations occur frequently ..." For this reason, the report urged continued "international monitoring by the competent United Nations organs, with a view to insuring compliance with international human rights instruments in the Islamic Republic of Iran ..." With respect to the situation of the Bahá'í minority, the special representative said: "Many documents signed by administrative authorities have been received, providing evidence of discrimination, confiscation, rejection by universities, suspension of pensions, demands for the return of pensions earned and paid, denial of passports and other irregularities ... This keeps the Bahá'ís in a perpetual state of uncertainty about their activities. The Government should therefore be requested to take effective action to ensure that these Iranian citizens enjoy the same civil and political rights as the rest of the population."[29]

Despite this rather somber evaluation, the delegations which had sponsored the previous year's resolution on Iran appear to have concluded that the consensus strategy still offered the greatest promise of maintaining pressure on the Iranian government and encouraging an amelioration of the

28. "Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1990/79 on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," 7 March 1990.
29. "Report of the Economic and Social Council, Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Note by the Secretary-General," No. A/45/697, 6 November 1990, 17.

human rights situation in the country. Accordingly, after considerable negotiation, they set aside their own proposed text of a new resolution, in favor of a compromise draft prepared in the name of the Commission's chairman.[30] This resolution, which again passed without a vote, continued the mandate of the special representative to investigate the "allegations of human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran" and once again called upon the government of Iran "to comply with international instruments of human rights." Significantly, this consensus text continued to single out "the situation of the Bahá'ís" for particular attention, a clear signal to Iran of the seriousness with which a large number of delegations continue to view the Bahá'í issue.

THE REPRESENTATIVE'S THIRD VISIT

When the Commission again took up the human rights situation in Iran, in February 1992, this pressure markedly increased. The new interim report submitted by the special representative after his third visit in December 1991 was still more severe in its criticism of Iran, including its references to the Bahá'í case, and much more explicit in endorsing the evidence for the charges being made by the Bahá'í International Community.[31] While noting that there had apparently been no further executions of Bahá'ís and that the number of arrests had significantly fallen, the special representative reported that "harassment and discrimination" had persisted. He concluded that "the documentation gathered is reliable evidence of unfair and discriminatory treatment toward Bahá'ís," and made specific reference to property confiscations, denial of university education, refusal of permits to establish businesses, confiscation of cemeteries and places of worship, discrimination in

30. "Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1991/82 on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran."
31. "Report on the Human Rights Situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights ... pursuant to Commission Resolution 1991," No. E/CN.4/1992/34, 2 January 1992.

matters of employment, access to public services, etc. The Commission's attention was particularly drawn to "harassment ... aimed at forcing them [Bahá'ís] to recant their faith."

Against this background, the 48th session of the Commission received from a group of eighteen nations the text of a draft resolution much firmer than those of the preceding two years, noting the special representative's view that "no tangible progress occurred in the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the better implementation of human rights," expressing its concern about certain specific problems, including "discriminatory treatment of certain groups of citizens for reasons of their religious beliefs, notably the Bahá'ís," and endorsing the view of the special representative that "the international monitoring of the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran should be continued." Several other delegations associated themselves with the draft after it had been tabled.

In the face of a Commission climate which was increasingly favoring the adoption of consensus resolutions, Iran rather unwisely pressed the matter to a vote. The resulting Resolution, which reproduced precisely the text of the draft, was carried by twenty-two votes to twelve, with fifteen abstentions.[32] The mandate of the special representative was extended for a further year, and he was asked to present an interim report to the General Assembly at its forthcoming 47th session. Consideration of the situation in Iran would be maintained "as a matter of priority" at the following year's Commission session.

On 18 March 1992, for the first time since 1988, a Bahá'í prisoner was executed. Three months later another Bahá'í was murdered by members of Iran's Disciplinary Forces, and in September 1992, two more death sentences were passed. On 27 August 1992, the 44th session of the Sub-Commission of Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities passed a resolution drawing attention to the renewed persecution of religious minorities and summary killings of Bahá'ís.[33]

32. Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1992, on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 3 March 1992.

On 23 November 1992, the special representative's report to the United Nations General Assembly was released and, in relation to the Bahá'ís, was the strongest one to date. On 18 December 1992, the United Nations General Assembly passed a strong resolution (88 votes in favor to 16 against, with 38 abstentions) making special reference to the treatment of the Bahá'í community and expressing regret that "the Islamic Republic of Iran has not given adequate follow-up to many of the recommendations contained in the previous reports."[34] The examination of the human rights situation in Iran would continue during the General Assembly's 48th session in 1993.

Mr. Galindo Pohl's annual report to the Commission on Human Rights in February 1993 revealed the existence of a circular, issued on 25 February 1991 by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and signed by President Khamenei, outlining the government's unpublicized policy towards the Bahá'í community. According to the special representative, the "guidelines have some slightly positive elements, in particular when they refer to the general status of this group and the granting of work permits, ration books and passports. But it must be observed that one rule limits all the others, namely, that which provides that the progress and development of the Bahá'ís shall be blocked."[35] While the intention to oppress the Bahá'í community is clear, the contrast with the regime's earlier practices is dramatic. That those actions against the Bahá'ís which embarrassed the government in international fora would have to be curbed was made clear in the statement made by Ayatollah Khamenei, spiritual leader of the regime, as quoted in the preamble of the document: "in this regard, a specific policy should be devised in such a way that everyone will understand what should or should not be done."

33. Resolution No. E/CN.4/Sub.2/RES/1992/15, 27 August 1992.
34. Resolution 47/146 of the United Nations General Assembly, 18 December 1992.
35. "Final Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, pursuant to Commission Resolution 1992/67 of 4 March 1992," No. E/CN.4/1993/41, 28 January 1993.

The original of the document carried an endorsement of the proposals in the handwriting of Mr. Khamenei himself. The key change, embodied in the government's circular, was that actions taken against the Bahá'ís would have to be controlled, and the most flagrant types of persecution restrained, in order to minimize the response of the international community.

On 10 March 1993 a further strong resolution was passed at the 49th Session of the Commission on Human Rights by a margin of 22 votes to 11, with 14 abstentions, noting "that there was no appreciable progress in the Islamic Republic of Iran towards improved compliance with human rights standards in conformity with international instruments."[36] Once again, the mandate of the special representative was renewed for a year and the matter would continue to be on the agenda of the General Assembly as a matter of priority. The stance of the Government of Iran continued to be one of maintaining that it respects human rights, and attributing the pressure of the Commission to the influence of Western governments hostile to the Iranian government.

Despite the repeated protestations by various representatives of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran that the Bahá'í community is not being persecuted, the evidence seems to indicate that the intentions of the regime remain the same: to suffocate the Bahá'í community while trying to minimize negative reaction from the international community.

CONCLUSION

When the case of Iran's Bahá'í minority was first introduced in the United Nations human rights system ten years ago, the community in Bahá'u'lláh's native land faced the threat of eventual extinction. Influential voices in the revolutionary regime had made clear their belief that the Bahá'í Faith was a "satanic" influence, that the Bahá'í community had no place in Iran's future, and that its members were "apostates" subject to

36. Resolution E/CN.4/RES/1992/62 of the Commission on Human Rights, 10 March 1993.

the death penalty if they did not recant their beliefs and convert to Islam. The energy of the pogrom thus launched, together with the overwhelming resources available to those who inspired it, made the threat fully credible to anyone familiar with the situation.

Today, while Iran's Bahá'í community is still excluded from the protection which the Constitution and the laws assure to other segments of the society, and while its members suffer various forms of discrimination, the threat to its existence has been effectively lifted. Until the 1992 execution of Mr. Bahman Samandarí, there had been no executions for four years. As of April 1993, only 7 members of the Faith remain in prison, most Bahá'í children have been re-enrolled in school, the prevailing economic discrimination is beginning to give way, and a small number of Bahá'ís have even been permitted to travel out of the country. Bahá'ís continue to suffer major deprivations in the areas of employment, retirement pensions, and access to university as well as a renewed threat to their personal property.

The most serious disabilities under which the community still labors are the denial of any form of freedom to practice its religion and the refusal of the authorities to return its desecrated shrines and other properties. It is these communal, as well as individual, human rights that are the focus of the continuing efforts of the Bahá'í International Community in the United Nations human rights system.

The United Nations human rights system is slow and admittedly cumbersome. Its requirements do not accord easily, if at all, with simultaneous recourse to the familiar weapons of political partisanship. As the case of Iran's Bahá'í minority convincingly demonstrates, however, it constitutes an enormous leap forward in the world's efforts to protect the human rights of oppressed people. In the view of Bahá'ís everywhere it represents humanity's best hope in this vital field of concern.

OBITUARIES

TÁHIRIH 'ALÁ'Í

On 26 September 1992, in France. Mrs. 'Alá'í was born into a Bahá'í family in Persia in 1906. She married Mir 'Aynu'd-Din 'Alá'í in 1932, and together they went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1952. In response to Shoghi Effendi's call to the Bahá'ís at that time to take the teachings of the new Faith to countries where there were no Bahá'ís, the Alá'ís moved to Southern Rhodesia in 1953. For this they were both designated Knights of Bahá'u'lláh,[1] and spent many years serving the Bahá'í Faith in Africa. Ill health caused Mrs. 'Alá'í to return to France in 1982.

VALERA FISHER ALLEN

On 9 April 1993, in Swaziland. Mrs. Allen was born in the United States in 1903, and became a Bahá'í in 1925. She married John William Allen at the beginning of the Great Depression in the United States, and they had three sons. In 1954, they answered Shoghi Effendi's call for the Bahá'ís to spread around the world by moving to Swaziland, and they were both named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. They lived there for the rest of their lives, serving as points of inspiration and unity for all who knew them.

G. A. AMRELIWALA

On 12 December 1992, in India. Mr. Amreliwala was born in Bombay in 1905. He became a Bahá'í during the 1930s and served on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India from 1945 to 1967. At the end of the second World War, Mr. Amreliwala was one of the first Bahá'ís to travel to the Holy Land to meet with Shoghi Effendi. After his pilgrimage, he undertook an all-India tour to meet with the Bahá'ís in different communities to share with them messages from the Guardian. He was known for his love and generosity, and as a pillar of steadfastness.

1. A designation given to individuals who took the Bahá'í Faith to virgin territories mentioned in Shoghi Effendi's ten year international teaching plan. (See also "The Second Bahá'í Holy Year", page 95.)

EMMA CABEZAS

On 4 October 1992, in Chile. Mrs. Cabezas was born in Chile in 1895. She became a Bahá'í in 1947, and was elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Chile in 1961. She was a stalwart supporter of the Faith, remaining in recent years as active as her health would permit.

RUTH SHOOK FENDELL

On 10 December 1992, in Costa Rica. Mrs. Fendell served the Bahá'í Faith in Latin America for more than 50 years, particularly in Colombia, Panama and Costa Rica. She designed and developed the formal gardens surrounding the first Bahá'í House of Worship in Latin America, located in Panama.

JOHN BIRKS "DIZZY" GILLESPIE

On 6 January 1993, in the United States. Mr. Gillespie was born in the United States in 1917, and was renowned for his virtuosity as a jazz trumpeter. During the 1940s he developed a jazz style known as bebop, which became world famous. He became a Bahá'í in 1968 and often spoke at public performances of his love for the Faith. He received numerous honors including the National Medal of Honor in the United States and the Kennedy Center Honor.

SVERRE HOLMSEN

In 9 October 1992, in Sweden. Mr. Holmsen was born in Sweden and was the well-known author of a great number of books. He became a Bahá'í in 1964 after deep study of the Faith over a number of years. In 1969, he wrote the first introduction to the Bahá'í Faith in the Swedish language—*De Upplysta Horisonterna* (The Enlightened Horizons). He also wrote an introductory pamphlet on the Faith in Swedish which is still widely used.

HELEN HORNBY

On 17 October 1992, in the United States. Mrs. Hornby was born in the United States, and graduated from Roosevelt University in Chicago. She became a Bahá'í in that city, and worked for the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare. She took an early retirement to teach the Bahá'í Faith in Colombia, where she was married to Charles Hornby. They later moved to Ecuador. She is author of *Heroes of God*, a history of the Faith in Ecuador. She also edited and prepared *Lights of Guidance*, an important Bahá'í reference work.

DORIS MCKAY

On 30 November 1992, in Canada. A Bahá'í since 1925, along with her husband Willard, Mrs. McKay was a contemporary and co-worker of such prominent early North American believers as Louis Gregory, Dorothy Baker, May Maxwell, Horace Holley and Howard Colby Ives. She is known for having prepared a synopsis of *The Dawnbreakers*, which has been in use for more than 50 years. She was active in the early race amity work in the United States, and in the 1940s moved to Canada as a Bahá'í pioneer.

MOHAMED MUSA

In June 1992, in Somalia. Mr. Musa was one of the first Bahá'ís of Somalia and a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Mogadishu. Mr. Musa was known for his extraordinary courage in a difficult environment. His life ended tragically, when, while he was enroute to Kenya, seeking refuge from the troubles in Somalia, armed gunmen stopped the bus on which he was travelling and killed all the passengers.

LEA NYS

On 28 July 1992, in Belgium. Ms. Nys served as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Belgium and was known for her international travels and meetings, as an emissary of the Faith, with Heads of State and other prominent persons, particularly in West Africa and the Caribbean. She often represented the Bahá'í International Community at United Nations conferences.

ALFRED OSBORNE

On 14 August 1992, in the United States. Born in Antigua, British West Indies, Mr. Osborne became one of the first Bahá'ís of Panama, embracing the religion in 1941. He served as a member of the Board of Counsellors[2] in Central America from 1968 to 1980 while based in Panama.

2. High-ranking officer of the Bahá'í community responsible for the propagation and protection of the Bahá'í Faith at the continental level.

SHÁYISTIH RAFÍ'Í

On 15 July 1992, in the Canary Islands. Mrs. Rafí'í was born in 1907 in Persia. She married a Bahá'í, 'Alí Akbar Rafí'í Rafsanjání, and finally became a Bahá'í herself 14 years later. In 1952, they visited the Holy Land where Shoghi Effendi encouraged them to leave Persia. In 1953 they moved to Morocco with their youngest son, 'Abbás, and were all given the title of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. They continued to serve the Faith in Morocco until Mr. Rafí'í died there in 1965. Mrs. Rafí'í then joined her daughter as a pioneer in the Canary Islands.

ANDREW ROBOMAN

On 20 July 1992, in Micronesia. Mr. Roboman was born on the island of Yap into the family which provided the traditional leaders of the society. He was Chief of the Council of Chiefs, the highest rank in the area. He became a Bahá'í in the early 1970s and always enjoyed visits from Bahá'ís for prayers and to keep him informed of the progress of the Faith throughout Micronesia and the world. Upon his passing he had a Bahá'í funeral, followed by a state funeral with full ceremonies as befitted his high rank.

ISOBEL SABRI

On 18 June 1992, in the United Kingdom. Mrs. Sabri was born in the United States in 1924. She became a Bahá'í in 1945, and in 1946 she settled in the United Kingdom as a Bahá'í teacher. In

1951, she married Hassan Sabri and, in response to a call from Shoghi Effendi, they went to East Africa almost immediately, serving Bahá'í interests with great distinction in Tanganyika, Uganda, and Kenya. She served on the Regional Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Central and East Africa and was appointed to the Continental Board of Counsellors in Africa in 1968. She was appointed in 1983 to the International Teaching Centre of which she remained a member until the time of her death.

ROAN ORLOFF STONE

On 1 January 1993 in the United States. Prominent internationally as a promoter of the synthetic language, Esperanto. A Bahá'í since 1933, she served as a member of the International Auxiliary Language Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States during the 1930s and 1940s, and subsequently became centrally involved in the work of Bahaa Esperanto-Liggo, the international organization of Bahá'í Esperantists, which she founded with eight other charter members, and served for many years as its secretary. She translated *The Dawn-breakers* into Esperanto.

CHELLIE J. SUNDRAM

On 22 February 1993, in Malaysia. Dr. Sundram was a distinguished physician who became a Bahá'í in 1958. He was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Malaysia in 1965 and was appointed to the Continental Board of Counsellors in Asia from 1968 until 1988. He served as a consultant for the World Health Organization (WHO), and was known for his administrative acumen, his brilliant conceptualization, and his artistic talent.

ROXANNE TERREL

On 17 November 1992, in the United Kingdom. Mrs. Terrel was born in the United States during the second World War. She became a Bahá'í in California, and soon went to live in Taiwan where she served as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly for 10 years. From Taiwan she moved to Macau, where she helped form the first National Assembly in 1989. She had a special love for the Chinese people which she shared with the Bahá'ís around the world as she travelled to inspire and to teach.

ROGER WHITE

On 10 April 1993, in Canada. Mr. White was born in Canada in 1929 and worked for a time as editor of *Hansard*, the daily record of debates of the Canadian Parliament's House of Commons. He became a Bahá'í in 1952, and served from 1966 to 1969 in Nairobi, Kenya, and then from 1969 to 1971 in Palm Springs, California, as secretary and research assistant to the Hand of the Cause of God and author, William Sears. From 1971 to 1991, he headed the Publishing Department at the Bahá'í World Centre in Israel. He was the author of four books of poetry and one novel.

A selection of new books published during 1992.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY WITH ANNOTATIONS

Agriculture Beyond 2000: A Bahá'í Perspective
Iraj Poostchi. Henley-on-Thames, U.K.: Pootschi Publishing, 1992. 199 pages.

Iraj Poostchi, former Professor of Agronomy and Head of the Department of National (Rural) Development at Shiraz University, Iran, examines the current state of agriculture worldwide and outlines the contributions which the Bahá'í teachings can make to universal agricultural development. Poostchi argues that poverty, starvation, unequal distribution of resources and environmental destruction are all related to the state of agriculture worldwide, and cannot be eliminated solely through governmental and financial means. Rather, solutions must address spiritual, moral and ethical issues, and the author illustrates how agricultural development based on spiritual principles might look.

Bahá'u'lláh, the Prince of Peace: A Portrait
David Hofman. Oxford: George Ronald, 1992. 200 pages.

The author offers an introductory account of the remarkable life of the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. He presents Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be the Promised One of all the religions of the past Who would establish the "Kingdom of God" on earth, and outlines the Bahá'í

peace program prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Divine Physician, for an ailing human society.

Call to Remembrance: Connecting the Heart to Bahá'u'lláh
Compiled by Geoffry W. Marks. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1992. 308 pages.

Published in honor of the centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, this volume synthesizes into one source the extraordinary events in Bahá'u'lláh's life as recorded by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Including extracts from Bahá'u'lláh's writings, this account traces the life of Bahá'u'lláh from childhood to maturity, through His ministry to His passing and the inauguration of His Covenant.

Cooperative Peace Strategies
Edited by Dr. John Davidson, Dr. Marjorie Tidman. Mona Vale, N.S.W.: Bahá'í Publications Australia, Association for Bahá'í Studies—Australia, 1992. 244 pages.

This collection of papers by authors from various disciplines and religious backgrounds addresses issues related to achieving peace, as outlined in the Universal House of Justice's statement *The Promise of World Peace*. Major themes of the papers include cooperation, developing attitudes of respect, and recognition of the oneness of humanity in all its diversity. Issues related to developing peace strategies are highlighted in this collection with a focus on communication and the media, fostering skills in social interaction, social and economic development and the environment, and developing global political and administrative structures.

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh
Adib Taherzadeh. Oxford: George Ronald, 1992. 473 pages.

In his latest book, the author of the four-volume *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* examines various aspects of the Covenant—the foundation of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh which ensures the constant and continuous

unity of the Bahá'í community. The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is based on two documents quoted in full, *The Kitáb-i-Ahd (The Book of My Covenant)* and *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. These documents provide for the successive guidance and administration of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and protect the interpretation of the Holy Writings. Taherzadeh examines the contents of these documents and the historical context in which they were written.

Dr. Muhájir, Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh
Irán Furútan Muhájir. Commemorative ed. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1992. 686 pages.

This biography examines the life of one of the most prominent Bahá'ís of the twentieth century. Dr. Raḥmat'u'lláh Muhájir was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God by the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for his service in introducing the Bahá'í Faith to the peoples of the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia. Dr. Muhájir's life reflects his utter devotion to his Faith and his success in sharing its teachings to the masses of the world. The story of his remarkable travels and services is compiled from his diaries and notebooks, travel documents, Bahá'í news reports, personal letters and memoirs.

The Gardeners of God
Colette Gouvion and Phillipp Jouvion. English Edition. Oxford: Oneworld, 1993. 223 pages.

Originally published in French in 1989, this book contains the results of a search made by two French journalists who travelled to the Bahá'í World Centre and throughout France investigating the Bahá'í Faith. The basic teachings and history of the Faith are examined and interviews with Bahá'ís of various backgrounds and ages are highlighted. The authors conclude that the Bahá'í Faith addresses today's crucial issues, making it of "contemporary spiritual value."

Occasions of Grace
Roger White. Oxford: George Ronald, 1992. 177 pages.

Through his poetry and vignettes, Roger White reconciles the perversities of the old world order with his vision of a new one. White recognizes the problems of our era as an inevitable transition from a dark, godless age to a time when people will care for each other out of love for their Creator. This collection portrays the devotion of Bahá'ís to their Faith and their optimism in their commitment to create a better world.

Peace With Your Partner: A Practical Guide to Happy Marriage
Erik Blumenthal. Oxford: Oneworld, 1992. 126 pages.

Psychotherapist and analyst Erik Blumenthal examines the causes of the current crisis in marriage and presents practical solutions towards establishing loving and understanding relationships. He finds four primary reasons for the disintegration of modern-day marriages: resistance to change, lack of religious conviction, social inequality and inadequate education. Peaceful and mutually fulfilling relationships must be based on equality, encouragement, and cooperation. Accordingly, Blumenthal identifies useful tools for individual self-discovery, describes means of conflict-solving and conflict prevention, and gives advice on choosing a partner and child-rearing.

A Theory of Almost Everything: A Scientific and Religious Quest for Ultimate Answers
Robert Barry. Oxford: Oneworld, 1993. 200 pages.

Barry discusses his ten-year search for the "theory of everything" that even Einstein failed to discover. Barry looks for answers to questions about the nature of reality and the meaning of life through an examination and synthesis of physics, psychology and religion. He concludes that humanity is evolving on a course laid out by its Creator to an eventual reunion with God. Throughout humankind's evolution, there have occurred quantum

leaps in development and Barry feels a quantum leap which will allow humanity to see itself as one organic unit is fast approaching and will be the foundation of the reordering of the world with religion, rather than science, as its basis.

Transition to a Global Society
Edited by Iraj Ayman, Suheil Bushrui and Ervin Laszlo. Oxford: Oneworld, 1993.

This compilation of essays, introduced by Dr. Federico Mayor, director-general of UNESCO, was drawn from the proceedings of the First International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society, hosted by Landegg Academy in Switzerland in 1990. Prominent scholars and thinkers contributed their views on the transition to a more united, culturally diversified world, and the roles that science, technology, government, business, culture, ethics and religion must play. Contributing authors include John Huddleston of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Nobel Laureate Professor Ilya Prigogine and Professor Volodymyr Vassilenko of Kiev State University.

The Works of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i: A Bibliography
Dr. Moojan Momen. Based on Fihirist Kutub Mashayikh 'Izam of Shaykh Abu'l-Qasim Kirmani. Newcastle upon Tyne: Stephen Lambden, 1992. (Bahá'í studies bulletin monograph). 177 leaves.

This comprehensive bibliography lists the major and minor works and volumes written by a prominent Persian, Muslim teacher who anticipated the Revelations of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. The titles of volumes are listed in chronological order when dates are available in order to see the development in Shaykh Ahmad's thought. The entries are divided into subject areas, and each includes a brief content summary, the libraries in which the work can be found, and any publication details. Momen also provides a chronology of the dates and events in the life of

Shaykh Ahmad, a list of his teachers, students, correspondents and those for whom he wrote works and treatises, an analysis of his works by location and year of authorship, as well as a list of volumes, written by others but belonging to Shaykh Ahmad, which may have influenced his own work.

SELECTED NEW BOOKS, NEW EDITIONS, AND REPRINTS RELEASED DURING 1992

'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh
H.M. Balyuzi. 2nd ed. with minor corrections. Oxford: George Ronald, 1987 (1992 printing). 560 pages.

Bahá'í Education: Curriculum Guide for Parents and Teachers: Including the Themes: Love Bahá'u'lláh and God's Plan.
[Mona Vale, N.S.W.]: Children's Task Force, 1992.

The Bahá'í Faith
Patrick Vickers. Oxford: Oneworld, 1992. 64 pages.

Bahá'í Readings
Selections from the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá for daily meditation. 3rd ed. Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1992. 390 pages.

The Brilliant Stars: The Bahá'í Faith and the Education of Children
H. T. D. Rost. Oxford: George Ronald, 1979 (1992 printing). 182 pages.

Day of Glory: The Life of Bahá'u'lláh
Mary Perkins; illustrated by Susan Reed. Oxford: George Ronald, 1992. 206 pages.

The Declaration of the Báb: A Compilation
Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1992. 82 pages.

An Earthly Paradise: Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the World
Julie Badiee. Oxford: George Ronald, 1992. 144 pages.

Education on Trial
Nathan Rutstein. Oxford: Oneworld, 1992. 217 pages.

The Elements of the Bahá'í Faith
Joseph Sheppherd. Shaftesbury, Dorset, U.K.; Rockport, Massachusetts; Brisbane, Queensland: Element, 1992. 118 pages.

Forever in Bloom
Photographs by Raghu Rai; text by Roger White. New Delhi, India: Time Books International, 1992. 126 pages.

Forget-me-not Nicobar
Jeanne B. Frankel de Corrales and Margaret K. Bates. Oxford: Oneworld, 1992. 176 pages.

From Night to Knight
Jenabe E. Caldwell. Oxford: Oneworld, 1992. 127 pages.

Gems of Guidance: Selections from the Scriptures of the World
Compiled and introduced by David Jurney. Oxford: George Ronald, 1992. 118 pages.

The Hidden Words
Bahá'u'lláh; translated by Shoghi Effendi, with the assistance of some English friends; illustrations Jacqueline Craske. Centenary ed. London: Nightingale Books, 1992. 91 pages.

The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh
Translated by Shoghi Effendi, with the assistance of some English friends. 5th rev. ed. New Delhi, India: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1992. 52 pages.

I Shall Come Again
Hushidar Motlagh; foreword by the Hon. Dorothy W. Nelson. Mt. Pleasant, Michigan: Global Perspective, 1992.

The Invisible Hand: Shaping the New World Order
Nathan Rutstein. Springfield, Massachusetts: Whitcomb Publishing, 1992. 114 pages.

Japan Will Turn Ablaze!: Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, and Historical Notes about Japan
Compiled by Barbara R. Sims. Rev. ed. Tokyo: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Japan, 1992. 114 pages.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book
Bahá'u'lláh. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992. 296 pages.

Meditations of the Blessed Beauty
Bahá'u'lláh; illustrations by Mark Sadan. Centenary ed. London: Nightingale Books, 1992. 84 pages.

The Ministry of the Custodians 1957-1963: An Account of the Stewardship of the Hands of the Cause
With an introduction by the Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992. 485 pages.

The Modern Renaissance: An Approach to a Healthier Society
Reza R. Mobine. Mona Vale, New South Wales: Bahá'í Publications Australia [distributor], 1992. 231 pages.

Naw-Rúz, New Day: A Compilation.
Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1992. 92 pages.

Nine Days to Istanbul
Jeanne Frankel de Corrales. Oxford: Oneworld, 1992. 128 pages.

(Parvázhá va yádigárhá): (bi-yád-i shahídán-i Bahá'í-yi Írán 1357 tá 1371 shamsí) = A Tribute to the faithful, 1978-1992: The Bahá'í martyrs of Iran
(ta'lif, nigárish va naqqáhí az Máhmihr Gulistánih) = Author, artist, designer Mahmehr. Dallas, Texas: Mahmehr Golestaneh, 1371 = 1992. 215 pages.

Proclaim the Most Great Name
Hushidar Motlagh; with a section by Robert Harris. Mt. Pleasant, Mich. : Global Perspective, 1992. 104 pages.

Remembrance of God : A Selection of Bahá'í Prayers and Holy Writings.
5th rev. ed. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1992. 210 pages.

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh
Adib Taherzadeh. Rev. ed. Oxford : George Ronald, 1974–88 (1992 printing). 4 volumes and study guide.

The Seven Valleys
Bahá'u'lláh; translated by 'Ali-Kuli Khán, assisted by Marzieh Gail; illustrated by Rob Hain. Centenary ed. London: Nightingale Books, 1992. 109 pages.

The Seven Valleys
Bahá'u'lláh; translated by 'Ali-Kuli Khán, assisted by Marzieh Gail. Oxford : Oneworld, 1992. 82 pages.

Tablet of Carmel
Bahá'u'lláh; translated from the original Arabic by Shoghi Effendi; illustrations by Mark Sadan; introduction based on an original essay by Roger White. Centenary ed. London: Nightingale Books, 1992. 54 pages.

Thief in the Night : Or, the Strange Case of the Missing Millenium
William Sears. Oxford: George Ronald, 1980 (1992 printing). 304 pages.

Thoughts, Education for Peace and One World : A Studybook for Moral Education
Compiled and introduced by Irene Taafaki; with drawings by Susan Reed. Oxford: George Ronald, 1986 (1992 printing). 326 pages.

A Wondrous World : A Collection of Bahá'í Sacred Writings and Accounts of Dreams and Visions from Bahá'í History
Compiled by Elias Zohoori. Kingston, Jamaica: Zohoori, 1992. 160 pages.

THE MINISTRY OF THE CUSTODIANS, 1957–1963
Introduction by Hand of the Cause of God, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992.

THE MINISTRY OF THE CUSTODIANS, 1957–1963

"Power," Lord Acton asserted in one of historiography's most widely quoted and misquoted aphorisms, "tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Whatever other challenges may be entered to this scholarly opinion, the history of the Bahá'í Faith between 1957 and 1963 provides a dramatic exception. On 7 November 1957, the Guardian and Head of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, died unexpectedly in London. In the absence of any surviving member of the family of Bahá'u'lláh eligible for this highest office, the Guardian had not been in a position to name a successor, and the Bahá'í community found itself bereft not only of the individual on whom its affections were chiefly fixed, but also of its leader. Responsibility for coordinating the efforts for the twenty-six National Spiritual Assemblies around the world fell on the shoulders of the Hands of the Cause of God, who had been described a short time earlier by the Guardian as the "Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic world commonwealth." As the Universal House of Justice, elected at Riḍván 1963, subsequently declared: "the entire history of religion shows no comparable record of such strict self-discipline, such absolute loyalty, and such complete self-abnegation by the leaders of a religion, finding themselves suddenly deprived of their divinely inspired guide."

The broad outline of the sequence of events by which the Hands of the Cause ensured the election of the

Universal House of Justice has long been available in various Bahá'í publications. Until now, however, the detailed documentation of this turning point in Bahá'í history has been accessible to the public only in part, through the publication in successive volumes of *The Bahá'í World* of the major statements issued by successive conclaves of the Hands of the Cause. The entire historical record has been brought together by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, widow of the Guardian, "chosen liaison" between him and the International Bahá'í Council,[1] and herself a leading figure among the Hands of the Cause. The volume comprises all of the statements issued by the successive conclaves of the Hands and various messages from the Hands in the Holy Land to National Spiritual Assemblies, conventions, and conferences around the world. It contains, as well, the greater part of the highly important communications between the group of Hands selected by their colleagues to administer the day-to-day work of the Faith in the Holy Land and those members of the Institution residing in other parts of the world. Supplementing these key documents are the texts of related cables and other communications received from National Spiritual Assemblies at particularly critical moments in the period under review.

Although deprived of the guidance of its appointed Guardian, the Bahá'í world was aware that authoritative guidance was also assured by Bahá'u'lláh's own pen to the second of the two central institutions of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice, whose establishment was called for in His Writings. This institution, however, did not yet exist. It was the Hands of the Cause who first fully understood the essential facts of the situation facing the Bahá'í world at the end of 1957, and communicated them to their fellow believers: the ten-year-long teaching plan,[2] which was by then approaching its midway

1. The International Bahá'í Council was created by Shoghi Effendi in 1951 as the forerunner of the Universal House of Justice to forge relationships with the Israeli Government, to help him in the erection of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb, and to conduct negotiations related to matters of personal status with the civil authorities. The members of the first Council were appointed by Shoghi Effendi.

point, had been designed to bring into existence the remaining number of National Spiritual Assemblies necessary for the election of this Supreme Body and would, in the meantime, serve as the authoritative guidance required for the community's collective activities. Galvanized by the urgency of the crisis facing the Faith, the Hands of the Cause embarked on a program of intense activity. Several among them were appointed to serve as Custodians of the Faith at the World Centre, responding to queries on the basis of the existing guidance of the Sacred Writings and the directives of Shoghi Effendi. Members of the Institution travelled tirelessly throughout the world, encouraging their fellow Bahá'ís, clarifying the needs of the work, and providing an inspiring example of the kind of personal dedication that could alone achieve the demanding goals of the Plan. By April 1963, these efforts had achieved their purpose: the required number of National Spiritual Assemblies had been established, and their members prepared in turn to elect the

2. See "The Ministry of Shoghi Effendi, 1921–1957", page 299.

Below: The Hands of the Cause of God at their 1958 Conclave.

membership of the Institution conceived by Bahá'u'lláh and assured of His unerring guidance.

At this point, the Hands of the Cause took the step that the House of Justice was later to describe as an act of self-abnegation without precedent in religious history. In their message of 5 November 1961 calling for a Convention in the Holy Land for the first election of the Universal House of Justice, they said: "All male voting members throughout the Bahá'í World are eligible for election to the Universal House of Justice. The Hands of the Cause do not limit the freedom of the electors. However, as they have been given the explicit duties of guarding over the security and ensuring the propagation of the Faith, they ask the electors to leave them free at this time to discharge their duties. When that supreme and infallible Body has been elected it will decide on all matters concerning its membership." It was a request that the Convention faithfully honored.

This compendium of the Custodians' papers benefits enormously from both a preface and an introduction written by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum herself. The former sets the publication in its historical context. The latter provides a fascinating and all too brief review of the events of the tumultuous six years covered by the compilation, a period during which the Custodians guided the affairs of the Cause entrusted to them through a most critical period of its long history. We are helped to follow the processes of consultation captured in the documents, by which the Hands of the Cause were able to reach a common understanding of the unprecedented challenge suddenly thrust upon them in the very depth of their private grief. We benefit from intimate glimpses of the struggle of the various conclaves to find the resources that the unfinished work of the Ten Year Crusade demanded—indeed, to find the resources needed for the maintenance and functioning of the Institution of the Hands itself. In one lengthy paragraph, no less moving because of its dispassionate tone and objective description of events, Rúḥíyyih Khánum summarizes the Hands' response to the crisis created by the attempt of one of their number, Charles Mason Remey, to seize control of the Faith by declaring

himself the "second Guardian." Equally cogent is her description of the imaginative and resourceful campaign orchestrated by the Custodians to defend the Moroccan Bahá'í community, several members of which found themselves facing sentences of death or long imprisonment because of religious persecution.

Already indebted to Rúḥíyyih Khánum for her matchless study of the life of Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'ís everywhere will feel a sense of immense gratitude for the integrity of purpose and painstaking effort that make *The Ministry of the Custodians* an enduring contribution to Bahá'í scholarship.

This statement was originally prepared by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, for presentation to the United Nations Special Palestine Committee in 1947.

THE FAITH OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

RESTATEMENT OF ETERNAL VERITIES

The Faith established by Bahá-'u'lláh was born in Persia about the middle of the nineteenth century and has, as a result of the successive banishments of its Founder, culminating in His exile to the Turkish penal colony of Acre, and His subsequent death and burial in its vicinity, fixed its permanent spiritual center in the Holy Land, and is now in the process of laying the foundations of its world administrative center in the city of Haifa.

Alike in the claims unequivocally asserted by its Author and the general character of the growth of the Bahá'í community in every continent of the globe, it can be regarded in no other light than a world religion, destined to evolve in the course of time into a world-embracing commonwealth, whose advent must signalize the Golden Age of mankind, the age in which the unity of the human race will have been unassailably established, its maturity attained, and its glorious destiny unfolded through the birth and efflorescence of a world-encompassing civilization.

Though sprung from Shí'ah Islam, and regarded, in the early stages of its development, by the followers of both the Muslim and Christian Faiths, as an obscure sect, an Asiatic cult or an offshoot of the Muhammadan religion, this Faith is now increasingly demonstrating its right to be recognized, not as one more religious system superimposed on the conflicting creeds which for so many generations have divided mankind and darkened its fortunes, but rather as a restatement of the eternal verities underlying all the religions of the past, as a unifying force instilling into the adherents of these religions a new spiritual vigor, infusing them with a new hope and love for mankind, firing them with a new vision of the fundamental unity of their religious doctrines, and unfolding to their eyes the glorious destiny that awaits the human race.

The fundamental principle

enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, the followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.

FULFILLS PAST REVELATIONS

The aim of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet of this new and great age which humanity has entered upon—He whose advent fulfills the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments as well as those of the Qur'án regarding the coming of the Promised One in the end of time, on the Day of Judgment—is not to destroy but to fulfill the Revelations of the past, to reconcile rather than accentuate the divergencies of the conflicting creeds which disrupt present-day society.

His purpose, far from belittling the station of the Prophets gone before Him or of whittling down their teachings, is to restate the basic truths which these teachings enshrine in a manner that would conform to the needs, and be in consonance with the capacity, and be applicable to the problems, the ills and perplexities, of the age in which we live. His mission is to proclaim that the ages of the infancy and of the childhood of the human race are past, that the convulsions associated with the present stage of its adolescence are slowly and painfully preparing it to attain the stage of manhood, and are heralding the approach of that Age of Ages when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when the Kingdom promised by Jesus Christ will have been established, and the peace of the planet definitely and permanently ensured. Nor does Bahá'u'lláh claim finality for His own Revelation, but rather stipulates that a fuller measure of the truth He has been commissioned by the Almighty to vouchsafe to humanity, at so critical a juncture in its fortunes, must needs be disclosed at future stages in the constant and limitless evolution of mankind.

ONENESS OF THE HUMAN RACE

The Bahá'í Faith upholds the unity of God, recognizes the unity of His Prophets, and inculcates the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race. It proclaims the necessity and the inevitability of the unification of mankind, asserts that it is gradually approaching, and claims that nothing short of the transmuting spirit of God, working through His chosen Mouthpiece in this day, can ultimately succeed in bringing it

about. It, moreover, enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all manner of prejudice and superstition, declares the purpose of religion to be the promotion of amity and concord, proclaims its essential harmony with science, and recognizes it as the foremost agency for the pacification and the orderly progress of human society. It unequivocally maintains the principle of equal rights, opportunities and privileges for men and women, insists on compulsory education, eliminates extremes of poverty and wealth, abolishes the institution of priesthood, prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy and monasticism, prescribes monogamy, discourages divorce, emphasizes the necessity of strict obedience to one's government, exalts any work performed in the spirit of service to the level of worship, urges either the creation or the selection of an auxiliary international language, and delineates the outlines of those institutions that must establish and perpetuate the general peace of mankind.

THE HERALD

The Bahá'í Faith revolves around three central Figures, the first of whom was a youth, a native of Shiraz, named Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad, known as the Báb (Gate), who in May, 1844, at the age of twenty-five, advanced the claim of being the Herald Who, according to the sacred Scriptures of previous Dispensations, must needs announce and prepare the way for the advent of One greater than Himself, Whose mission would be, according to those same Scriptures, to inaugurate an era of righteousness and peace, an era that would be hailed as the consummation of all previous Dispensations, and initiate a new cycle in the religious history of mankind. Swift and severe persecution, launched by the organized forces of Church and State in His native land, precipitated successfully His arrest, His exile to the mountains of Azerbaijan, His imprisonment in the fortresses of Máh-Kú and Chihríq, and His execution, in July, 1850, by a firing squad in the public square of Tabríz. No less than twenty thousand of his followers were put to death with such barbarous cruelty as to evoke the warm sympathy and the unqualified admiration of a number of Western writers, diplomats, travelers and scholars, some of whom were witnesses of these abominable outrages, and were moved to record them in their books and diaries.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, surnamed Bahá'u'lláh (the Glory of God), a native of Mázindarán, Whose advent the Báb had foretold, was assailed by those same forces of ignorance and fanaticism, was imprisoned in Teheran, was banished, in 1852, from His native land to Baghdád, and thence to Constantinople and Adrianople, and finally to the prison city of

Acre, where He remained incarcerated for no less than twenty-four years, and in whose neighborhood He passed away in 1892. In the course of His banishment, and particularly in Adrianople and Acre, He formulated the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, expounded, in over a hundred volumes, the principles of His Faith, proclaimed His Message to the kings and rulers of both the East and the West, both Christian and Muslim, addressed the Pope, the Caliph of Islam, the Chief Magistrates of the Republics of the American continent, the entire Christian sacerdotal order, the leaders of Shí'ah and Sunní Islam, and the high priests of the Zoroastrian religion. In these writings He proclaimed His Revelation, summoned those whom He addressed to heed His call and espouse His Faith, warned them of the consequences of their refusal, and denounced, in some cases, their arrogance and tyranny.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

His eldest son, 'Abbás Effendi, known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá (the Servant of Bahá), appointed by Him as His lawful successor and the authorized interpreter of His teachings, Who since early childhood had been closely associated with His Father, and shared His exile and tribulations, remained a prisoner until 1908, when, as a result of the Young Turk Revolution, He was released from His confinement. Establishing His residence in Haifa, He embarked soon after on His three-year journey to Egypt, Europe and North America, in the course of which He expounded before vast audiences, the teachings of His father and predicted the approach of that catastrophe that was soon to befall mankind. He returned to His home on the eve of the first World War, in the course of which He was exposed to constant danger, until the liberation of Palestine by the forces under the command of General Allenby, who extended the utmost consideration to Him and to the small band of His fellow-exiles in Acre and Haifa. In 1921 He passed away, and was buried in a vault in the mausoleum erected on Mount Carmel, at the express instruction of Bahá'u'lláh, for the remains of the Báb, which had previously been transferred from Tabríz to the Holy Land after having been preserved and concealed for no less than sixty years.

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

The passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá marked the termination of the first and Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Faith and signalized the opening of the Formative Age destined to witness the gradual emergence of its Administrative Order, whose establishment had been foretold by the Báb, whose laws were revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, whose outlines were delineated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament, and whose foundations are now being laid by the national and local councils which are elected by the professed

adherents of the Faith, and which are paving the way for the constitution of the World Council, to be designated as the Universal House of Justice, which, in conjunction with me, as its appointed Head and the authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í teachings, must coordinate and direct the affairs of the Bahá'í community, and whose seat will be permanently established in the Holy Land, in close proximity to its world spiritual center, the resting-places of its Founders.

The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, which is destined to evolve into the Bahá'í World Commonwealth, and has already survived the assaults launched against its institutions by such formidable foes as the kings of the Qájár dynasty, the Caliphs of Islam, the ecclesiastical leaders of Egypt, and the Nazi regime in Germany, has already extended its ramifications to every continent of the globe, stretching from Iceland to the extremity of Chile, has been established in no less than eighty-eight countries of the world, has gathered within its pale representatives of no less than thirty-one races, numbers among its supporters Christians of various denominations, Muslims of both Sunní and Shí'ah sects, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and Buddhists. It has published and disseminated, through its appointed agencies, Bahá'í literature in forty-eight languages; has already consolidated its structure through the incorporation of five National Assemblies and seventy-seven local Assemblies, in lands as far apart as South America, India and the Antipodes—incorporations that legally empower its elected representatives to hold property as trustees of the Bahá'í community. It disposes of international, national and local endowments, estimated at several million pounds, and spread over every continent of the globe, enjoys in several countries the privilege of official recognition by the civil authorities, enabling it to secure exemption from taxation for its endowments and to solemnize Bahá'í marriage, and numbers among its stately edifices, two temples, the one erected in Russian Turkistan and the other on the shore of Lake Michigan at Wilmette, on the outskirts of Chicago.[1]

This Administrative Order, unlike the systems evolved after the death of the Founders of the various religions, is divine in origin, rests securely on the laws, the precepts, the ordinances and institutions which the Founder of the Faith has Himself specifically laid down and unequivocally established, and functions in strict accordance with the interpretations of the authorized Interpreters of its holy scriptures. Though fiercely assailed, ever since its inception, it has, by virtue of its character,

1. By 1993, the Bahá'í Faith was established in 188 independent countries and 45 dependent territories or overseas departments, with a total of 165 National or Regional Assemblies. Literature had been published in more than 800 languages and dialects. There are Bahá'í Houses of Worship in Australia, Germany, India, Panama, Uganda, the United States and Western Samoa, and lands have been purchased for at least an additional 112 Temples.

unique in the annals of the world's religious history, succeeded in maintaining the unity of the diversified and far-flung body of its supporters, and enabled them to launch, unitedly and systematically, enterprises in both Hemispheres, designed to extend its limits and consolidate its administrative institutions.

The Faith which this order serves, safeguards and promotes, is, it should be noted in this connection, essentially supernatural, supranational, entirely non-political, non-partisan, and diametrically opposed to any policy or school of thought that seeks to exalt any particular race, class or nation. It is free from any form of ecclesiasticism, has neither priesthood nor rituals, and is supported exclusively by voluntary contributions made by its avowed adherents. Though loyal to their respective governments, though imbued with the love of their own country, and anxious to promote at all times, its best interests, the followers of the Bahá'í Faith, nevertheless, viewing mankind as one entity, and profoundly attached to its vital interests, will not hesitate to subordinate every particular interest, be it personal, regional or national, to the over-riding interests of the generality of mankind, knowing full well that in a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no lasting result can be achieved by any of the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are neglected.

Nor should the fact be overlooked that the Faith has already asserted and demonstrated its independent religious character, has been emancipated from the fetters of orthodoxy in certain Islamic countries, has obtained in one of them an unsolicited testimony to its independent religious status, and succeeded in winning the allegiance of royalty to its cause...

The following is an extract from William Hatcher and Douglas Martin, The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion *(Harper and Row, 1985), 64–72.*

THE MINISTRY OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, 1921–1957

The period between 1921 and 1963 in Bahá'í history is most readily accessible through consideration of the major projects undertaken by Shoghi Effendi in the execution of his role as Guardian. Four areas of activity particularly stand out: the development of the Bahá'í World Centre, the translation and interpretation of Bahá'í teachings, the expansion of the administrative order, and the implementation of the divine plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Immediately after assuming his responsibilities, and continuing throughout his life, Shoghi Effendi devoted a great deal of time to the physical development of the Faith's international headquarters in the area surrounding the Bay of Haifa. During the lifetimes of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, several parcels of land had been gradually acquired by the community of exiles. Of these, the two most important were the site of the shrine where the body of Bahá'u'lláh was interred (in the vicinity of the mansion of Bahjí just outside Acre), and the site of the shrine on the side of Mount Carmel above the city of Haifa which contained the remains of the Báb. Through the generosity of individual Bahá'ís, bequests, and responses to special appeals by Shoghi Effendi, these properties were vastly increased during the Guardian's ministry. Magnificent gardens were laid out, the first of a number of monumental buildings were erected, and a master plan was created for the development of a spiritual center and administrative complex that would meet the needs of a rapidly growing international community and which would be able to expand with it, a complex designed to rank among the most beautiful in the world. A widely dispersed religious community was thus provided with a center of pilgrimage and guidance that would greatly contribute to creating a sense of common identity.

High on the list of priorities of any religious system must be the determination of the canon of its scripture and the application of these sacred writings to the circumstances of individual and community life. Empowered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will* as the sole authoritative interpreter of the Bahá'í

writings, Shoghi Effendi interpreted world events in the light of the Bahá'í scriptures and shared with the Bahá'í community the results of these analyses in the form of lengthy letters to the Bahá'í world.

At the same time, the nascent Bahá'í communities around the world were deluging Haifa with questions on an enormous range of subjects in the Bahá'í writings, and the Guardian's answers to these inquiries also formed a significant portion of the interpretation of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. In the early 1940s Shoghi Effendi focused his analytical attention on the events of Bahá'í history; and in 1944, in commemoration of the centenary of the declaration of the Báb, he produced a highly detailed study covering the entire century from the Báb's first announcement of his mission to Mullá Ḥusayn to the completion of the first 'Seven Year Plan.'

Shoghi Effendi's program to interpret the Bahá'í writings was considerably aided by the fact that he was in a position to serve as the principal translator of the writings from Persian and Arabic into English. He had studied English from early childhood and as a young man was able to continue his studies at the American University of Beirut and subsequently at Oxford University, where he remained until the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death in 1921. Since the major administrative bodies of the Bahá'í Faith during the first critical decades of the Guardianship were located in English-speaking countries, Shoghi Effendi's ability to express and interpret Bahá'í concepts in the English language provided an invaluable source of guidance to the new faith in the Western world.

His role as an interpreter was also of long-range importance to the development of the Bahá'í community. It assured unity of doctrine during the early years of the faith's global expansion and thus greatly reduced the threat of schism.

Parallel with his translation activities and the development of the World Centre of the faith, Shoghi Effendi devoted much of his energies to bringing into existence the system of administrative institutions as they had been conceived by Bahá'u'lláh and established in embryonic form by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Each locality with nine or more adult believers was encouraged to elect a 'Local Spiritual Assembly' to govern the affairs of the faith in that area. As soon as the number of local spiritual assemblies in any given country provided a sufficiently broad base, the Guardian urged the election of a national spiritual assembly, vested with full jurisdiction over the affairs of the faith in that particular country.

A steady stream of correspondence from Haifa provided these nascent institutions with guidance concerning the application of the Bahá'í writings to the conduct of community life. More general communications urged all believers to give their wholehearted support and obedience to the bodies they elected. Bahá'í principles of consultation were identified and assemblies were urged to conscientiously train themselves in group decision-making.

In accordance with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will*, between the years 1951 and 1957, the Guardian appointed a number of distinguished believers as Hands of the Cause of God and charged them with special responsibilities for teaching the faith and protecting its institutions. The crowning unit of this global administrative structure was the institution of the Universal House of Justice, conceived and named by Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi indicated that, as soon as the expansion of the Bahá'í community permitted, a Universal House of Justice would be elected by the entire international Bahá'í community, acting through their national spiritual assemblies.

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Shoghi Effendi's reasons for devoting so much time and energy to the development of the Bahá'í administrative order during the first years of his guardianship soon became apparent. The administrative institutions of the faith provided the necessary instruments for the implementation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "Divine Plan" to spread the message around the world. Before the widely scattered community could undertake so great a task, it was necessary to establish decision-making administrative bodies capable of mobilizing the necessary manpower and resources. Moreover, it was essential that adequate time be allowed for these institutions to learn the rudiments of Bahá'í administration and consultation.

Accordingly, it was not until 1937, sixteen years after the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that Shoghi Effendi began systematically working on realizing the objectives laid out in the series of letters sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Bahá'ís of North America. In April 1937 the first seven-year plan was launched with three major goals: (1) to establish at least one local spiritual assembly in every state of the United States and every province of Canada; (2) to make certain that at least one Bahá'í teacher was residing in each Latin American republic; and (3) to complete the exterior design of the first Bahá'í house of worship in North America—a building whose cornerstone had been laid by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during his visit in 1912, and which, in many ways, symbolized the international Bahá'í community itself. Despite the obstacles created by the outbreak of World War II, this plan was successfully completed on the centenary of the declaration of the Báb, in May 1944.

Following a two-year interval, a second seven-year plan was launched in 1946. The focus of this effort was Europe, which at the time had only two national spiritual assemblies: those of Great Britain and Germany. The plan also called for the creation of local spiritual assemblies throughout Latin American and a great multiplication of those in North America. The successful conclusion of this plan likewise coincided with a major Bahá'í centenary, the one-hundredth anniversary of the inception of Bahá'u'lláh's mission in the Síyáh-Chál in 1953. One of the major goals of this seven-year plan was the establishment of an independent national spiritual assembly in Canada. This was achieved in

1948, and in 1949 was followed by its incorporation by a special Act of Parliament, an achievement which Shoghi Effendi pointed out was 'unique in the annals of the Faith, whether of East of West.'

The two most impressive single achievements of this second plan had a special connection with the North American Bahá'í community. April 1953 marked the formal dedication of the house of worship at Wilmette, Illinois, which was to be the first of similar structures to be built on all five continents of the globe. The designer was a French-Canadian architect named Jean-Louis Bourgeois. His magnificent conception was hailed by the Italian architect Luigi Quaglino as 'a new creation which will revolutionize architecture in the world. Without doubt,' he added, 'it will have a lasting page in history.' One other major triumph of these years was also a building, a magnificent shrine to crown the stone edifice built by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to serve as a mausoleum for the Báb. The architect of this shrine was another Canadian, William Sutherland Maxwell, with whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá had stayed during his visit to Montreal. The exquisite design, in which a golden dome crowns a white marble arcade and rose-colored granite pillars, has provided the Bahá'í World Centre on Mount Carmel with one of the most beautiful landmarks on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

In 1953, without any lapse of time, Shoghi Effendi launched the Bahá'í community on the most ambitious undertaking in its history—a global plan which he termed a 'Ten Year World Crusade.' This plan would conclude in 1963, the centenary of the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Riḍván. One hundred and thirty-two new countries and major territories were to be opened to the faith and the existing communities in 120 countries and territories were to be expanded. National spiritual assemblies were to be established in most countries in Europe and Latin America, and vast increases were called for in the numbers of assemblies, believers, and property endowments. This plan, like those before, was achieved on schedule (indeed was far exceeded); but under circumstances very different from any the Bahá'í community might have anticipated.

In early November 1957, while on a visit to England to purchase furnishing for the Bahá'í archives building on Mount Carmel, Shoghi Effendi contracted Asian flu. On November 4, he died of a heart attack, leaving the Bahá'í world stunned and temporarily distracted, its ten-year plan only half completed.

The Guardianship was theoretically a continuous one. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will and Testament* authorized the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to appoint a successor from among the direct descendants of Bahá'u'lláh but indicated certain qualities such a successor must possess. Shoghi Effendi died without designating a successor, as apparently no other members of the family met the demanding spiritual requirements laid down in the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and in *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.*

There would, therefore, be no second Guardian; the only other institution endowed with the authority to assume the leadership of the Bahá'í community was the Universal House of Justice—a body which had yet to be elected.

Three interrelated factors provided an answer to the dilemma facing the Bahá'í world: (1) from statements Shoghi Effendi had made, it was apparent that he considered that conditions would be ready for the election of the Universal House of Justice when the ten-year plan was successfully completed; (2) in the meantime, the Bahá'í community would receive the basic guidance it required from the detailed plan already laid down by Shoghi Effendi; and (3) finally, in one of his last messages to the Bahá'í world, he had named the Hands of the Cause as the 'Chief Stewards' of the faith and called on them to collaborate closely with the national spiritual assemblies in assuring that the ten-year plan was carried out and that the unity of the faith was protected.

Heartened by this last message, the Hands of the Cause organized their work around a series of annual 'Conclaves.' These consultations produced a number of major statements, including the formal declaration that Shoghi Effendi had left no will and had appointed no heir to the Guardianship (Conclave of 1957), and the announcement that the Universal House of Justice would be elected by the membership of all the national spiritual assemblies of the Bahá'ís of the world in 1963 (Conclave of 1959).

By April 1961 twenty-one new national spiritual assemblies were established in Latin America; and, a year later, an additional eleven were elected in Europe. The remaining goals of the ten-year plan were likewise either accomplished or surpassed. In the spring of 1963, precisely one hundred years after Bahá'u'lláh first declared his mission to a handful of followers in the Garden of Riḍván, the members of the fifty-six elected national spiritual assemblies around the world carried out an election of the first Universal House of Justice. In a remarkable gesture of renunciation, the Hands of the Cause disqualified themselves from serving as elected members of the supreme administrative institution of the Bahá'í community.

For Bahá'ís, the election of the first Universal House of Justice represented an event of transcendent importance. After more than a century of struggle, persecution, and recurrent internal crises, and through democratic electoral processes, the Bahá'í community had succeeded in bringing into existence a permanent institution for the guidance of all the affairs of the faith. Moreover, its establishment had been conceived by Bahá'u'lláh himself and was patterned on principles laid down in his writings and in those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The cosmopolitan membership of the first Universal House of Justice seemed particularly appropriate to the institution's nature and functions: the nine members from four continents represented three major religious backgrounds (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) as well as several ethnic origins.

Beyond its institutional importance, the establishment of the Universal House of Justice symbolized the element which Bahá'ís regard as the essence of their faith: unity. The emergence of the Universal House of Justice as the unchallenged authority in all the affairs of the community meant that the Bahá'í Faith had remained united through the most critical period of a religion's history, the vulnerable first century during which schism almost traditionally takes root.

THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY TODAY

In the thirty years since the election of the Universal House of Justice, the growth of the Bahá'í community has been dramatic. From a membership of an estimated 408,000 in 1963, the number of believers has now risen to over five million. During the same period the number of National Spiritual Assemblies has grown from 56 to 165 and the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies from 3,555 to 20,435. Altogether, it is estimated that at least 2,112 different ethnic and tribal backgrounds are represented, and the literature of the Faith appears in over 800 different languages. Statistics published by the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *World Christian Encyclopedia* indicate that, with its diffusion to 205 countries, the Bahá'í Faith is now the second most wide-spread of the world's religions, exceeded only by Christianity.[1] These figures, all of them the product of a conservative statistical methodology, indicate that the Bahá'í community likely ranks as the most diverse organized body of people on the planet today.

That a relatively small religious community should have experienced such growth in both numbers and diversity at so early a stage in its history is an extraordinary accomplishment. The same may be said of the community's success in establishing its credentials in the eyes of civil authority. Far from rejecting the world and the institutions that govern it, the Bahá'í community has deliberately pursued a close relationship with civil authority, as an integral part of its development. Through continuous efforts in a series of global development plans, Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies at both local and national levels have become legally incorporated in the great majority of the territories where the Faith has been established. Similarly, the Faith's marriage ceremony has secured formal recognition in a great many civil jurisdictions and, in various parts of the world, Bahá'í holy days are beginning to gain a status similar to that accorded to other independent faiths in the calendars of

1. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1992; *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 1982.

businesses, schools, and government offices.

At the United Nations, the Bahá'í International Community has steadily expanded the recognition early accorded to it as an international Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) enjoying consultative status with ECOSOC. It has been particularly active in the fields of human rights, the needs of women and children, environmental concerns, and the pursuit of sound sustainable development policies. Its international efforts in these areas are coordinated by various specialized agencies, the United Nations Office, the Office of Public Information, the Office of the Environment, and the Office for the Advancement of Women.

Far from acting merely as another international lobbying group focused principally in New York and Geneva, however, the Bahá'í International Community represents an association of democratically elected national and local councils united in their beliefs and goals, and reflective of the entire diversity of humankind. The community's efforts in the United Nations system have gained not only a forum for the Bahá'í Faith's universal ideals, but also an opportunity to contribute directly to laying the foundations of international order. Much attention is given by Bahá'ís to ensuring that, to the extent circumstances in various regions permit, society in general is made aware of the existence of the Faith and its teachings. Publishing trusts print and distribute a great variety of Bahá'í literature, ranging from compilations of the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith, to scholarly commentaries, popular books, newsletters, and magazines. Other media are also extensively utilized: films, videos, television programs, spot announcements, radio broadcasts, newspaper articles and advertisements, pamphlets, posters and manuals, correspondence courses, exhibitions, lecture series, and winter and summer schools. The objective of all this activity has been to ensure that, in time, every human being on earth will come in contact with the message of Bahá'u'lláh.

A Bahá'í institution that has figured prominently in this program of public education is the House of Worship. Today there are Bahá'í Houses of Worship on every continent, and a great many additional sites have been purchased around the world for future construction of these edifices, which are intended to play a central role in Bahá'í community life. Around each, in time, will be constructed other institutions, such as schools or colleges, hostels, homes for the aged, and administrative centers. At the present time the Houses of Worship are not used principally for Bahá'í community services. Rather, they are open as places for persons of all religious backgrounds (or those professing no particular faith) to meet in the worship of the one God. Services are non-denominational and consist of readings and prayers from the scriptures of the world's faiths, with no sermons or other attempts to cast these teachings in a mold of specifically Bahá'í interpretation. The only requisite architectural

features of a House of Worship are that it have nine sides, symbolic of completeness and comprehensiveness, as nine is the highest single number.

The expansion of the Faith proceeds, as was the pattern established under the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, through a series of international teaching plans. Increasingly, however, as the national and local institutions of the Faith have matured and become consolidated, the plans have been set in terms of general objectives decided on by the Universal House of Justice, with the details being established by the National Spiritual Assemblies themselves, in consultation with the Continental Boards of Counsellors. A Six Year Teaching Plan, the fourth Plan undertaken since the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963, was successfully concluded at Riḍván 1992. An analysis of its achievements indicates that growth has been particularly rapid in India, Russia and several former Eastern Bloc countries, as well as such far-flung countries as Bangladesh, Brazil, Tchad, Guyana, Haiti, Kenya, Macau, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua-New Guinea, the Philippines, Taiwan and Zaire.

By far the most dramatic feature of the recent expansion has been the extraordinary response to the Faith on the part of the peoples of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, following the collapse of the barriers that had long prevented free intercourse with the populations of these lands. National or Regional Spiritual Assemblies were established in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the entire former USSR in 1991. In 1992, National or Regional Assemblies were established in Albania; Azerbaijan; the Baltic States; Central Asia; Hungary; Poland; Russia, Georgia and Armenia; and the Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. The rapid expansion in the numbers of Local Spiritual Assemblies throughout all these countries indicates that, where Regional Assemblies have been temporarily established, National Spiritual Assemblies will shortly emerge. Bahá'í literature is rapidly appearing in all the major languages of the region and communities are energetically pursuing the establishment of formal relations with civic governments.

A development which has given enormous impetus to the expansion and consolidation of the Faith in the past decade has been the intensification of its persecution in the country of its birth. Throughout the past century the Bahá'ís of Iran had been the object of bitter attacks by elements among the Muslim majority incited and led by Islamic clerics. Under the Pahlavi Shahs (1925–1979), this long-standing prejudice against the Faith on the part of segments of the Muslim population was harnessed to political ends, with the Bahá'í minority now serving to distract public attention from various unpopular policies of the regime. With the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, efforts at the total suppression of the minority Faith became systematized. By 1992 more than 200 Bahá'ís had been executed or assassinated, hundreds more had been impris-

oned, and tens of thousands had been deprived of jobs, pensions, businesses, and educational opportunities. All national Bahá'í administrative structures had been banned by the government, and holy places, shrines, and cemeteries had been confiscated, vandalized, and destroyed.

Aroused by this deliberate attempt to destroy its parent community, Bahá'ís around the world launched an intensive campaign of protest. Many thousands of newspaper articles appeared and the situation was made the subject of countless television and radio stories. Several national governments and legislatures condemned the actions of the Iranian government or expressed concern about the fate of the Iranian Bahá'ís. Most important, in a series of resolutions that gave specific attention to the Bahá'í situation, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and finally the General Assembly itself began to press the Iranian regime to observe the international human rights covenants to which it was committed. In response to this international outcry, the most violent aspects of the persecution gradually abated by the early 1990s. However, the Bahá'ís of Iran remain without any fundamental guarantee of their rights to practice their religion freely, and the efforts of the coreligionists around the world to maintain the pressure for the emancipation continues. [2]

As has so often been the case throughout religious history, the persecution had effects almost precisely contrary to those intended. The world-wide attention given to efforts to alleviate the suffering of the victims entailed a massive education of government officials, academics, the media, and the general public in many lands about the nature of the Bahá'í Faith and its aims and teachings. The very nature of the issues involved has tended to throw into clear relief the peaceful and progressive character of the Bahá'í community. It is hardly surprising that so dramatic an increase in public awareness coincided with a great increase in the membership of the Faith. Moreover, the experience of arising together to defend their fellow believers against an unprovoked assault had a powerful consolidating effect on the Faith's highly diverse membership around the world, deepening members' understanding of the implications of their beliefs and providing Bahá'í institutions with an unparalleled experience in coordinating their efforts.

Throughout these same years the education of the community advanced greatly through a series of messages drafted by the Universal House of Justice and published in many languages. Particularly important was *The Promise of World Peace*, a twenty-one page document issued in the fall of 1985, which analyzed the reasons that world peace has for so long been considered unattainable and declared that these barriers could at last be overcome. The effect of this message, published in over a million copies and distributed to lead-

2. See "The Case of the Bahá'í Minority in Iran", p. 247.

ers of thought, government bodies and the media, was to provide the members of the Bahá'í Faith with the conceptual framework for a program of collaborative action with a wide range of like-minded organizations. The keynote, the message declares, is the coming of age of humankind: "A candid acknowledgment that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist, that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine."

As the Faith's teachings became even more widely known, the Universal House of Justice decided that the time had come for the public presentation of the Bahá'í message to focus much more directly on its Author. Accordingly, on 3 April 1991, it forwarded to National Assemblies a statement prepared by the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, entitled *Bahá'u'lláh*. Published, like the statement on peace, in many languages and large print runs, the document was also made the centerpiece of an intensive campaign of public information. Its objective was to set Bahá'u'lláh's mission in the context of the global crisis that had, by the closing decade of the century, become a commonplace of public discussion:

> As the new millennium approaches, the crucial need of the human race is to find a unifying vision of the nature of man and society ... For, without a common conviction about the course and direction of human history, it is inconceivable that foundations can be laid for a global society to which the mass of humankind can commit themselves.
>
> Such a vision unfolds in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the nineteenth-century prophetic figure whose growing influence is the most remarkable development of contemporary religious history ... The phenomenon is one that has no reference points in the contemporary world, but is associated rather with climactic chang-es of direction in the collective past of the human race. For Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be no less than the Messenger of God to the age of human maturity ...[3]

As the Bahá'í Faith commemorated the centenary of Bahá-'u'lláh's passing,[4] His message was seen to have taken visible shape in a community that represents a microcosm of the human race itself and is established in every corner of the globe. The network of administrative institutions conceived by the Founder is now in place throughout the planet. His teachings, translated into many languages, now provide the central spiritual guidance in the lives of its heterogeneous membership. In the decades immediately ahead, the

3. *Bahá'u'lláh* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 1–2.
4. 29 May 1992. See reprint of statement on p. 47.

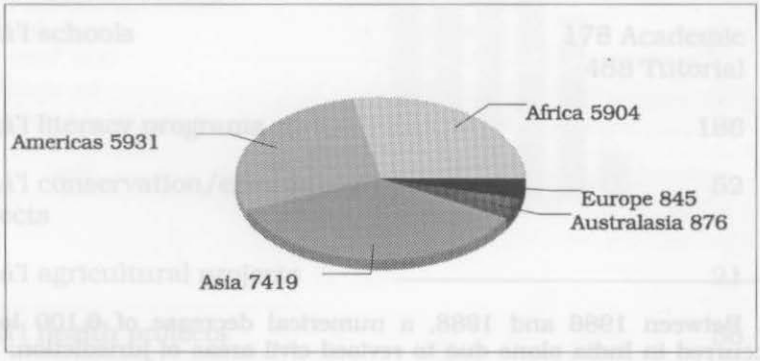
existence of such a community will offer increasingly encouraging evidence that humanity, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work as a single people in a global homeland.

STATISTICS

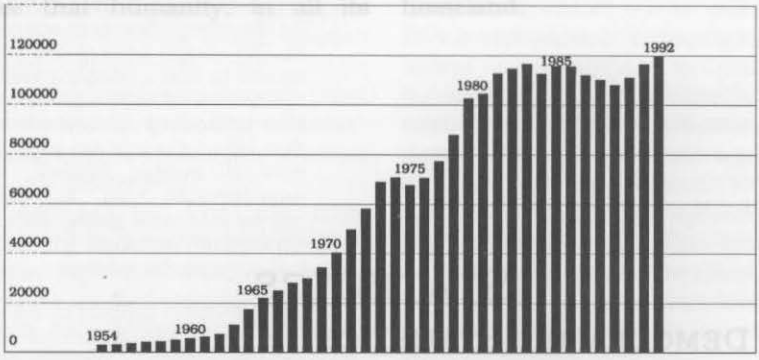
DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS

Worldwide Bahá'í population	More than 5 million
Countries/dependent territories where Bahá'í Faith is established	188 countries/ 45 territories
National/Regional Spiritual Assemblies	165
Local Spiritual Assemblies	20,435
Localities where Bahá'ís reside	120,046
Tribes, races and ethnic groups represented in the Bahá'í community	2,112

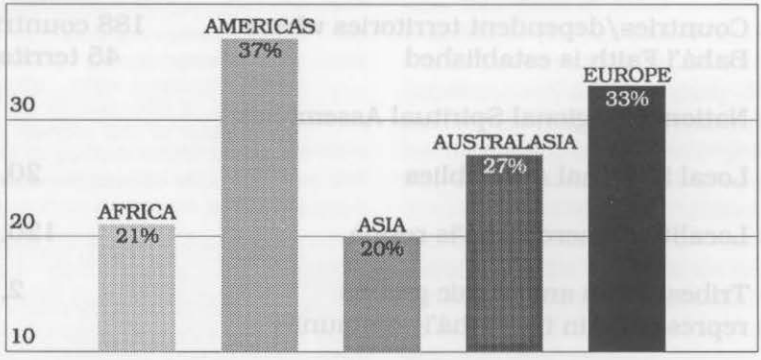
GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES BY CONTINENT



GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF LOCALITIES WHERE BAHÁ'ÍS RESIDE[1]

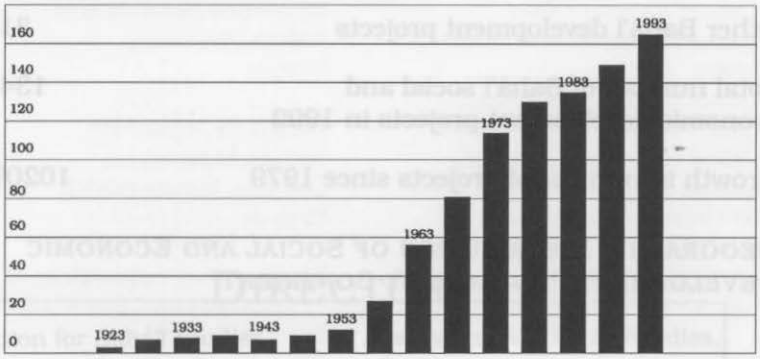


PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN ON NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES BY CONTINENT



1. Between 1986 and 1988, a numerical decrease of 6,100 localities occurred in India alone due to revised civil areas of jurisdiction; similar changes took place in other countries.

GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES

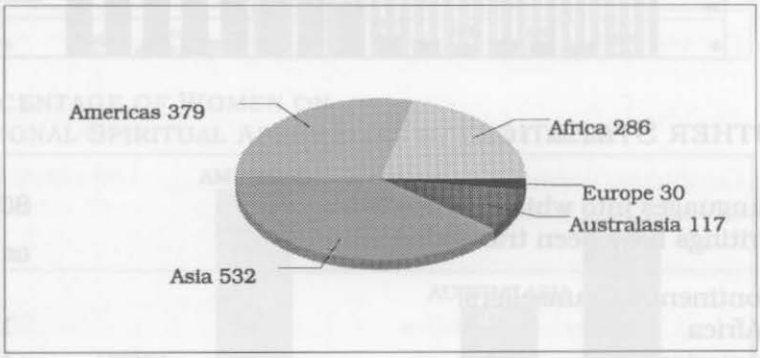


OTHER STATISTICS

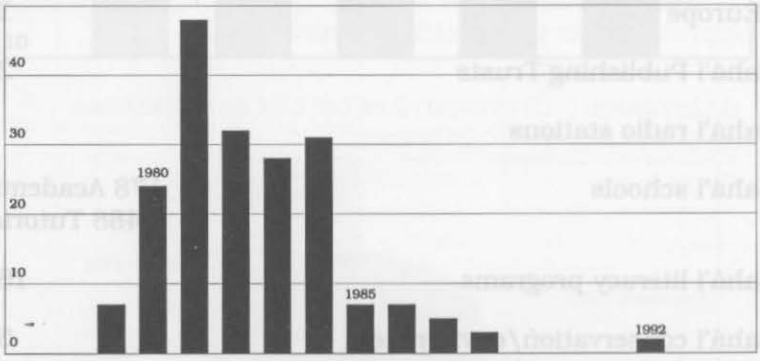
Languages into which Bahá'u'lláh's writings have been translated	802
Continental Counsellors:	
Africa	18
Americas	17
Asia	17
Australasia	10
Europe	10
Bahá'í Publishing Trusts	29
Bahá'í radio stations	7
Bahá'í schools	178 Academic 488 Tutorial
Bahá'í literacy programs	186
Bahá'í conservation/environment projects	52
Bahá'í agricultural projects	21
Bahá'í health projects	56

Bahá'í women and youth projects	52
Other Bahá'í development projects	311
Total number of Bahá'í social and economic development projects in 1992	1344
Growth in number of projects since 1979	1020%

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS BY CONTINENT



NUMBER OF BAHÁ'ÍS KILLED IN IRAN SINCE THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION



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Bahá'í International Community
Haifa Offices:
• Secretariat
• Office of Public Information
P. O. Box 155
31-001 Haifa
Israel

1. For further information on other Associations for Bahá'í Studies around the world, contact this office.

Bahá'í International Community
New York Offices:
• United Nations Office
• Office for the Advancement of Women
• Office of the Environment
• Office of Public Information
• Office of the Administrator-General
866 United Nations Plaza
Suite 120
New York, NY 10017
U. S. A.

Bahá'í International Community
Geneva Office:
• United Nations Office
Route des Morillons 15
CH-1218 Grand-Saconnex
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Bahá'í International Health Agency
P. O. Box 510
Westmount, Québec
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Bahá'í Medical Association of Canada
Box 143, RR #2
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Comité de l'Association Européen Francophone pour les Etudes Bahá'íes
c/o The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Switzerland
Dufourstrasse 13
CH-3005 Bern
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European Bahá'í Business Forum
Secretariat
35 avenue Jean-Jaurès
73000 Chambéry
France

Health for Humanity
467 Jackson Street
Glencoe, Illinois 60022
U. S. A.

International Association of Bahá'í Publishers and Distributors
Bankastraat 86
3531 HH Utrecht
Netherlands

International Bahá'í Audio-Visual Centre
Apartado 1817
Maracaibo 4001-A
Venezuela

Landegg Academy
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World Community Foundation
163 Amsterdam Avenue #259
New York, NY 10023-5001
U. S. A.

In just over one hundred years, the Bahá'í Faith has grown from an obscure movement in the Middle East to the second-most widespread of the independent world religions. Embracing people from more than 2100 ethnic, racial and tribal groups, it is quite likely the most diverse organized body of people on the planet today. Its unity challenges prevailing theory about human nature and the prospects for our common future.

The Faith's central message is that of unity. Its Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, teaches that there is only one God, that there is only one human race, and that all the world's religions have been stages in the revelation of God's purpose for humankind. Today, humanity has collectively come of age: "The earth is but one country," Bahá'u'lláh asserts, "and mankind its citizens." The emergence of the Bahá'í community offers persuasive evidence that the human race, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work as a single people in their planetary homeland.

The Bahá'í World is the principal public record of the community's growth and development. The volumes reproduce major documents and provide statistical data and other detailed information on the Bahá'í Faith's wide-ranging program of activities, which are illustrated by many photographs, maps and charts. In-depth articles focus on major areas of Bahá'i concern.

For the serious researcher and the general student alike, the dramatic growth of the Bahá'í Faith raises new and interesting issues about the role of religion in social development. *The Bahá'í World* series has been redesigned primarily to meet these needs.