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The Last Refuge

Fifty Years of the Universal House of Justice

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Cover photo of the room where the Universal House of Justice held its meetings before the building of the Seat on Mount Carmel.

National Bahá'í Archives, United States

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Hushmand Fatheazam

1924 — 2013

A dear and uncommon father who taught us that exploits of service can be as much a way of life as they are the indelible marks of sublimity, and that plain humanity can be as extravagant and fascinating as triumphs may tower subdued and ineffable.

Foreword

The seven sessions of Irfan Colloquia in 2013 were partially devoted to the jubilee celebration of the first election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963. A historic part of `Irfán Colloquium programs in 2013 were the presence of two members of the Universal House of Justice who had been elected in 1963 and were still in this world. They were invited to address the `Irfán Colloquia sessions and talk about their memories of that history making event. They were Mr. Ali Nakhjavani and Mr. Houshmand Fatheazam. Mr. Fatheazam was unable, due to his health condition, to personally attend the colloquium and made his presentation through a video recording which was screened in all sessions of the `Irfán Colloquium in that year. Mr. Nakhjavani graced the `Irfán Colloquium sessions at the Acuto Center for Bahá'í Studies in Italy and addressed those gatherings in both Persian and English. His talks were video recorded and screened in other `Irfán colloquia sessions in that year. These video recordings are precious documents on a very important development in the history of the Bahá'í Faith.

In addition to those talks, Mr. Shahbaz Fatheazam, Mr. Houshmand Fatheazam's son, who had been an eye witness to those history making developments, was invited to record his impressions of, and his thoughts about that event, and the fifty years of functioning of the Universal House of Justice as the supreme governing body and world center of the Bahá'í community. The Last Refuge is Shahbaz Fatheazam's narrative. `Irfán Colloquium Publications is pleased to present this narrative as an additional document to the video recordings described above.

Iraj Ayman
`Irfán Publications

Part One

Personal Reflections

Preface

This paper celebrates fifty years of the establishment of the Universal House of Justice but it has not been specially commissioned. It is intended simply to commemorate what 'Abdu'l-Bahá has referred to as the day when "the faithful rejoice"[1], the election of the first historic Universal House of Justice. There is the additional quandary that coinciding as this period does with my own personal life, any writing shall be suspect, not just by scholars who find my private perch from which to survey this exceptionally fecund period in modern Bahá'í history an invitation to a biased and an inevitably distorted angle of vision, but by others too who do not share my analytical introspection or feelings about these times. The argument is not so much about facts but about the experience of living through this period and feeling the immensity of the plans at work. Very few lucky enough to have witnessed that extraordinary moment will doubt that what is written here has been what most have felt but when one writes about one's own time inevitably personal experience shapes the way we see events and even the way we assess the evidence — a very real danger whenever wondering eyes are fanned by ardor. For me, those 5 days in late April and early May, 1963, in Knightsbridge, London, where some 6,000 believers had gathered in Royal Albert Hall to greet the newly elected Universal House of Justice, is a part of the past which is still very much part of my present. I can still see the scene, as in a dream, the child of 7 peering over from one of the balconies, called

boxes, at the scene below. The energy of this opening drama was palpable even for a young lad who did not know why his father was standing, with eight others, with his hands clasped and head bowed, before a cheering multitude. For sure, a historian's predicament and unease at the task of deconstructing a spiritually charged, at times, seemingly mythical narrative but, as fate would have it, my privileged, inalienable function to expose. I cannot apologize for seeing through glasses ground by my father, an early protagonist of this fascinating period of Bahá'í history but, as I am certain I can never know what these early members of the supreme body of our Faith thought privately, I am also certain that I have never been prevented from learning what they said or wrote publicly. The various forms in which such personal observations have occurred in the last fifty years may be considered by the faithful as true, by some scholars useful, but never can anyone ridicule as false. In the next few pages, we shall look backward over the road at 10 Haparsim Street[2] that led the Bahá'í community to where it is now and the many questions that arose, were stilled and which persist to this day regarding the many aspects of this divinely ordained, crowning institution of the Bahá'í Faith. The problem of synthesis, however, of fitting together the various manifestations of human thought and action, may, in the end, have proved too challenging (fitter pens will do better on this important task) and my attempt to address it may have failed lamentably, but then only me to blame to have dared embark on this "perilous pleasure" and justly to receive that very unhelpful advice given to the poor Irish traveler inquiring about the way to Ballynahinch. He was told: "If I were you, I wouldn't start from here at all."

NOTES

1. The fulfillment of the prophecy contained in Daniel 12:12 coinciding with a span of time that includes 1963. See, Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963—1986, compiled by Geoffrey W. Marks, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1996, page 738.

The Last Refuge: Part 1

2. The building located at the foot of Mount Carmel, in Haifa, Israel, across the street from the House of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which, for several decades, served as the Western Pilgrim House and, for twenty years, the seat of the Universal House of Justice and its offices. The decision to occupy 10 Haparsim St. came from the House itself and communicated to the Hands of the Cause in late May, 1963.

Introduction

We begin with a brief, personal account. It recalls the events that transpired on my father's final day at the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, significant not so much for the commotion of farewell, but for the thought uppermost in the mind of a man set to leave the stage. Mr. Peter Sjörström, at the World Centre since 2000 and working in the Secretariat for 12 years, told me over dinner in Haifa once that as he accompanied both of my parents to the Council Chamber for their farewell with the House members (early in May of 2003)[1] my father suddenly turns to him and says: "You know, I have never met the Universal House of Justice before!" Peter said that these words stunned him and left him with an indelible impression. One simple, telling line but an ovation to an entire life's learning. A feeling of unreality had possessed my father (or dispossessed him) for the sense of detachment was very strong, and one which broke the ego-self axis into pieces — the silent ego aware of a superior centre to which it was subordinate. But only in this way, perhaps, that my father could truly feel safe.[2]

My parents then emerged from the Chamber with a beautiful gift offered in recognition of the many decades of service, a silver tray engraved with the official seal of the World Centre above and etched with these simple words:

Hushmand and Shafiqih Fatheazam
with heartfelt gratitude and abiding love
The Universal House of Justice

Aside from the disarming simplicity of the souvenir, strangely, no date is fixed on this inscription as if to imply that life's temporal conjunctions, its corruptible continuum of beginning, middle and end — do not matter as much as the tree, its fruit and its essence that are left behind. This prelude to our brief survey of the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith gives us a very special pre-disposition to a unique form of learning. When my father uttered those final words there was no fear or confusion in his mind. (These always act as barriers to understanding and response and which often make worthless our intellectual facility). Here was proof that mind and feeling need not be disjoined. My father made a return upon himself. He had overcome intellectual discipline and had allowed the accumulated deposits of love to carry him and his wife Shafiqih inside the Council Chamber. In this particular type of schooling, the clear perceptions and decisiveness of adulthood are intertwined with the innocence and awe of childhood. This is the vitality and health of the true intellectual, I believe, one that clearly senses what is alien or destructive, what does not comport with his or her moral vision, but matched with the humility needed for self-awareness. And this is never possible if the 'ceremony of innocence' is drowned. We may never be good teachers, my parents seem to say, but we can always be diligent students — not just pupils who have grown older or taller but active learners who have renounced the qualification of educator to inherit the mantle of discipleship, but only after their fair share of testing and questioning. ("Both teachers and learners go to sleep at their post, as soon as there is no enemy in the field.")[3] In the dynamic and perpetual act of (re)discovery and preservation, our inquiry is actually yielding (teaching) useful knowledge, (re)search, and other massive constituents of intellect, but all of these activities have, at its center, the enterprise of learning and not a teacher's training college. Father understood Goethe's dictum that one knows much only in the sense that one knows little.[4] He also made

sure that the tree of knowledge did not rob him the fruit of life, eloquently expressed in those few words on that emotionally charged morning in the month of May.

Such reading into the grammar of conduct of one man and his devotion to truth is clearly not to detract attention from the importance of methodology[5] or to downplay the faculty of reasoning. Nor are we condemning the academic approach. Much less are we hinting at the other extreme, that personal belief alone is a balance by which all verities are assayed; or alerting the reader to the ironic danger of merging objectivity with what is obviously a study of our own community. Nor should this confessional tale mislead the reader in assuming that there is no scientific merit in choosing a genuinely incommensurable subject for which there is no comparable political or religious formula or sufficient grounds for impartiality (like Euclidean geometry) to fend off the assault of superstition. Controversy does not go away by separating the 'questionable' subjective from the 'acceptable' objective — a putative pair and a moral dilemma which seems irresolvable even when we follow J.L Austin's intelligent advice that when one member falls under suspicion, it is only wise to view the more innocent-seeking party suspiciously as well. The extreme rationalism of Leibniz and the extreme skepticism of Hume are to be avoided not just because one is indefensible and the other unsatisfactory but because knowledge is something in its perfection — timeless and ideal. We are forever in the danger of contrasting half-beliefs, albeit clearly and consistently, because reality is always more extensive than our current understanding of it. What is being proposed here is that no reasonable person can advance the claims of intellect without either acknowledging its perils and limitations or having only an imperfect grasp of intellect's discipline. Intellect enjoys making distinctions and succumbs to definitions but these separate what it has belabored to distinguish and the parts are never rejoined leaving a deep void and a cognitive wound unhealed. Explanation can obscure truth and ideas may actually destroy it. Father was fond of saying that we suffer from an 'illness of definition'. He mentioned this on several occasions. By

this he meant that excessive analysis into the mysterious workings of God's Cause, like gazing directly into the sun, makes us blind. When we are struck by this illness, we are harmed and afraid to experiment, to freely realize our attempts to human plenitude in forming communities, in teaching the Faith, in running Assemblies and so on. We wrongfully rely on palliative definitions to encourage us to act but, in truth, we are moved to inaction because there is no spontaneous innovation in applying the teachings. To prostrate, fall freely to heavenly verses in praise of God or follow instantly is as capricious as the arrogance of disbelief. Such opposite extremes are the after-effects of the same illness, one resulting from the paralyzing mania of never venturing beyond the invisible line of sterile obedience, the other from stepping so far out that we develop a counterculture so strong as to confuse the healthy intrusion of all that is foreign and new as debilitating and life-threatening (as per the microscopic point of view) and which must be fought at all costs. Short-sighted, hasty explanation, as much as the architectonic, both, obscure truth and the emergence of ideas.[6]

While ideas develop as a system of thought and have been intellectually worked out, these may actually denote a way of thinking and feeling which is more emotional than rationalized and, paradoxically, such sentiments may actually kill the peaceful conduct of ordinary life precisely because intellect is rigid and allows no oversight. The practical arrangements needed for sustaining order always fall secondary to the formation of new ideas driven by intellect — a common, universal ailment. As one nineteenth century student of government famously warned: "Rigorous reasoning would not manage a parish vestry, much less a great nation."[7]

Intellect is not fixed but always relative to the culture, ideas, arts and sciences, of the times. It needs aging before it is potable and safe and this thought should make us prudent, and we are not just referring to young minds but to all populations today that are 'new' in the sense that the history of thought with its cemetery of formulas has taken away the traditional,

utilitarian role of ideology, the battleground of the intellectual.[8] We must not be allowed to be lured, or duped, by the blandishments of dogmas, of the arts and sciences, and thusly make ourselves susceptible to the temptations of intellectualism with its inevitable incongruity and disease.[9]

A Bahá'í study (meaning one conducted by a Bahá'í rather than implying a new scientific methodology for Bahá'í academics) is greatly assisted when inspiration, that "influx of the human heart"[10] rides on active participation in Bahá'í affairs, in any capacity, at any level, independently of experience. Not idle observation of an empirical nature but, quite literally, allowing ourselves to be "... caught up in...the struggle of a very young community to understand and express the ideals expounded in the teachings of its founder"[11] and "...show to the world a mature, responsible, fundamentally assured and happy way of life, far removed from the passions, prejudices and distractions of present day society."[12] Our conscious and, not seldom, testing involvement in the work of the Bahá'í community is a pivotal point. The act of service, the imprint of the true humanitarian enthusiast as the American humanist Irving Babbit was prone to preach, strengthens our understanding of Bahá'í society.[13] It is within the domain of the actor, and not just a supporting actor, where consistent corroboration of evidence and information may be found to make any study and its conclusions less prone to error and more acceptable to outsiders. But actors, one must add, who comprehend their roles.[14] The influence which such an analysis exerts is greatly enhanced when the spiritual exposition intrinsic to it is done in a language that epitomizes "...Bahá'u'lláh's call for a style of communication replete with tact, wisdom, fairness and integrity."[15] Such a desired outcome is achieved, not through piety or a sub-intellectualized attitude for what actually is, but by developing our true intellect through (a) obedience to its limits, (b) broadening our platform of rationalization by being active supporters involved in the new world community and (c) resisting to supine religious conviction. All three combined to form the texture of a balanced Bahá'í research because it ennobles us as human beings.[16] At 79 years of age (his age at the time of resignation), father personified this stance par

excellence and embodied the adage that intellect is the watcher and life the participant, without considering too carefully how all his lessons were to be applied in a temporal and mutable world below the moon.

There exists, however, a problem of a different order, namely, how to move the information we have gathered into any form of conceptual framework.

The long tradition, especially in political science, of a comparative approach[17] confronts, in the idea of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order, the formidable proposition that there is no basis on which to test explanations or theories. To put it candidly: "It would be utterly misleading to attempt a comparison between this unique, this divinely-conceived Order and any of the diverse systems which the minds of men, at various periods of their history, have contrived for the government of human institutions"[18] or, adding even greater perplexity to the student of politics: "...systems of human polity, whether past or present, whether originating in the East or in the West, offer no adequate criterion wherewith to estimate the potency of its hidden virtues or to appraise the solidity of its foundations".[19] We can try to systematically order empirical evidence and proceed scientifically from description of this Order to its explanation and, eventually, prediction as to how it may evolve but the unusually singular system of Bahá'í administration does not provide those universally recognized 'facts' of political life from which to infer regularities across political systems or forms of government. What 'fact', may one reasonably ask, can be ascribed to the belief that the origins of Bahá'í Administrative Order are "... those hidden springs of celestial strength"[20] or, that such a unique order relies "...solely upon that mystic Source with which no worldly advantage... can compare..."?[21] Critics will say that such magnificent peroration just confirms that any and all analysis is hopeless given the biased core of such a study and that religious abstraction is not conducive to finding meaningful answers. This is a valid objection especially when it is precisely at this first stage of theory building — the formulation and description of the model — where it is important to use words and concepts that are understood clearly, and in the same way,

by everyone. But the problem does not go away simply because the need for just such a set of concepts is difficult to satisfy, difficult to understand, and with a very unique and peculiar application not particularly helpful to a study of this kind.

In trying to solve our dilemma we must ask the question: what exactly are we to explain? A more refined concept of politics and society which develops concepts that can 'travel' — i.e. are truly comparative across systems — and can thus be related to the political process in various societies and to which all people may easily connect? This clearly benefits research design but the question is not just with method but with the substance itself, the 'essential institution' of the Universal House of Justice, a very unique agency within a very unique framework. Is analytical conclusion possible when we are exhorted "to contemplate its administrative structure uninfluenced by concepts from past ages..."?[22]

Barricaded by a model universe filled with deity of another realm, with precepts composed '...with the tongue of power' and '...written...with the pen of might ', we must quickly shift our logic of inquiry lest we are seen to impair the validity of its results. And this must be done before comparativists start to elaborate their approach and begin investigating.

In a language written not to entertain nor to unhinge but to instruct, in no controversial way, albeit with a deep cleavage of spirit, we are exhorted to adopt a certain perspective which, in itself, has permanent appeal; namely, that all good things, reason as well as revelation, nature as well as grace, the commonwealth as well as the covenant, are equally, though diversely, of God, 'the Causer of Causes, and the Sustainer thereof'. Laws merely human, if they are good, have all been copied out of the tables of that high everlasting law which God made. Divine testimony and demonstrative reasoning are kin. Words that surround us such as, "The Administrative Order... is, by virtue of its origin and character, unique in the annals of the world's religious systems, "[23] or "...this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from

anything that any Prophet has previously established..."[24] are not to be picked like flowers and taken home but to be enjoyed where they grow. Out of their rightful place, expressions can easily lose their meaning and their essence becomes discolored, lost. In such an argumentative context, explanatory primacy, then, should be our mental order and not the matter or object of study. The focus must surely be on our belief proportioned to evidence and not the evidence itself. Method is inseparable from spirit and character. We must try and explain the Universal House of Justice in terms of our spiritual understanding and not to break it into pieces to fit the ornaments of puzzled minds, however sophisticated or time-tested.

Given that that there is no precedent in this 'supreme institution' of the Bahá'í Faith, representing as it does a departure from past and existing systems 'both in origin and in concept', any explanation offered cannot provide for useful theory because the explanatory hypothesis requires not only to explain the case on which it is being based, but also other cases (governments or institutions) that fall into the same set. Such data simply is not available. If the similarities that exist between the Bahá'í system and other political structures are not congruent can differences, then, be meaningful? What is the current predominant perception, we may ask, of any particular political formula akin to the workings of Bahá'í Administrative Order? If we cannot predict with certainty how the Universal House of Justice is likely to evolve in the future then maybe we should redefine study not on predictability but, at best, catalogue the major similarities and differences. But, then, what are the essential components of comparison? Is it government, societies, parties, policies, elections, et cetera?[25]

How any religious community evolves undoubtedly rests on its ability to analyze its institutional set-up but in this particular instance, navigating on such uncharted waters, our own analysis is confined by time and by the extraordinary nature of the Bahá'í system, hence the need to shift our logic of inquiry, a summons to which even the most tutored mind might incline to heed.[26] Such a change in mentality, far from being a distortion in our rational

attitude, or a mere impulsion which gives the appearance of logical or scientific reasoning, may actually serve an important functional derivation in the wider context of political thought. To quote one illustrious twentieth century thinker of politics: "...when a political formula corresponds with the mentality of the age and with the most widely shared sentiments of a people, its utility is unquestionable."[27]

Such incitement to a new form of reasoning is not to force historians or political scientists to be more than a little credulous on the new conceptual properties operating as causal factors in the political action of this unique Order, revolutionary in its force yet evolutionary in the logic of its process[28] but to permit, at the very least, that the near future be allowed to redress the balance of our present incomprehension or imperfections in grasping the full implications of Bahá'í Administration and to absolve any ingenuous equivocation, at this early stage, between moral Bahá'í aspirations and its practical consequences. More importantly, to avoid the unpleasant duty of condemning history for having failed to realize the hopes and promises which such an order may hold for mankind.

In a world today which, imaginatively and technologically, is seeing its commonwealth as possible and its interests as common, but resisting in that "our single planetary globe is mocked by worlds of different understanding"[29], studying the Bahá'í model as a fresh frame of social relations definitely has rationalist appeal although at odds with the dense facticity of political and social practices in present day society and where discernment requires the eye of faith. More importantly, we should inquire whether the Bahá'í model is equipped to solve the terrible algebra of reconciling human fulfillment with co-existence in vastly disparate societies? Yet even greater questions are involved which the Bahá'í Faith addresses but which also have direct implications for political theory as well: what is reasonable, for example, for man to want and what should we really care about? How has the world evolved and why is it the way it is? Have the traditions of understanding politics accompanied the drastic changes we, as a species, have brought

into the world?[30] How are we to achieve what we want and how to secure it? Does any political theory contain the resources to show us how the future can be made less grim?

These various propositions, entertainingly treated by political theorist John Dunn in his book Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future (1979), only provide the backdrop to the current study. But as interesting as these propositions are and as complicated as the formation of a conceptual framework has been shown to be we must forge ahead. We try and show how a common will, not dissimilar to the doctrine of the general will[31], is formed for this particular central authority of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, to survive and how it remains vitally significant in ensuring the welfare not just of the community it was created to protect but "...to foster that which is conducive to the... advancement and betterment of the world."[32] We shall also see how the outcome of a healthy interaction between masses and leaders can be made to match, as closely as possible, intended results without the politics which flows from intended predicaments. But before looking at new history, we must see history itself otherwise, as Tolstoy savagely said, we shall be acting "...like a deaf man replying to questions which nobody puts to him."[33]

NOTES

1. Father had already formally expressed his desire to relinquish his membership to the Universal House of Justice in November of 2002, after 40 years of service. This permission was granted by the Supreme Body but he was requested to continue to serve until the election due in April of 2003. This was announced to the Baha'is of the world.
2. The thought, as much as the ambience, is captured from this segment of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet Asl-i-Kullu'l-Khayr (Words of Wisdom):"The essence of true safety is to observe silence, to look at the end of things and to renounce the world." Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (TOB), Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust (BPT), 1988, page 157.
3. John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, Chapter II, available online http://www.constitution.org/jsm/liberty.htm
4. This confession from one of Europe's leading thinkers of the Enlightenment, to which all true knowledge subscribes, really follows from what Socrates, the symbol of the martyred

intellect and "the most distinguished of all philosophers" [Bahá'u'lláh, TOB, page 147] had adjured over 2,000 years earlier: "I know that I know nothing." [ἓν οἶδα ὅτι οὐδὲν οἶδα]

5. For a fascinating glimpse into the sophisticated world of political methodology, for example, refer to the dense volume The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology, Edited by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier, Oxford, UP, 2008, where good research design, technique, and improved data collection are emphasized as the indispensable tools of the political scientist. But another view questions whether political scientists should be such toolmakers at all and, instead, act as opinion-makers in illuminating the problems afflicting the world. See, Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics, Edited by Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud, Cambridge, UP, 2004.

6. In my professional area of work, piecemeal analysis and a particularity of interests act against creating the necessary condition in which to test flourishing new ways to do things. In a recent blog on the Harvard Business Review (HBR — December 2013), http://blogs.hbr.org/2013/10/analysts-want-you-to-innovate-except-when-they-dont/ a research by two professors concluded that too much financial analysis kills innovation and found a direct correlation between companies with a top-heavy financial structure supporting an excessive numbers of financial analysts and fewer patents being generated. Conversely, when analyst coverage declined (for reasons such as mergers or closures of brokerages) innovation increased. The emphasis on short-term results deter innovative projects in the long-term. Creativity on all fronts, it seems, is stunted when we allow ourselves to be swallowed by defining too narrowly rather than allowed to be led by the desire to refine more broadly. No attempt will be made to 'define' father's consciousness as a movement to emotional rationality which knows through embrace rather than a dissection characteristic of Western analytical rationality because we shall fall in the same doctrinal trap of categorizing against which he warns us. What he is saying is more that there is no way of establishing a proportion between what we know and what we do not know than he is saying that the real motivating forces impelling us remain unknown to us. A dictionary of the world is ill-advised.

7. Walter Bagehot, quoted in Jacques Barzun, The House of Intellect, New York, Perennial Classics, 2002, page 154. The supposition here being that the rule of the governing class ultimately justifies its power not on reason but upon popular sentiment or belief which, at a given moment and among a particular people, is generally accepted as morally right.

8. The supposition that the older, grand humanistic ideologies derived from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are exhausted is not new. Karl Marx, for example, stated that once a state progressed from capitalism, a classless society would emerge, rendering ideology irrelevant. Daniel Bell, in his famous book, The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties, published in 1960, argued that political ideology has become irrelevant among "sensible" people, and that the polity of the future would be driven by piecemeal technological adjustments of the extant system. The most celebrated thesis on the subject, a kind of a cause célèbre, is that of Francis Fukuyama, in his earlier article, The End of History, published in The National Interest, Summer of 1989, which reads: "What we may be witnessing is...the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." [Preface]

9. Intellectualism is a perversion of the intellect, its imitation, beginning with externals such as a pompous jargon, manufactured vocabulary, affectation of method and rigor, the pedantries of modern criticism but also hiding mixed, nocive motives such as desire for authority and recognition and these, in turn, sub-consciously, creating the undesirable qualities of pride and vanity. The tradition of intellect espouses order in thinking, reducing chaos into harmony, cataloguing the accumulation of knowledge and mapping out relations of the separate departments. Intellect actually puts us in the way to correct its own mistakes, such as the affliction of intellectualism referred to, and "[t]hough it does not itself discover the unknown, it is one principal way by which discoveries are made." John H. Newman, from his seminal work An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent, completed in 1870, and quoted in Jacques Barzun's, The House of Intellect, New York, Perennial Classics, 2002, page 262.
10. ` Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, Wilmette, BPT, 1982, page 22. One may define this phrase further as reasoning under the premise of true faith but not ratiocination by 'satanic promptings'.
11. William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion, Harper & Row, 1985, page 173. There is a new edition 2002 by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust in Wilmette.
12. The Universal House of Justice, in a letter announcing the Nine Year Plan, dated October 1963, and published in Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963–1986 — The Third Epoch of the Formative Age, compiled by Geoffrey W. Marks, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1996, page 18.
13. Such strengthening improves our capacity to refute the arguments of those who are antagonistic to the Faith. At a certain level, this can take the form of Bahá'í apologetics. For a concise view of the importance of Bahá'í apologetics see Udo Schaefer's article, Bahá'í Apologetics?, published in The Bahá'í Studies Review 2001/2002, Volume 10, 2001, page 85. For a brief discussion on the centrality and historical importance of critical apologetics in general, refer to Jack McLean's succinct Foreword in Making the Crooked Straight, A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics, by Udo Schaefer et.al., Oxford, George Ronald, 2000, pp xiii.
14. The material needed to understand the meaning of events must be sought "... in the depths of the workaday world and its men and women, because it is only there that one can grasp what is unique, what is animated by inner forces, and what, in both a more concrete and a more profound sense, is universally valid..." Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, Princeton, UP, 1953, page 391.
15. Robert Weinberg, Compilation: Writers and Writing, published in The Bahá'í Studies Review 2001/2002, Volume 10, 2001, page 171.
16. For a complete discussion refer to the compilation: EXTRACTS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ AND FROM THE LETTERS OF SHOGHI EFFENDI AND THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE ON SCHOLARSHIP, prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, February 1995, available from http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/SCH/

17. Curiously enough, comparative politics to this day continues to be but variations of the traditional approach to political science which focuses on types of regimes, proposed originally by Aristotle in the fourth century B.C. with his three pairs or 'continuums' of government, namely, monarch-tyranny, aristocracy-oligarchy, and politeia-democracy. Within each pair, Aristotle sub-divided it further, monarchy, for instance, was sub-divided into five distinct types and so on. See, S. E. Finer's, Comparative Government, Pelican Books, 1974, page 39. (Montesquieu and Tocqueville are famous adherents of this approach). Shoghi Effendi acknowledges our debt to Aristotle's unchallenged source of political organizations when he refers to Aristotle's 'standard types of government' in his World Order letters. See, Shoghi Effendi, WOB, Wilmette, US BPT, 1991, page 85.
18. Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955, page 153.
19. Ibid, Page 152
20. Ibid, page 51.
21. Ibid.
22. The Universal House of Justice, in a letter dated April 24th, 1972, and published in Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963–1986 — The Third Epoch of the Formative Age, compiled by Geoffrey W. Marks, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1996, page 217.
23. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, page 326.
24. Shoghi Effendi, op.cit. page 146.
25. For a discussion on the limits of comparative research, see the paper by Hans Keman entitled, Comparing political systems: Towards positive theory development, published in 2006 and available in pdf from Working Papers Political Science No. 2006/01, Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
26. Comparing the Bahá'í experience with that of other forms of government is important as it deepens our understanding of our community but also permits us to see the wider range of alternatives. It illuminates the virtues of our own institutional life and by taking us beyond our familiar arrangements and assumptions, comparative analysis helps expand our awareness of the potentials. But this must be done by dropping our intellectual guard and fully absorbing the advice of Shoghi Effendi, who, referring to the Charter of Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order, writes: "We must trust to time and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of [the] provisions and implications [of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá]", quoted in Bahá'í Administration, page 62.
27. Gaetano Mosca, quoted in S.E. Finer, Comparative Government, London, Pelican, 1974 page 33.
28. Bahá'í vision is revolutionary: "Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System — the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed." Bahá'u'lláh, Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, page 119. The revolutionary aspect of Bahá'í thought is further emphasized by the remarks of a noted Bahá'í physicist and former member of the Universal House of Justice: "The Bahá'í concept of social change [sees] the transformation of human society as a result of a very complex set of interactions between profound changes that have to occur within the individual and deliberate

attempts at changing the structure of society. Moreover, the change of social structures is not understood as mere political change, it involves total change in all structures, mental, cultural, economic, and social, including a complete change in the very concept of political leadership and power." [See Farzam Arbab, The Process of Social Transformation, published in The Bahá'í Faith and Marxism, pages 9–10, Ottawa: Bahá'í Studies Publications, 1987]. Yet, in the Bahá'í writings, reference to the organic nature and development of Bahá'í institutions, of 'an organic change in the structure of present-day society' as well as the Faith itself 'as an ever-growing organism' is also very clear and provides the opposite notion, that of evolutionary growth, the idea that change occurs naturally over successive generations and with it a level of increasing diversity and unequalled complexity in human organization as the process of maturity unfolds. It is not the antagonism of revolution and evolution, however, which should be the focus of our attention but to better understand their coexistence and relationship as a natural trajectory, as in dynamical systems. In general evolution theory, (E. Laszlo, 1987), the notion of 'bifurcations' are precisely such revolutionary transformations in the development of society. "The reins of power change hands, systems of law and order are overthrown, and new movements and ideas surface and gain momentum. When order is reestablished, the chaos of transformation gives way to a new era of comparative stability. Societal bifurcations can be smooth and continuous, explosive and catastrophic, or abrupt and entirely unforeseeable." [See A. Laszlo and S. Krippner, Systems Theories: Their Origins, Foundations, and Development, Published in: J.S. Jordan (Ed.), Systems Theories and A Priori Aspects of Perception. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 1998, Chapter 3]. Profound transformation, then, underlies the evolutionary process.
The theory further provides a conceptual foundation for evolutionary consciousness, action, and ethics which move us toward strategies by which to guide the sustainable development of human communities. "So profound a transformation of society should also be viewed as the exigency of an underlying evolutionary process at a time when the principles of oneness, of interconnectedness, and of justice are imposing themselves on the collective consciousness of humanity." [Farzam Arbab, Introduction, published in The Lab, the Temple, and the Market: Reflections at the Intersection of Science, Religion, and Development, Ed. by Sharon Harper, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, 2000, page 2]. In the Bahá'í community, we typically see community-building of an appreciably slower rhythm but where momentums of growth are clear once the nature of the process is grasped. "This Administrative Order is the nucleus and pattern of the World Order adumbrated by Bahá'u'lláh. In the course of its divinely propelled organic growth its institutions will expand, putting forth auxiliary branches and developing subordinate agencies, multiplying their activities and diversifying their functions, in consonance with the principles and purposes revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for the progress of the human race." The Universal House of Justice, The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa, Bahai World Centre, 1972, page 8. Is not theoretically understanding the origin and change of organically created social and political structures the fundamental question any theorist of social sciences should aim to resolve?

29. While these words were written just after World War II by a University English Professor (Richard M. Weaver in his classic book Ideas Have Consequences, University of Chicago Press, reprinted in 1984, page 2), a University Professor of Government (Samuel P. Huntingdon) just after the Cold War gave enduring form to the idea that people's cultural and religious identities, and not just political ideology, will be the primary source of conflict

in the world in his book The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, Touchstone Books, New edition (1998). More recently, in an interview with the Brazilian weekly newsmagazine, Época, (Issue # 749, September 24th, 2012 edition, page 118) best-selling author Salman Rushdie, himself the centerpiece or rhetorical figure of such deeply embedded religious divide, albeit on a very small and personalized scale (his controversial novel, The Satanic Verses, first published in 1988 by Viking Penguin, was considered blasphemous by Muslims and shortly after, in 1989, he was issued the death warrant or fatwa by Iran's religious leader Ruhollah Khomeini) agonizes over the fact that there does not seem to be a solution to the "shock of world visions", as he puts it, aside from recourse to the "basic principles of the rule of law and equality".

30. Or is it the converse, with certain past political, maybe even unscrupulous, maxims or rules of thumb have subconsciously created whole worlds which we have come to consider as fixed. The portrayals and histrionic phrases of a certain controversial Florentine patriot of the Renaissance, Machiavelli, for example, are still respected and repeated to this day. His belief that conflicts can only be controlled by both persuasion and force; or that force and guile must be met with force and guile; or his cant, "Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are" which continues to be the protective badge of dissimulation we see in the shifting (and shifty) politics of today; and still other evil things that we are exhorted to do but which are not condonable in terms of common morality.

31. The parallel with this doctrine in political philosophy is that society is figured principally as a social organism i.e. the will of a collective body as distinguished from the will of any particular individual or group. Where the two part ways is that the Bahá'í approach does not ignore the importance of culture, heritage, and traditions to the identity of these citizens or members — a common critique in the General Will as formulated by Rousseau, for example.

32. The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 1972, page 5.

33. Count Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, War and Peace, Epilogue, Part 2, Chapter I, quoted in Isaiah Berlin, The Hedgehog and the Fox, An Anthology of Essays, FSG, New York, 1997, page 453.

'Shepherds unto His sheep'[1]

A general description of Bahá'í Administrative Order and its features to be addressed in the remaining sections and endnotes are important facts of historical authenticity but to understand them is to understand the men and women that are part of it; not just to establish facts and give causal explanations for them, but to examine what a situation meant to those involved in it, what their outlook is, by what rules they are guided, what 'absolute presuppositions' (as Collingwood invented) were entailed in what they said or did. This kind of knowledge is not knowledge of facts or logical truths; nor the knowledge of how to do things; nor even the knowledge provided by faith in divine revelation, in which we as Bahá'ís profess belief. It is more like knowledge we claim of a friend, of his or her character, of ways of thought or action, the intuitive sense of personalities and feelings. Unless we are able to 'enter into' the minds and situations of the past, such history will remain a dead collection of objects in a museum. It has been individuals, men and women, who have made our Bahá'í world — its community, its embryonic civilization, its institutions — not out of 'whole cloth', as Marx was to point out, or infinitely malleable material but out of the external, corporeal world of human effort, of physical and psychical constitution, of the story of human activity, of what Bahá'ís did and thought and suffered in these fifty years since the birth of the Universal House of Justice and who continue to exert their influence.[2]

Institutions, in their early years, as in the human child, are little indication of their later personality. Methods and organization become more stable, operations renewed, the process of maturation intensifies and stability and change occur as identity and experience grow. But while maturation is intrinsically determined and typically only moves forward, as in biological growth, development, on the other hand, involves a myriad of skills and milestones that may move forward but also may regress. Development of a child, unlike maturation, involves (and sometimes depends on) significant interactions with the environment and other people and inherent traits and social influence, both, interact with equal importance to develop personality. Similarly, the impact of the outside world on the development of the Universal House of Justice cannot be underestimated. "And as the Bahá'í Faith permeates the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise, as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth, all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities incumbent upon the world's future super-state."[3]

The environment, society, the interaction of people, both within institutions and outside of them, by believer and disbeliever alike, have a powerful, immeasurable effect on the personality of institutions. It is to this human element we must now turn. We are not so bold as to vindicate Vico's proposition that one knows fully only what one has oneself made but our effort must be seen as an attempt by an outsider leading to the door that leads into the inside, and who tries not to fall over the imponderable gulf between what has been made and constructed and what God has designed and intended for this unique institution. To better understand our subject is to understand the members of the House of Justice; after all, the plausibility of Bahá'í administration rests upon the possibility of having exemplary members and much of the function of institutions springs from the way they are enacted. ("The strength and progress of the Bahá'í Community depend upon the election of pure, faithful and active souls....")[4]. Moreover, loyalty

and talent are important in organizing Bahá'í administration and in explaining institutional coherence. Focusing on these lives, therefore, is entirely relevant although the Bahá'í community is educated to know that there are today no leaders in the sense of individual authority. The leader principle cedes to the collegial principle as the bedrock of Bahá'í Administration.[5]

The most striking impression one has of the members of the Universal House of Justice, the one that remains, is how human imperfection is preserved and displayed on the public stage. No attempt is ever made here to boast moral attributes or to imitate virtue. Affectations of sanctity, pretense to mysticism, may be the favourite means of advertisement in the sham spirituality of the medieval cloister or of modern creeds but in this unique membership human virtue is compressed, not in the flourishing company of 'wit or worth' but in another pair of attributes, of the vulnerable and forgotten kind — humility and unconditional love, a love given freely and forgivingly, 'seventy times seven'.[6]

It is flaws, not hypocrisy, that triumph and rather than cast a shade on the faith they profess, such shortcomings are the particular terms of endearment of these men of the House of Justice. There is no pomp or special robe to enhance ceremonial rank, no headdress to announce protocol, no artificial redolence to flatter personal connection, no kissing of hands, no booming sermon behind the pulpit, no ornamental embroidery to drape ecclesiastical superintendency, no braying of canticles by rote.[7] In their presence, the air of mutual satisfaction is non-existent, no false estimates of character to betray ambition, no vestige of supremacy. The legitimacy of these members does not depend on their title of utility but on a position advocated by God, resting on the permanent assurance of Bahá'u'lláh in His Tablets that "God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth…".[8] Such an agreeable mandate, such a working climate of assurance and serenity never predisposes these, 'the recipients of the Divine guidance', to intemperate enjoyment of tranquility much less, over-confidence in a certain future — a future, alas, which they themselves acknowledged once

as 'shrouded in mystery'.[9] Of these men, these sons, we may say, swimming 'in the same stream as Heaven above and Earth below', neither pragmatism nor the voice of oracles guide them but the authority of divine law and articles of faith. They are not public teachers of rhetoric but private pupils of devotion pursuing truth and practicing virtue; not invulnerable heroes but reluctant notables mindful of the innocence of human error, reared in an edifice where "God's purpose, wisdom, universal truths, mysteries and realities of the Kingdom...shall gradually be revealed and made manifest."[10] Here exists a fascinating, daily, array of contrasts where the imperial routinely mingles with the democratic, peremptory rule resting perfectly on the shoulders of surrendering souls; formality regularly revising itself with informality, and where impersonal authority is indissoluble from personal affection, a father's sobriety matched by a mother's compassion, stateliness framed in lowliness. They do the job of poets by touching "...[t]he point of intersection of the timeless/With time..."[11], but also the job of workmen, sweeping "dead thoughts ... like withered leaves, to quicken a new birth".[12] No engines or trades or fields, however, in which to find or test meaning in their work, recognized as much for the heroic and legendary as for the small, and contemporary. (The early days of the existence of the House of Justice were intense with a level of detail which stuns for its banality, as depicted in this entry of Ian Semple's diary: "On 18th June, 1963, the House of Justice authorized the ordering of 40 bags of peat and approximately 250 pounds of bone meal from Italy for the gardens.")[13] We see men, brethren, exercising cardinal duties in a supreme institution supplied with majesty and holiness but themselves stripped of any personal honor, hierarchy, or sanctity. Each forgets himself and recalls himself. A member of the House of Justice is neither number nor order; neither first nor last; neither greatness nor smallness; neither equality nor inequality; neither similarity nor dissimilarity.[14] Nine men, "as nine brothers...[who] deeply love one another... "[15], a band of officers "cemented by the immediate intense feeling of joy and unity that [bind them] together"[16].

A sequestered life, socially speaking, awaits these individuals after their election, with no levity of discourse and all scrutiny and gaze: from every eye they wish to hide, yet in every eye they dwell. Their human character, however, mercifully preserves them to build the most pleasurable, the most agreeable, the most useful and the most respectable of human qualifications. They teach us that by fulfilling the law, they are loosened from its thunder and allowed to smile in its gentle rain revealing to those closest to them that their deeds are the fruits of love and their love the fruits of faith. We are harbored from their text-studying, their hard tasking, the weariness of anxiety, the monotony of epistolary correspondence, the drudgery of sundry, operational decision-making, the stocktaking of communities, and all we are allowed to see in the functioning of this "great institution of the planet"[17] is a metaphor of dignity in prose, all the more striking for the human toll borne in such sacrificial service making us to gasp, in one voice, "....how valuable these nine members are in our eyes as Bahá'ís."[18] It would not be wrong to say that these men lay their heads on stone, and sleep waking, fixing "... their gaze by day and by night..."[19] unable to flee the business of the world or "...the heavy burden of work resting upon members...".[20] Self-sacrifice is their proper end. Our House of Justice is their home of suffering. If we were to point to the one supreme difficulty affecting all members it would be this: the mind, this engine of contemplation, is never lulled to rest from the agitation of the world which distresses and tries the power of concentration to the extreme, burdening them terribly with ever-present, oppressive tasks. Their cry is compelling: "Have pity on me, have pity on me...because the hand of our Lord has touched me!"[21]

This unique office emancipates the members of the House from holding any opinion of their own rectitude or from trading personifications of perfection or pitching penitence. This is because the repercussion of their solemn obligation exercises them in the habits of humility, meekness, and patience with nothing to show other than the visible proof that in God's sight "the deede is good because of the man and not the man because of his deede."[22] Theirs is not to "... justifie the wayes of God to men"[23] but to pave the way of

man to God, thrown into enormous prominence by the administrative order they lead. Of them we can say they are contemplative in action, sensitive to the contours of their time, their work divided only into the good and better. These Trustees "... enquire into the conditions of their subjects and acquaint themselves with the affairs and activities of the divers communities in their dominions."[24] Their decisions draws the conciliatory line connecting the affairs of the world to the engagements of religious belief, bringing an ever-increasing level of sophistication to discourse without ever itself being self-assured or uncompromising, revealing the extraordinary act of a Divinity who chose to work through regular men, ancilla domini, with no appellation. No halo, the aureole of divinity, hangs above the heads of these "Ministers"[25] , these "daysprings of authority"[26], these chosen workmen for God, "the salt of the earth"[27] yet they are luminous; no flames emanating from their backs yet they are radiant; not to be measured but admired, these men are not heavenly archetypes of being yet are our guardian angels, minister and assistant, both. They are purified and do the purifying, receive illumination as well as cause it, are to be perfected but also to bring about perfection. These House members have the same thought, the same word, the same action in meditating the abode of hymns. Holy immortals they are not but nine lamps illuminating paths to a universal liturgy which celebrates everything in the Cause but themselves. "Unworthy instruments"[28] in their human composition, perhaps, but whose effective range of influence is formidable, sounding the trumpet to make the listening shores rebound and themselves becoming strings of joy. Such are my perceptions but infinitely more worthwhile is to hear directly from one who had the inestimable honor of serving the longest, and to thank him for revealing these blameless and pure thoughts encased in a mind of private wonder and elementary apprehension:

"Hushmand Fatheazam returned from a visit to England on 29th January 1967, bringing to nine the number of members present in the Holy Land. I note a comment in my diary at that time which I think is important. I wonder if this first Universal House of Justice is especially blessed, or if this love

and harmony among the members will always continue? In a sense it has been a little like a love affair. The first incomparable days and months when we were all overwhelmed and were bound together in an ecstatic affection, ignorant though most of us were of one another's natures, helplessly relying on the guidance of God for what the future would reveal. Now, after nearly four years [1967] we all know one another so much better, both our virtues and capacities and our faults and shortcomings. The early rapture only recurs from time to time, but its place has been taken by a profound respect and love for one another — each one knowing the others and knowing the others know him — yet for all our human frailties, for all our bygone strongly held disagreements in consultations — no barrier has been raised between any two of us. I can see, as I observe my fellow-members, how they are growing in spiritual stature, understanding and breadth of vision; and I know how I myself have grown and how I am even now aware of so many faults of which I must rid myself. Time and again we stumble, but each time we pick ourselves up and strive once more to be worthy of the high calling which our fellow believers have thrust upon us. Now, thirty years since I wrote those words, I can testify that the same spirit still exists, and has persisted through all the vicissitudes and changes of membership which those years have seen. "[29]

It is the genius of Bahá'u'lláh's Order that genuine humility of its serving administrators atones for the courtliness and authority of its institutions and in this legalistic landscape of rule and order, rank and hierarchy, there is none to seek favour, to celebrate fame or to protect personal memory.[30] "[A]n ethos of loving service', we are always reminded, 'pervades Bahá'í institutional identity."[31]

The idea of hierarchy, however, exists in the Bahá'í Faith and supports the vision of order in the universe and within it objective degrees of value. Some or even every form of being — transcendent, intelligible, and material — have a particular position and an appropriate function, a great chain of being with its own particular range of references.[32] Bahá'u'lláh supports the

idea that the universe does not subsist by any other reason than because a great order of difference conserves it:

"And amongst the realms of unity is the unity of rank and station. It redoundeth to the exaltation of the Cause, glorifying it among all peoples".[33]

But hierarchy is not lordship nor is thearchy (the rule of God) mediated through power or order, nor clerus or secular offices. Lower orders do not come to union with God because some blessed with instant and intuitive illumination reveal what is obscure to them. The medieval (defunct) idea that multitudes should be so well arranged so that higher beings use intermediate beings to bring lower beings to union with God is non-existent. In the Administrative Order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh, together with the authority vested in elected corporate bodies (national, regional and local) to make decisions, binding on the community is the spiritual, moral and intellectual influence that the Administrative Order must exert on both the lives of believers and the work of the Faith's institutions. This influence acquires a special character through the services performed by individuals who are appointed to high rank and charged with functions relating to the protection and propagation of the Faith.[34] In practical terms, these duties are now carried out by the Continental Counsellors who receive their guidance from the International Teaching Centre, 'an institution whose mandate is global and which functions in close proximity to the Universal House of Justice'. Those appointed or elected to institutions capable of directing the thrust of efforts exerted by the generality of believers, be these in the branches of the 'learned' or 'rulers', are always susceptible to tests of character because of our very human temptation to venerate officeholders (or ourselves), at the risk of causing a deprivation displeasing to Bahá'u'lláh Himself: "Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world hath been laid waste. It hath become desolate."[35]

It is our natural tendency as human beings to categorize people in certain groupings with exaggerated significance in our imaginations. We tend to

think that Bahá'ís in official positions are fundamentally different. Personality and character differences not inevitably are associated with nominations to Bahá'í administrative posts. This overly strong and natural tendency to categorize people in certain occupations and positions is related to what psychologists have dubbed 'the fundamental attribution error'.[36] While this theory is developed in the study of professions (why some become bankers, others teachers, still others artists and so on), it does not mitigate the fact, nor lose argumentative force in our special context, that we tend to attribute the behavior of others to personality differences far more than warranted. Aside from distorting the true nature of the individual at the centre of attention, such proclivity may actually engender a sense of envy.[37] Another conspicuous (more positive) and pervasive human impulse, however, may be more pertinent and more germane to Bahá'í community — after all, the decisive characteristic in Bahá'í administration is the essential spirituality with which institutions are imbued ("...institutions...can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed.").[38] There is an enormous literature in modern psychology confirming the importance of self-esteem but in mature people the desire for praise is transformed into a desire for praiseworthiness which cannot be interpreted as self-adulation or egocentrism. Adam Smith, more commonly associated with the impulse of self-interest for his free-market theories, writes this surprising observation in his first book, The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759):

"The desire of the approbation and esteem of those we live with, which is of such importance to our happiness, cannot be fully and entirely contented but by rendering ourselves the just and proper objects of those sentiments, and by adjusting our own character and conduct according to those measures and rules by which esteem and approbation are naturally bestowed. We are pleased not only with praise, but with having done what is praiseworthy."[39]

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This desire for praise was one to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá responded with profuse readiness given His prodigious and varied correspondence marked by intimacy, warmth, forbearance and, of course, praise, all exploited by His sin-covering eye.[40]

There can only be one consequence when living in the holy and venerated grounds of Haifa and Akka — that of a clear and gradual transmutation in one's acquired character, drawn frantically to others with similar holy breath.[41]

> We've no regards for words or language
> We look for spirit and behavior
> We see the heart and if that's humble, ignore the words ....
> Jalâl al-Din Rumi, Poem 29

These sacred hubs inevitably change our outlook on life and its expectations, if for no other reason than for geographically nesting in the bosom of God since the beginning of time — a historical continuity which gives Haifa its historical individuality and magical qualities:

"This mountain is a holy mountain: it has always been sanctified. The prophets have always loved it. Christ has trodden on its path; Elijah lived upon it. The wind is sweet on it, the flowers are many, the view is wonderful. When you come up the mountain many fragrances reach you; the pure air gladdens you; the beauty refreshes you. So the mind is made single, the thoughts are purified; the spirit turns to God."[42]

This unique neighborhood with no bounds to its spiritual jurisdiction threatens to bring the best in us, its giant, ionic pillars always reaching to the sky, the sky representing the birds, flight yielding the all-important auspices. Our ego is erased to release the consecrated self-similar in effect to the transfigured souls who were sanctioned with the privilege of meeting Bahá'u'lláh, `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi in their day.[43] Independent of the individual's function, high or low, formal or informal, institutional

or otherwise, pilgrimage (or looking Haifaward), launch us on a journey of conversion with lasting effects, most especially humility in our intellectual endeavours. But this kind of humility can be a screen if we use it as a reason for not serving. A distinguished American Bahá'í reminds us that "... the dividing line is not how much we know — not how many books we have studied — but whether we passed from inaction to action, because we are pledged to serve, and 'Abdu'l-Baha has pledged to serve us if we serve Him."[44] We are qualified to serve if we serve. The Bahá'í World Centre, this modern denomination of a once palm-fringed setting of age-old twin metropolis of Acre and Haifa, is an inviting gravity of invisible energy which while it draws us to itself, to the insulating power of its unique context, also pushes our galaxy of mental formations away from every other, at the one and the same time protecting us from any sudden intrusion of irrelevant sense, but also permeating each corner of our cluttered and confused minds to an objective several hundred orders of magnitude larger and where no laws of physics can single out as special or understandable — a "just so" story which is as encompassing as it is enchanting and which can only be interpreted by our own individual psyche, each to him or herself. Such an extraordinary proposal, we are warned, is not to be approached with healthy skepticism but to teach ourselves "the science of the love of God"[45] — a divine argument which can be given the definition of man living and choosing freely in accordance with his reason and volition but saddled with the properties of a powerful spiritual reality, "a sign of God"[46], the soul, enslaved to an ineffable Reality, and drawn to "Brides of inner meaning"[47]. Bathed in spiritual light, one always leaves Haifa, this principate of service, this storehouse of mysteries, never priggishly self-assured about the imponderables of the soul. The account that follows seems to say that everything that happens to our leaders in this quarter of the world whether produced in action or word, springs from both heaven and earth. Any and all separation of powers, human or divine, outward or inward, material or spiritual, is to be repudiated.

"It was the custom of Shoghi Effendi to walk on Mount Carmel, and at times he invited the Persian men believers to walk with him. They would walk a few paces behind him, out of respect. Ali-Kuli Khan was a member of one of these groups of men, and at one point Shoghi Effendi stopped, and turned to the men, and said, "Although I am Abdu'l-Baha's successor, I am not His equal. His station is far greater than my own." Then he turned, and continued walking. Ali-Kuli Khan burst into tears. When he finished weeping, one of his fellow pilgrims asked him, "What Shoghi Effendi said was very beautiful, but why did it have such an effect on you?" Ali-Kuli Khan answered, "Many years ago, I was here on Pilgrimage during the days of Abdu'l-Baha. One day I was walking with Him on the slopes of Mount Carmel, and He stopped, at that very same spot, and turned to me and said, "Although I am the Successor to Baha'u'llah, I am not His equal. His station is far, far greater than My own." And of course, as we were walking behind the beloved Guardian, I recalled the sweetness of that moment. And then I saw that we were approaching that spot where the Master had spoken, and to my astonishment, Shoghi Effendi stopped, and spoke at that same spot. And when he said what he did, then I understood the greatness of this Cause."[48]

NOTES

1. One of the many appellations given to the occupants of the Supreme Baytu'l-'Adl (Universal House of Justice) as in this passage: "O ye Men of Justice! Be ye in the realm of God shepherds unto His sheep and guard them from the ravening wolves that have appeared in disguise, even as ye would guard your own sons. Thus exhorteth you the Counsellor, the Faithful. (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992, p. 38)

2. There would be many a telling story of what was going through the minds of the 288 delegates, a third of whom women, who had assembled at the home of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa, that Sunday morning, the first day of Ridvan, April 21, 1963, to cast their ballots (together with the other 216 absentee ballots) for the election of the first historic Universal House of Justice. All fifty-six National Assemblies (NSA) participated in the election according to the official report concluded by the Hands of the Cause and where eighteen tellers appointed by the Hands, themselves members of NSAs, had tabulated the ballots. These delegates must have been of a special self-awareness for having been direct participants in the erection of such an '...august body to whom all believers must turn', many of whom had remained until the very last lap on the road that finally led to the completion of the Beloved Guardian's Ten Year Holy Crusade and to total triumph; a magical period, to be sure, and a spur to heroes and heroines, lovers of uncorrupted hearts, men and women

of action, who took to the helm in the greatest of storms. It was in the Convention session on the following day, Monday, April 22nd, held at Beth Harofe Auditorium, 2 Wingate Avenue, Haifa, where the result of the names of the nine Bahá'ís with the highest number of votes (in descending order) was announced by the Chief Teller, Ernest Gregory, then a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the British Isles: Charles Wolcott, 'Ali Nakhjavani, H. Borrah Kavelin, Ian C. Semple, Lutfu'llah Hakim, David Hofman, Hugh E. Chance, Amoz E. Gibson, and Hushmand Fatheazam. Curiously, an Internet site which calculates the days of the week on which past dates fall, in its Historical Events section, announces only one entry for April 21st, 1963: "The Universal House of Justice of the Bahá'í Faith is elected for the first time." See http://www.dayoftheweek.org/?m=April&d=21&y=1963&go=Go And, as if to prolong our infatuation with the machinations of the calendar, the recent 11th International Convention in Haifa opened its first day Ridvan celebrations on April 21st, 2013, with 1,080 delegates present (from a total of 1,413 – three times the total of delegates in the first election) also on a Sunday, exactly as it was 50 years ago!

3. Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Wilmette, BPT, 1991, page 5. A simple pragmatic approach is always helpful in understanding the development and organizational strengthening of any institution. In early May, 1963, the House of Justice appointed (1) the Secretariat, (2) the Department of Finance, (3) the Legal Department (which included matters affecting property and relations with the Government), (4) the Holy Places Department, and (5) the Research Department with all members, with the exception of Lotfullah Hakim who only served on the Research Department, sharing more than one function. During this time, the entire Bahá'í staff numbered two people: an English-speaking secretary Ms. Marion Michaeloff and Ms. Missagh Tahmassebi for the Persian section. Today (as of January 2014), the number of full-time volunteer staff exceeds 600, incorporating 80 nationalities, including youth between the ages of 18 and 30, distributed among these original departments created by the House plus an additional Department of Library and Archival Services – divided into an Archives Office, responsible for the preservation, arrangement, and description of the Bahá'í authoritative texts; a Conservation Office, responsible for preserving the Bahá'í sacred writings and relics, as well as other historic documents and artifacts; and the Bahá'í World Center Library. Offices responsible for statistical analysis and for audiovisual resources, offices responsible for worldwide issues related to socioeconomic development and the environment, offices concerned with the management of funds, including such functions as handling contributions, accounting, purchasing, disbursements, and cost analysis, offices that perform human resource functions – meeting personnel, accommodation, and health needs, as well as kitchen services and offices related to data processing, telecommunications, and administrative development.

4. Shoghi Effendi, in a letter in Persian, April 9, 1932, quoted in Lights of Guidance, # 35, page 10.

5. Although our focus is on the Universal House of Justice, we must be reminded that Shoghi Effendi repeatedly stressed the inseparability of the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice and their functioning together. The absence of a living Guardian does not logically entail that the Universal House of Justice is 'unable to function'. "During the whole thirty-six years of his Guardianship Shoghi Effendi functioned without the Universal House of Justice. Now the Universal House of Justice must function without the Guardian, but the principle of inseparability remains." [Letter of the Universal

House of Justice, May 27th, 1966, WOG, Messages 82–84] This principle of inseparability is paramount. In the Bahá'í Faith there are two centers of authority: one is the Book with its Interpreter, for 'in reality the Interpreter ('Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Efendi) ...is an extension of that center which is the Word itself' [Letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, December 7th, 1969, quoted in Messages 42]; and the other is the Universal House of Justice 'guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book' [ibid]. No misunderstanding can exist between these two spheres of authoritative interpretation and subsidiary legislation — the former a function of the Guardianship and the latter, legislative ability, the domain of the House of Justice. The fact there can only exist one 'Head of the Faith' does not annul the principle of inseparability. In the absence of the Guardian, the Universal House of Justice is now, in addition to being the highest legislative body of the Faith, the "apex" of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, also the body to which all must turn, and the sole infallibly guided institution and the Bahá'í Faith's center of authority. It must do everything within its power to ensure the performance of all those fundamental functions which it shares with a now deceased Guardian, and which the previous Head of the Faith discharged such as, "...the formulation of future worldwide teaching plans, the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, and the guidance, organization, and unification of the affairs of the Cause throughout the world." [Letter of the Universal House of Justice, May 27th, 1966, WOG, Messages 82–84] The House of Justice"...must make provision for the proper discharge...of the functions of protection and propagation...; it must, in the absence of the Guardian, receive and disburse the Huququ'llah..." [ibid] as the Marja-i-Amr. or, the focal point of authority. But the absence of a Guardian cannot imply that "all that was written about the Guardianship and its position in the Bahá'í World Order is a dead letter and was unimportant." [ibid] In fulfilling its legislative function, the Universal House of Justice has a substantial body of authoritative interpretation to which it may turn. "Shoghi Effendi, during the thirty-six years of his Guardianship, has already made innumerable such definitions...a careful study of the Writings and interpretations on any subject on which the House of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legislation....the Universal House of Justice, itself assured of Divine guidance, is well aware of the absence of the Guardian and will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its sphere of jurisdiction...which the Guardian has confidently described as "clearly defined." [ibid]

6. An offhand reference to Jesus' admonishment to Apostle Peter (Matthew 18:22) for no individual to put a limit ever on the number of times a wrongdoer must be forgiven ahead of perdition; essentially, to forgive and to forget. The Master gave a useful, simple advice to Stanwood Cobb during his first visit to Akká, in February 1908: to "...endure people even when they are unendurable".

7. This is evidently referring to the fact that there is no class of ecclesiastics or clergy in the Bahá'í Faith. But we are also touching on a thorny theme, namely, the intertangled realms of ecclesiastical and political activity which haunts religious communities to this day, despite the efforts of self-described reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin to resolve the issue in the Reformation they initiated in the 16th Century. We are cognizant of the fact that the House of Justice is "under the protecting power of Bahá'u'lláh Himself". But as it has also been "endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state" ['Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, Wilmette, BPT, 1982, page 455] humanity's past and current tested

experience with major religions in this area will always engage a skeptical attention on the part of the non-Bahá'í public. Only time and guidance can assist us in exposing the verity that "all affairs are committed to the care of just kings and presidents and of the Trustees of the House of Justice." [Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets, page 93]. How 'all matters of State' are to be referred to the House of Justice, however, is a moot point and any opinion shall be ex tempore – the most accomplished mind might feel itself exiled 'And where the very books as if afraid/Hurry along to some less magic shade.'

8. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 68.
9. See House of Justice Messages May 28th, 1975.
10. Shoghi Effendi, letter written in December 1923.
11. T.S. Eliot, The Dry Salvages, Part V,
12. A line from Ode to the West Wind, by Percy B. Shelley, written in 1819. There is implied in this opening paragraph, a balance in the functions of the House of Justice between the ideal and the essential, the eternal and the now, in language both measured and unmeasured. In this special locus of authority, Scripture is not idealized nor is it the province to 'aestheticize', as it were, the problems of the world as poets are wont to do. But neither should we expect to receive exact blueprints or instruction manuals focusing so much on the essential that poetry is taken out altogether, leaving us bodies with no spirit. When one studies the corpus of messages emanating from the House of Justice we see that it is trying to reach us for what's still passionate, still unintimidated, still unquenched, while at the same time guiding us to dismantle structures and rediscover paths in transfusions of the future and the present – the future contained within the present, as the plant within the seed. Such interplay of bold reason and pure inspiration in sounds and images is what we mean by poetry bending our angle of vision whether we recognise it or not. It is to this birth and opening of alternative thought in latest time to which the poet Shelley constructs the metaphor that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world". [See his prose, A Defense of Poetry, 1819).
13. Cited on page 25 of the unpublished diaries of Ian Semple, covering the years 1961–1967 in Haifa.
14. The Universal House of Justice, in one of its earliest meetings in London at the National Hazíratu'l Quds, 27 Rutland Gate, in May 1963, immediately after the Jubilee celebrations in Albert Hall, decided not to elect permanent officers (codified in Clause V, Paragraph 4, Item (2) of its Constitution) and this unprecedented institutional arrangement (without exception, all other elected bodies of the Bahá'í Faith, at any level, local, regional or national, even its precursor, the International Bahá'í Council, have had permanent officers and with them, codified terms of reference of some influence, as dictated by constitution – the office of secretary, for example, is akin to a 'chief executive officer') enduringly defends the supreme body against any suggestion, so much as remote, that any one member, over any other, might enjoy a measure of superiority or seniority in rank or prestige. The absence of permanent officers on the House of Justice deliberately avoids the vestige of unwarranted reference to personality or figurehead. In an official video done at the home of my parents in West Vancouver, in early March 2011, yet to be released, my father mentions that the body's decision not to elect permanent officers, when conveyed by House member Mr.

Wolcott to the Hands of the Cause who had gathered in the large meeting room just below, on the first floor, 'electrified the atmosphere' and it was tangible the general 'astonishment' of these senior dignitaries of the Cause. My father goes on to say that later, he heard Mr. Khadem, one of Hands of the Cause, say that this decision was to him the 'first practical proof' that the supreme institution was 'guided by Bahá'úlláh'. The only moment where the principle of 'primus inter pares' [first among equals] may be seen to operate is immediately after the announcement of the election results when customarily the member who has received the highest number of votes acts as spokesman on behalf of the elected nine and steps out to address the international delegates on the Convention floor. The very transient and fleeting nature of this commanding, opening act, occurring only after the lapse of a full five years, symbolizes the wish of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that 'such service when true and unselfish, requires no announcement, nor following...' [Lights of Guidance, page 33, #120]. On all other occasions, whether in official ceremonies or formal gatherings in the presence of the Universal House of Justice, the House member who officiates is the duty of the Chairman nominated for that week's session beginning on the Sunday. This office and its holder is on a rotational, weekly basis, decided from among its members and is of a purely administrative and coordinating function bearing no official, public or permanent designation.

15. Alí Nakhjavani, Shoghi Effendi: The Range and Power of His Pen, Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 2006, p 42
16. Ian Semple, in an e-mail to the author, dated April 16th, 2003.
17. David S. Ruhe, in a letter written to Hushmand and Shafiqeh Fatheazam, dated December 7th, 2002.
18. Amatu'l-Bahá Ruhiyyih Khánum, transcript of her talk at the World Centre, October 10th, 1985.
19. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, page 126.
20. Letter of The Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated November 5th, 2012, announcing the resignation of Dr. Farzam Arbab and Mr. Kiser Barnes.
21. The Book of Job 19:21, The Holy Bible, (King James Version). Even though God's hand, here, is not to chastise, as in the original story of the biblical figure, but to grant favors on His Trustees which makes the responsibility all the more crushing.
22. Tyndale, as quoted in C.S. Lewis', English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama, Oxford University Press, 1944, page 187.
23. Milton, Paradise Lost, Book I, line 26
24. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982, p. 129–130
25. Ibid, p. 27
26. Ibid, p. 26
27. Matthew 5:13, The Holy Bible, (King James Version).

28. A phrase used by Alí Nakhjaváni, in his closing remarks made to the assembly of delegates at the 8th International Convention, immediately after the announcement of the ballot results of the election of the Universal House of Justice, held in Haifa, April 1998. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3voHjL8ki80&feature=relmfu

29. From the unpublished diary in typed monograph of Mr. Ian Semple, covering the period 1961 to 1967, page 53. At this juncture, the reader is invited to refer to the Appendix at the end of this article which tabulates raw data on all twenty seven men who have served, and are serving, the House of Justice. Since the birth of the institution in 1963, there have been 11 elections and 5 by-elections. The equivalent of three new Houses of Justice, or 27 men, have served since the first historic body was elected in 1963. In these 50 years, two complete turnovers of the House have transpired resulting in, on average, at least one new membership occurring every two years (50/27). In just four international conventions, 1973, 1978, 1983, and 1998 was there no change in membership. The median (·) number of years served per member (second Table) is 13 years although with the most recent election of the House (April, 2013), this composite average falls to just 5 years. (Precise tenure, during this period 1963–2013, shows a bi-modal distribution, or two local maxima, with members most frequently serving either 2 terms or 5 terms). Demographic profiling presents a remarkably even distribution between 'Iranian', 'American' and 'Other' descendants – the latter now slightly edging the predominant Iranian and American cultures which have historically prevailed in the origin and formation of Bahá'í national/international bodies over the decades.

30. Clearly, there exists a distinction between institutions and individuals who compose them and this is very well established in the Bahá'í Writings. Elected or appointed members to local, national or international bodies "are by no means supposed to be perfect, nor can they be considered as being inherently superior to the rest of their fellow believers." [Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, November 15, 1935, Lights of Guidance, Chapter One, page 9]. This advertence annuls the principle of the best ('aristoi' in Greek), as defined by eugenics, privilege or wealth, in our elected and selected class of trustees but the idea of a qualified group of people serving, superior in rank in the case of the institution of the learned, remains prevalent in Bahá'í polity, but as deputies of God and not of the people. Such an arrangement gives some conformity to the aristocratic experience but by no means purely so and very far removed from its essential and anachronous principle of assurance about identity, to which both biological inheritance and carefully contrived upbringing are thought to contribute. Although the presence of rigid Bahá'í electoral procedures, such as the strict elimination of canvassing, nomination and reference to personalities, as well as the presence of frequent elections, develop an important spirit of voter responsibility together with a real chance for institutional renewal and change, holders of administrative posts or positions of high rank can never escape their human limitations. Self-admiration or intellectual pride can be so unleashed as to abase individuals "to the depths of wretchedness and degradation" as 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to alert the believers on the perniciousness of pride, the greatest breach of qualification to service. Pride, the inflated ego and contempt for others, can also be institutionally oriented, glorifying the office with such zealotry as to confuse institutional wisdom with intense self-satisfaction. This always acts as an impediment to critical and impartial examination of the actual consequences of decisions. Both are wrong – the former for defiling self and the latter for its obtrusive insistence in deliberations which make impossible

any effective way of realizing acceptable or excellent social achievements or change. In either case, there is disguised the "lust of leadership" admonished by Bahá'u'lláh as such in His Book of Certitude, and therefore answerable to God. And when such a figure does emerge in the community, referred to by Shoghi Effendi as "deluded, self-seeking adventurers", the secret indignation of a community protected by the Covenant isolates the person, defuses the temperament, extinguishes the fever and dislodges the syndrome before it becomes pestilential. Ambition is abomination, we are told by `Abdu'l-Bahá, and to feign devotion is fetid (paraphrasing Shoghi Effendi's ra'aheyeh montane'e taqlid), yet, such character discolorations are extremely rare in Haifa precisely because of its sanctified atmosphere of abnegation. The one notable exception was Mason Remey who, a few months after leaving Haifa, in a "Proclamation" of April 1960 declared that he was the "Second Guardian", basing his 'spurious claim' on the fact that he had been named president (in 1952) by Shoghi Effendi of the then newly formed International Bahá'í Council in 1951. When he refused to renounce his attempt to thus seize control of the Cause, the Hands of the Cause expelled him from the Faith as a violator of the Covenant some three months later, in July 1960. The relative delay in officially announcing Mason Remey's expulsion "...should not be taken as lack of confidence in the Hands' authority to expel Covenant-breakers, but as a further evidence of the continual care exercised by the Hands not to overstep the bounds of their authority in any individual instance." Letter written to an individual believer on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 4th, 1997.

31. The Universal House of Justice, Message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010.

32. The hierarchical conception is prevalent in many historical works, literary or otherwise. In C.S. Lewis' masterful A Preface to Paradise Lost, for example, we read: "Everything except God has some natural superior; everything except unformed matter has some natural inferior. The goodness, happiness, and dignity of every being consists in obeying its natural superior and ruling its natural inferiors." Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, page 73.

33. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in William S. Hatcher, Love, Power and Justice – The Dynamics of Authentic Morality, Wilmette, BPT, 1998, page 24.

34. Such rank belonged to the Hands of the Cause of God created by Bahá'u'lláh and formally defined and established by `Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament. Under the direction of the Guardian, the functions of the institution of the Hands were elucidated and elaborated and in due course, he brought into being the Auxiliary Boards for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith to serve the work of the Hands of the Cause (but not to assume their high rank) and to ensure that their vital influence would permeate the Bahá'í community. "With the passing of Shoghi Effendi and the conclusion of the Universal House of Justice that it could not legislate to make possible the appointment of additional Hands of the Cause, it became necessary for it to devise a means of extending into the future the critical functions of protection and propagation vested in these high-ranking officers of the Faith. The first step in this development was taken in November 1964 when the Universal House of Justice clarified its relationship with the institution of the Hands by stating that "responsibility for decisions on matters of general policy affecting the institution of the Hands of the Cause, which was formerly exercised by the beloved Guardian, now devolves upon the Universal House of Justice as the supreme and central institution of the Faith to which all must turn." At that time, too, the number of Auxiliary Board

members was increased, and the Hands of the Cause in each continent were called upon to appoint one or more members of their Auxiliary Boards to act in an executive capacity on their behalf and in their name. In June 1968 the Continental Boards of Counsellors were brought into being." [Message of the Universal House of Justice on the Institution of the Counsellors, January 29th, 2001]. The Hands of the Cause are all deceased (the last, Dr. 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá, the longest surviving member, having passed away September 22nd, 2007) and no other office in Bahá'í administration today has a corresponding life appointment or emanating comparable prominence. The function of Chief Trustee of the Huqúqu'lláh, historically embodied in one individual, was also a life appointment but since 2005 has been represented in a three-member International Board of Trustees nominated by the Universal House of Justice and with a fixed term, formed "to guide and supervise the work of Regional and National Boards of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh throughout the world." Ridván Message 2005, the Universal House of Justice.

35. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in William S. Hatcher, Love, Power and Justice – The Dynamics of Authentic Morality, Wilmette, BPT, 1998, page 24.

36. Refer to the article by Lee Ross, (1977) The Intuitive Psychologist and His Shortcomings: Distortions in the Attribution Process, Advances in Experimental Social Psychology 10:173–220.

37. The late widow of the Guardian, Ruhiyyih Khánum, once observed that Shoghi Effendi contemplated appointing believers to the high rank of Hand of the Cause only towards the very end of his life. For many years, Shoghi Effendi feared that the immaturity of the believers would lead them not to "...accept, without jealousy and criticism, that a fellow-believer should stand forth from the rank and file in such a high station, bathed in such a bright light of distinction. I remember how surprised I was when he said this." Ruhiyyih Khánum, in the Introduction, Ministry of the Custodians 1957–1963: An Account of the Stewardship of the Hands of the Cause, Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, 1992, page 3.

38. Shoghi Effendi, The Importance of Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude, compilation by the Universal House of Justice, March 1980, p. 14

39. Adam Smith, quoted in Robert J. Shiller, Finance and the Good Society, Princeton, UP, 2012, p. 237.

40. To become familiar with the prolific literature of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, see Prof. Amin Baníni's article, The Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, published in World Order Magazine, 6:1 (Fall 1970): 67–74. For a Persian version and using a literary, linguistic approach to His penmanship see the recorded session on The Persian Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Prof. Vahid Rafati, at the 2012 Chicago Conference of the Association of Friends of Persian Culture available on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYkIyq2mXEk

41. A generalization, of course, but with an element of truth as acknowledged by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His observation: "Among those who visited...some were recalled to life...But others, in truth, have simply passed through; they have only taken a tour." Quoted from Notes Postmarked The Mountain of God, by Roger White, New Leaf Publishing, 1992, page viii. An early dramatic example of the first kind is Roy Wilhelm in his visit to Akka in 1907, originally just to accompany his mother but which totally transformed him to the point that on his crest lies the salutation 'Hand of the Cause of God'.

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42. Quoted in E.S. Stevens, The Mountain of God, London: Mills & Boon, 1911, frontispiece.
43. The New Testament alludes to such a sensation: "And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole." Matthew 14:36
44. Horace Holley, A Talk at the Los Angeles Bahá'í Center, October, 23, 1948 available at http://bahaitalks.blogspot.com.br/2010/02/horace-holley-talk-at-los-angeles-bahai.html
45. Bahá'u'lláh, The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys, Wilmette, BPT, 1991, Page 21.
46. Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Page 158
47. The idea of acting free within a preconceived immanent spiritual reality, conjures Sartre's famous phrase "L'homme est condamné à être libre" [Man is condemned to be free]; here, however, is invoked our spiritual capacity rather than Sartre's idea of human responsibility, albeit the element of consciousness is present in both concepts. It is precisely in consciousness where the matter of belief is to be weighed, credited, or dismissed as an illusion, a mistake, or falsehood.
48. Ali Kuli Khan served briefly as 'Abdu'l-Baha's English-language secretary between 1899–1901. He was appointed Iranian charge d'affaires in Washington in 1910 and later served in various high-ranking diplomatic positions. His marriage to Boston society girl Florence Breed (1875–1950) in 1904 was praised by 'Abdu'l-Baha as the first marriage between East and West, a symbol of the unity in the Baha'i Faith. This story is available from http://bahai-storytelling.blogspot.com.br/2010/11/day-of-covenant.html

2

Part Two

Formal Considerations

Authority Reviewed
'The Religious Danger'
Conclusion

Authority Reviewed

On our most recent pilgrimage as a family (December 2009), we had the privilege of visiting the Terraces on Mount Carmel. The exquisite detail in every corner of this unique monument to landscape architecture is a feast to the senses: footstone and flora intertwine with shaven marble and stone balustrades bordered by tossing trees and bright flowerbeds year-long, encroached by the sound of running fountains continually purging their dross, flanked by water ducts under the vigil of eagle statuettes. This blessed mountainside of sight and sound has had earth removed and concrete poured in equal volume (100.000 cubic metres each) from foot to crest a kilometer long, but with no sense of vanquish or conquest from either soil or mortar, explained not by their intrinsic materiality, but that both, equally, earned their colors by lying low. Amram Mitzna, Mayor of Haifa at the time of the inauguration of the terraces in May 22nd, 2001, writes: "The chiseled and sculptured work coordinates with the colorful plants, creating beauty, harmony and tranquility."[1] The trilogy — beauty, harmony, and tranquility — conceptually banded together from time immemorial as ultimate values breeding truth and virtue — virtue aiming at beauty and beauty at truth — may well make up the psychic hierarchy necessary when approaching the subject of authority.[2] Men have always given greater priority to social or political hierarchies and have articulated these as building blocks in historic definitions of authority[3] but in Haifa, with its particular canon of supernal

imagery and style, these seem to push us in another direction. Surrounded by forms of exquisite regularity and uniformity, by constructions that excel in proportion and wrapped in graceful art — handiwork which, while drawing attention to itself, nevertheless leaves the cardinal object invariant and centered — teaches us symmetry. Might not all this portrayal of beauty conveyed to the pilgrim lead us to ponder upon a broader application of the concept of authority, one that applies to a law namable by harmony and reflecting a deeper reality — an authority which is able to tear away all impediments standing in the way of discovering what is true and permanent in human beings?[4] The reaction to symmetry goes far beyond the mere assessment of beauty and harmony. It is about the discovery of hidden and important truths. "Comprehending the universe means understanding its symmetries."[5]

Discovering the equivalent to a law in physics is an obvious application of the symmetry principle. Laws in the social sciences, however, are a remote copy and are only as valid as their underlying assumptions. Their applicability to real-world phenomena can also be overrated. There exists so much faith in certain notions, however, that it presses us to discover or create an equivalent mathematical law for social theory.[6] The idea of authority has indeed been examined in this light of autonomy, most revealingly in the social sciences and their prophets of the early nineteenth century to the 1920s who sought to work out roles for authority consonant with the autonomy of the social sciences and especially scientism, in the shape of French positivism, identified by its founder, Auguste Comte (1798—1857).[7] His solution was to assign spiritual authority priority in the direction of social progress and with it, innovation; and political authority priority in the maintenance of social order and to insist upon their mutual separation and inviolability. The great pioneers of the new sociology recast authority as categorically detached from its political connection with coercive power but as social authorities with little relevance to modern society. Later, Emile Durkheim (1858—1917) assigned authority to the declining repressive type of archaic society where old people, the unique intermediary between the

present and the past, give authority its waning traditional status. Max Weber ignored the anthropological principle of authority and taught us that the religious and natural hierarchies such as the church and family, the social roots of authority, were declining institutions and supported by inertia. His inquiry gives the modern idea of authority the rational organization of a highly integrated modern industrial society with impersonal rules and faceless offices — Weber's famous legal-rational authority, empowered by a formalistic belief in the content of the law (legal) or natural law (rationality). For him, obedience is not given to a specific individual leader — whether traditional or charismatic — but to a set of uniform principles and rules.

After Weber, the contemporary intellectual approach to authority tended to defend the familiar liberal ideas, including those of the democratic limits upon and accountability of authority. Such radicalization was a post World War II phenomenon which saw in totalitarianism the justification of coercive power in authority but not just as a case of political abuse but as the key to the ubiquity of oppressive authoritative power throughout society in general.[8] All kinds of authentic authority are denied — social stratifications and its divisions into classes as represented by layers of subordination and superordination, our natural capacities and acquired merit, the delegation of rights, the authority of age and experience, the authority of the author, both in terms of a special regard for founders and their foundations and in terms of the viability of executing pre-determined agendas initiated by them. These are denied not because they have been corrupted by their association with power but because they are in themselves illegitimate exercises of power. The functions of personal respect, social continuity and individual well-being are better served by the untrammeled interaction of absolutely free and equal individuals. "The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way', said the most celebrated of its champions[9] disdaining the fact that such a perspective lies at the very root of the ancient conflict between freedom and authority and which brings us to the central question of politics, obedience, and its corollary, coercion. 'Why should I (or anyone) obey anyone else?' 'Why

should I not live as I like?' 'Must I obey?' 'If I disobey may I be coerced and if so, by whom, and to what degree, and in the name of what or for the sake of what?' Law, we are told, is always a fetter, even if it protects us from being bound in chains that are heavier than those of the law. And underneath the political question ultimately lies the moral and religious one, namely, individual freedom.[10] It is here, amidst the battle lines drawn between the cool head of science and positivism and the often distempered head of religion that modern man's political odyssey lies.

"A freeman', said Hobbes, 'is he that...is not hindered to do what he has a will to do."[11] This has been the classical definition of freedom as understood by most (English) political philosophers, namely, an area within which one may act unobstructed. What, precisely or conveniently, this area of non-interference is represents the thorny topic of generations of thinkers of all hues across all areas of study, but it is to the original proposition that a caveat must be made. Firstly, the doctrine of freedom is comparatively modern. Individual liberty as a conscious political ideal was scarcely discussed in the ancient world or in the legal conceptions of Romans and Greeks, much less in the Jewish, Chinese or any other ancient civilization. So the domination of this ideal has been the exception rather than the rule, even in the recent history of the West. The present generation, we can say, is in an interesting stage in the history of the idea of authority, where the individual, more than government, has become the subject of discussion. Authority today has become more a question of relation among psychic elements and the degree to which we, as individuals, have internalized the social relations of authoritative power.[12]

A second problem associated with the prominence of liberty as a focus of concern is that individual freedom is not everyone's primary need — freedom is not synonymous with the absence of frustrations of any kind. The peasant needs clothes and shelter and medicine much before, and more than, personal liberty.[13] Of course, the minimum freedom he needs today and the greater liberty he seeks tomorrow is identical to million-

aires. A third restriction is that evidence of history tends to show that fiery individualism grows at least as often in severely disciplined, not 'free', communities, such as the military or puritan religious denominations and this can knock down the argument that liberty is a necessary condition for the growth of human genius.[14] Liberty is not incompatible with an autocratic form of government or the absence of self-government — there is no necessary connection between individual liberty and democratic rule, or variants of democracy. In mid-nineteenth century Europe, for example, the approach to freedom was through an actual weakening of the structure of authority, thus enhancing individual rights; in America, the same gain to individual rights and freedom is obtained through diversification of authority, through one type of authority being held in check by another. Who governs me is logically distinct from the question how far may I be interfered by government. To quote Berlin: "Just as democracy may, in fact, deprive the individual citizen of a great many liberties which he might have in some other form of society, so it is perfectly conceivable that a liberal-minded despot would allow his subjects a large measure of personal freedom."[15]

The question that must be asked is this: is individual freedom, even in the most liberal societies, the sole, or even dominant, criterion of social action? After all, we compel children to be educated, we forbid killing, we agree that cruel pleasures like hunting or perverse excitements are worse for us than the amount of restraint needed to repress them. Is the debate on the limits of authority or its locus — in whose hands authority should be placed — so dominant as to preclude all other novel experiments in living? Is the discussion of absence of public intervention (individual freedom from external interference or, more precisely, a maximum degree of non-interference compatible with the minimum demands of social life) or presence of rule (freedom to pursue self-realization, self-determination, collective self-direction by some public power or participation in government)[16] as fundamental to a peaceful society as the argumentation over the centuries seems to suggest? If parts of humanity are unaccustomed to freedom in small concerns how can these learn to use it in great affairs?

Such petition, of course, begs the question that our universal inquiry and the choices inherent to it are precisely why liberty is so dear to us but also why it cannot be unlimited. Respect for the principles of justice or shame at gross inequality is as basic as the desire for liberty although freedom and equality, as has been observed almost to the point of triteness, are strange bedfellows and have a certain propensity to consume one another.[17]

A wider question, especially in the Bahá'í context, still remains: can we as human beings ever receive enlightenment enough to tolerate or have faith in a single criterion, proven to be such a deep source of satisfaction both to the intellect and to the emotions? Is ordinary human knowledge enough to construct belief in a final solution in the sense that all positive values in which men have believed must, in the end, be compatible or even entail one another, something in nature which binds liberty, equality, and fraternity together? Or better, are we capable of ridding ourselves the errors of childhood long after having recognized the very truths needed to destroy them, truths that have involved our moral, religious, intellectual, economic and aesthetic values which are, in their turn, bound up with our conception of man and of the basic demands of his nature?[18]

In discussing government or tradition in general, we find the development of individuality an annoying, permanent feature. It destroys the idea that politics can be shaped by rational understanding alone.[19] Is the unfolding of reason, the cultural passage from superstition to rational comprehension, trusting enough as a weapon to reject political claims based on supposedly sacred authority implied in Bahá'í polity?[20] Let us examine the evidence.

That we are all individuals is a palpable biological fact and to be individual is to be distinctive; to be an individual is not distinctive at all — it is simply a common human fate. The danger lies in a particular brand of the individual. "Being individual is an almost purely aesthetic category and on the whole an affirmative one. Being an individualist is plainly a moral category and veering strongly towards a negative one."[21] To be individualist, then,

goes beyond being individual and makes a vice out of necessity and is well on the way towards clashing with the interests of others, even denying any affective commitment of one human being towards another. There is nothing inherently wrong with the fine cult of individuality which generates respect for the efflorescence of human personality and creativity but this same cult of individuality when turned into a self-subsistent politics of its own (not unlike anarchism), is seen as 'a tasteless exercise in vanity and self-deception' and which today's world of financial capitalism fosters a narrow egoist individualism at the expense of free, inventive and generous individuality what Nisbet forewarned in his book Twilight of Authority (1975) as individualism "which reveals itself less as achievement and enterprise than as egoism and mere performance." Where moral sufficiency in our way of life grows weak, so too allegiance to reason, tolerance, even government by consent; where the core of confidence around which our liberal values manifest themselves melts down, so too hope in the availability of all men of viable individual life, vocations and calling. "Barbarism,' observes Ortega y Gasset, 'is an absence of standards to which appeal can be made."[22]

It is interesting that John Locke, considered as the leading apologist of liberal constitutionalism, predicates this particular feature of liberalism, namely individualism, on an explicitly transcendental and extra-human order of value, God. This is of some importance for a historical understanding of liberalism. God, the Creator, Locke says, determined the ends of man, his creature; and all the values which we defend must be seen as vehicles of God's purpose for man. Government and society were contrivances devised for man through his own reason bestowed by God. As such, government is to be seen as a subordinate practical convenience, not a focus of value in itself. (Locke's advice resembles the Bahá'í belief in action where the believer is reminded never to confuse means with ends or to allow the instrument to supersede the spirit. "Say: O servants! Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord")[23]. Reductive egoistic individualism, Locke explains, is the ugly result of what the human condition becomes when

this extra-human authority is removed. "A dependent intelligent being,' he wrote, 'is under the power and direction and dominion of him on whom he depends and must be for the ends appointed him by that superior being. If man were independent he could have no law but his own will, no end but himself. He would be a god to himself and the satisfaction of his own will the sole measure and end of all his actions."[24]

What can democratic society, with their 'shell institutions'[25], say in reply to the libertarian and, secondly, does the politics of pure individuality, in itself, represent a viable political arrangement? We shall answer the second part of the question first. To believe that there might come to be nothing but purely private life is espousing fantasy. Individualism may be splendid in its transcendence or in the vigour of its self-expression, but it suggests History in the classic pose of the ostrich. A certain Left Hegelian author summed up the politics of pure individuality in a memorable if derivative apothegm: "the egoist...has nothing to say to the State except 'Get out of my sunshine' ".[26] Of course, individuals are society's smallest units and such consideration is hardly sufficient for treating them as a commanding focus of value or to tolerate their idiosyncratic tastes and opinions.[27] It is in the nature of the liberal-democratic type of government[28] to deny that there is any objective science of society or of morals and that in the last resort truth is a matter of individual conscience where all consciences are held, by an act of faith, to be equal either in the sight of God or in the sight of man but it is hard to see how individuals can make valid claims to a measure of tolerance over and above what the majority of their society is inclined to give them when individuals themselves are cultural arte-facts and social products and the majority itself constantly changing. Liberal values today still have their attractions but cannot enjoy their privileged relation to the historical process indefinitely.

We have learnt, as a species, that the ideal of springs of cooperative wealth flowing abundantly to touch the most distant human estuaries is looking rather thin as a political program or philosophy.[29] Defenders of

liberal democracy acknowledge that as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century intense ideological and institutional conflict need to be resolved to prevent its suicide but that the main threat, some even say with overstated artistry, is not from within but from forces outside its domain:

"...[L]iberal democracy in general...face[s] three serious opponents: radical Islam, a rising autocratic China, and the forces of global governance."[30]

In answer to the other half of the question, of what can democratic society say in reply to the egoist, this has partly been explained in the preceding discussion. Any truth held by the individual is fallible. Rulership, therefore, will be conditional and temporary as the views to what is true and therefore proper for government to act upon will change from time to time with opinion fluctuating among the body of 'people'.[31] And when this opinion is not unanimous it must be representative of and responsive to the majority. But the majority must change (so too the minority) otherwise with permanent minorities and permanent majorities serious problems arise for the maintenance of the system. This deadlock is explained by Pareto's optimality where it is postulated that no individual in society can increase his own satisfactions without thereby causing someone else to diminish his. This causes pressure groups and political parties that are so disposed to fear for the increased satisfaction of other groups to be obtained at its own expense, and consequently resist the policies of these other groups and strive desperately to preserve the status quo. But preserving the status quo does not perpetuate a free and equal society. One can argue whether this is stability or immobilism but there is no doubt that the same groups playing the same roles and pursuing the same policies by the same techniques on much the same sorts of occasion makes for a system insensitive to the needs of an ever evolving society.[32] The abolition of slavery in America in the nineteenth century and enacting civil rights legislation in the twentieth century are just two examples of how determined the effort to political change, in fact, strengthened society.

But is there not in the idea of an ever-evolving society and its social interdependence, the seeds of inequality and political instability? Can any institution be changed to reward the better side of human nature?[33] Is there a special guidance on how to realize our conceptions of civilization and justice in economy, society or polity, in face of the palpable obstructions to allow for the sacred community to be born and to operate peacefully, in unity, and with desired ends not only agreed but secured — 'the construction of a moral island in an amoral ocean'?[34]

Fashioning such a world pressed by the demands of history forces us to seek, not the temporary comfort of utopia or the idyllic state, but the full truth of a synoptic vision addressing a new relation with a new type of authority and a new type of custodian of aspirations that are authentically universalist, practically international and untied to old structures of domination considered impossible to dismantle.[35] After all, a world without social organization of some sort is simply unimaginable. But we cannot dismiss liberal democracy as failure nor do Bahá'ís shun the concept of liberty which democracy values.

"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... We have accepted to be abased ... that ye may be exalted, and have suffered manifold afflictions, that ye might prosper and flourish".[36]

In the Bahá'í Faith the relation between democracy and liberty is viewed differently from the popular (ideal) nexus of elections (practice of democracy) and the preservation of freedoms (liberty). While the Bahá'í idea of government allows all adults (21 years of age and above) to actively participate in the selection of its leaders, the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion, and property can only be guaranteed by ap-

preciating and respecting two wider Bahá'í loyalties or firmness: that of (1) unity of mankind and (2) the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, although in reality these two concepts are interrelated as per this declaration: "It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else..."[37] Only a sense of true brotherhood and unity can build a just society and enforce universal peace; without unity peace is unachievable. And legitimate civil rights can never be degenerated to the level of undermining the Covenant, 'for this would vitiate the very purpose of the Revelation itself.' As to the phrase 'true liberty' mentioned in the scripture above, this is understood to mean that a man so upright as to be unable to sin is more free than someone who is able to either sin or not sin. "True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it."[38] Outside the law of God there is no freedom of action and Bahá'ís adhere to the principle of libertas oboedientiae, an accountable freedom or obedience that leads to liberty.

Is democracy, as Toqueville asserts, a history of freedom or a history of power? We cannot detach the relation of democracy to the preservation of contexts in which from the individual, community and institutions[39] can thrive under the watch of a 'tutelary power' which can secure their gratification and determine their fate, but as a loving parent vying to prepare them for manhood and not, 'on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood'. Centralized, democratic power may not destroy but it prevents existence; it may not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, and may even 'extinguish' a people, in the sense of sterilizing all social differences.[40]

Our narrative thus far seems to suggest a passionate faith in the future, an untroubled confidence in our power to mould it, especially if allied to a capacity for realistic appraisal of its true contours, and a sensitive awareness of the tendencies of a particular political and historical milieu. While comforting and commendatory, this mood can quickly turn into parody if our ability to hear the distant hoofbeat of the horse of history is not followed by a superhuman effort to leap and catch the horseman by the

coat-tails, to paraphrase Berlin. Not the heralds of a bright and cloudless civilization of the future, our generation must listen for this fateful sound more eagerly than any other and be preoccupied with its own vivid world, deciding to act and not to react. Our audience is not just immediate but in centuries to come. Sensing the larger picture with 'seismographical accuracy' and revealing hidden substrata is not something to be admired as virtuosity but to heed as a warning to save the future; it is done by interpreting the present with a vision from the not too distant past which explains both historical change and that which promotes the peace and tranquility of the world. But readers are too wounded and deceived in always seeing any explanation only explaining away and every chorus line only denying the given. But neither should disbelief or total skepticism be considered a suitable inclination for even the least schooled and innocent amongst us, forced to wander self-blinded. In the "worthy agencies of that Divine Polity which incarnates God's immutable Purpose for all men"[41] the Bahá'í proposal is not a rival type of knowledge nor mystical conservatism but a belief in a single, serene vision, too indivisibly simple and remote from normal intellectual processes to be assailable. Its mere possibility, however, needs a fight, fought not with pitchforks or knives, or power or knowledge, but, paradoxically, by resisting, by unburdening both intellectual infallibility and our sense of perpetual moral error. If we are poorly endowed to reconcile, (or too honorable to leave unreconciled), the conflict of what there is with what there ought to be, then a higher realm containing a perception far above that of any human being — a greater realism — must be independently sought. Why resist or turn our backs to the content of this greater realism when our very innate faculty — the faith instinct — won't let God go away?[42]

NOTES

1. Bahá'í Shrine and Gardens on Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel, A Visual Journey. Edited and compiled by the Haifa Tourist Board ([Haifa]: Municipality of Haifa, Haifa Tourist Board and Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 2001), p. 34.

2. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" from Ode on a Grecian Urn, line 49, written in 1819, perhaps Keats' most discussed line in all of his poetry.

3. The definition of authority itself is elusive as the march of history forces upon it ever new meanings, with internal assumptions being but reflections of authority's changing external roles. The original dominant meaning was the capacity to evoke voluntary compliance or assent. In today's restless world, authority is seen as the capacity to evoke compliance, voluntary or not, "on grounds which confer an official right upon coercive power and a compulsory force upon rational conviction." Leonard Krieger, in the Dictionary of the History of Ideas, Volume I, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973, page 141. As such, authority becomes a source of power inducing others for desired results but which needs to be always stronger in the face of disobedience which has become more and more legitimate as the possibilities to do so with impunity have become more frequent.

4. The liberating context of political community, of an authority to emancipate the individual from the torments and stress of the faction ridden, rootless and anomic society and to provide him the haven and moral fortress to survive, has always been influential in political thought, and can be found in works as early as Plato's Republic (380 BCE) but the broader, spiritual idea of individual emancipation, in the sense that true existence is not in the material but in the disembodied, true existence beyond the here and now, can be found much earlier, in the logical outgrowths of larger metaphysical systems, such as the Indian religion, traced to 1500 BCE.

5. Physicist Leon Lederman, quoted in Finance and the Good Society, by Robert J. Shiller, Princeton, UP, 2012, page 132.

6. In my particular field of study, concepts of symmetry are found in market efficiency, the mathematical law to describe the price of a stock option (Fischer Black and Myron Scholes); the so-called Modigliani-Miller theorems and still others.

7. Comte's relevance is his claim that human culture developed in three stages: the theological where human beings rely on supernatural agencies to explain what they can't explain otherwise; the metaphysical where human beings attribute effects to abstract but poorly understood causes; and the positive (or experiential) where we understand the scientific laws that control the world. The Bahá'í view unifies the three dimensions not just in the acquisition of facts but to lead to truth awareness.

8. Totalitarianism is not just restricted to a terrorist political coordination of society. In the formulation of Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), a left-wing German sociologist, contemporary industrial society also tends to be totalitarian with economic-technical coordination operating through the manipulation of needs by vested interests. "Under the rule of a repressive whole, liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination." (Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 7)

9. John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, Chapter I.

10. In progressive movements which seek a radical change in men's moral, social and intellectual lives, such as the Bahá'í Faith, political mentality is inseparable from the religious or moral mentality, especially when there exists the conviction of the sanctified nature of

politics. Politics provides the chosen course of action and a common policy but it is the zeal, sense of mission, dedication and sacrifice of a profoundly religious quality which seals politics' success.

11. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/h/hobbes/thomas/h68l/chapter21.html

12. This brings to mind famous studies such as Fromm's Escape from Freedom (1941), Adorno's The Authoritarian Personality (1950), Riesman's Lonely Crowd (1950), where cosmos and psyche meet in character types that define our degree of conformity or submission to power and authority.

13. George Orwell, impatiently arguing his case for collectivism given the depressing reality of social inequalities, and writing in 1943, puts it more bluntly,: "All that the working man demands is . . . enough to eat, freedom from the haunting terror of unemployment, the knowledge that . . . [his] children will get a fair chance, a bath once a day, clean linen reasonably often, a roof that doesn't leak, and short enough working hours to leave . . . [him] a little energy when the day is done." "Looking Back on the Spanish War," The Collected Essays, 11, page 265.

14. Refer to Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, by James F. Stephen, published 15 years after Mill's On Liberty.

15. Isaiah Berlin, The Proper Study of Mankind – An Anthology of Essays, New York, FSG, 1997, page 201.

16. This is alluding to Isaiah Berlin's famous idea of distinguishing between negative liberty and positive liberty, a provocative essay first published in 1958 under the title Two Concepts of Liberty. [See Berlin, I., 1969, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in I. Berlin, Four Essays on Liberty, London: Oxford University Press. New edition Berlin 2002]. Negative liberty is defined as a mere absence of something (i.e. of obstacles, barriers, constraints or interference from others), whereas positive liberty implies the presence of something (i.e. of control, self-mastery, self-determination or self-realization). In Berlin's words, we use the negative concept of liberty in attempting to answer the question "What is the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?", whereas we use the positive concept in attempting to answer the question "What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?". The facts of our humanity – that we are born ignorant, unreasoning, rapacious and with a very high probability of falling severely ill and dependent – may always be an excuse for State to intervene, but does this necessarily mean oppression?

17. Hobbes contemplated unlimited liberty as the bain of stable order ("Liberty is power cut into pieces") but it is not clear how his iron logic of political thought – representation of the absolute political community, or Leviathan, and the creation of an impersonal environment of law within which individuals may rationally pursue their proper interests – can make a community true, good and beautiful. The strong and powerful would cease to exist, given Hobbes' blend of social nihilism and political affirmation, but he never justified absolute power (always to be understood to mean the absence of competing allegiances or lesser form of community and not totalitarianism) in the name of virtue, equality, and

freedom as Rousseau was inclined to do more than a hundred years later. This preeminent citizen of Geneva envisaged a power that is more than power; he saw it as refuge from the inequities and uncertainties of ordinary society.

18. An interrogation that cannot be escaped by those who, with Kant, have learnt the truth that 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made' summarizing the belief that our understanding of objects would always be skewed by our limited capacity to understand.

19. The Universal House of Justice imagines this in its important and often-quoted letter about rights and freedom of expression in the Bahá'í community, in a letter addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States, dated December 29th, 1988. "...[T]he inordinate skepticism regarding authority, and consequently, in the grudging respect which citizens of various nations show toward their governments...have become pronounced in the incessant promotion of individualism, often to the detriment of the wider society..." Paragraph 22.

20. Hegel conceived the notion that universal history is the realization of the Idea of Reason but he acknowledges that this does not work out in a reasonable way on the surface. In his doctrine of the Cunning of Reason, he acknowledges that history fulfills its ulterior rational designs in an indirect and 'sly' manner. It does so by calling into play the irrational element in human nature, the passions which he sees as the individual person's self-regarding, self-seeking emotions. He writes: "Two elements, therefore, enter into our investigation: first, the Idea, secondly the complex of human passions; the one the warp, the other the woof of the vast tapestry of world history." Refer to his Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History. The creator of Moby Dick, in a style less orotund, agrees: 'Tis dream to think that Reason can/Govern the reasoning creature, man." [Herman Melville, "Selected Poems of Hermann Melville", Ed. Hennig Cohen, Fordham University Press, 1991, page 169]

21. John Dunn, Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future, Cambridge, Canto, 1993, page 35.

22. Jose Ortega y Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses, New York, 1932, p. 79

23. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 222

24. John Locke (1632–1704), quoted in John Dunn, The Political Thought of John Locke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), frontispiece.

25. Coined by Anthony Giddens in his 2002 book, Runaway World: How Globalization is reshaping Our Lives, page 19, to refer to institutions that appear the same and carry the same name but inside have become quite different. The outer shell remains but inside they have changed;. "...'shell institutions'...are institutions that have become inadequate to the tasks they are called upon to perform."

26. Max Stirner, in The Ego and His Own, quoted by John Dunn, Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future, Cambridge, 1993, page 53.

27. Complicated thinkers such as Rousseau, Kant and John Stuart Mill would take issue here and argue that the central value of the moral life is individual responsibility. The form of a good act for an individual is – very roughly – an act performed in such a manner that the individual could will that act to be a universal law and the precondition for an individual

to perform such acts was the condition of autonomy, the full assumption of responsibility for one's own moral life. Based on the Christian solidity of their time, such convictions are understandable but in the current vacuity of modern society the relations between autonomy, morality and reason become tenuous if not wholly inadequate.

28. The liberal-democratic nation-state is a product of the modern age (an English export?) and emerged during the Enlightenment. Although a compound term which goes by a variety of other names (constitutional democracy, representative democracy, democratic republic and the like) it consists of two different strands: liberalism and democracy. The former emphasizes individual rights such as free speech, freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom of religion and limited government; the latter means majority rule in some form with equality of citizenship in political participation supported by independent political parties representing the different viewpoints of the people. It is a tautology to say that liberal democracy is a product not just of law, but of philosophic and religious views, of habits and sentiments.

29. In the last decades, the domestic agenda of British and American politics, their governments being outstanding examples of liberal-democracy for their government stability, executive authority, extensive administrative capabilities and concern for minorities, can really be reduced to only one issue: increasing national productivity and dividing it up. But the results, at least for the USA, make for pretty somber reading. According to the US Congressional Budget Office, for the 1% of the population with the highest income, average real after-tax income grew 275% between 1979 and 2007; over the same period, Americans with income in the bottom 20% of the population saw only an 18% increase. Cited in Finance and the Good Society, by Robert J. Shiller, Princeton, UP, 2012, page 89.

30. John Fonte, Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves or Be Ruled by Others?, New York, Encounter Books, 2011, page 341. Global governance is a serious political actor on the world stage and its presumption of global rule of law and judicial supremacy of global legalism is considered a threat to domestic politics and in conflict with the moral right to self-government. The Bahá'í operation of unity in diversity explains away this plausible threat of global supremacy in its conception of a world federation of states. See also Note 146 on page 46.

31. The people, or demos, is a bald term which recoils, it seems, whenever we describe our own political view or aspirations. Self-rule is a necessary condition of democracy but are the people really sovereign and is their exercise of sovereign self-government, or the modern variant, representative democracy, meaningful? Who are the people anyway? Are they adult, white males (Note: white women in South Africa were first allowed to vote in 1930 and it was not until the end of apartheid in 1994 that all adult women were allowed to vote), legal residents, country citizens of the mentally sane, non-incarcerated kind? If every person must count as one and no person as more than one, what happens in the event of two mutually exclusive policies being put forward from among the people? The policy supported by most people wins, but then the notion 'people' turns into a majority of the people. But might not the size of the minority matter? After all, winning by 50.5% and losing by 49.5% is not much of a margin. Before relegating the term 'people' as sheer narrative pleasure like a sacrilegious image ('idolum mentis') to use as declamatory veneration but of no practical, political significance, we simply have to admit that modern states are precluded by their very structure from giving more than a token recognition to the ideal of political

equality. We know that organs of government do not simply 'represent' or reproduce consciously expressed values of the public and it is arguable whether they should indeed do so as the public also expects government to provide continuity and to show foresight. Moreover, the indispensable presence of a large-scale bureaucracy in modern government may be an antidote to wasting a prodigious amount of time and effort but is, nevertheless, another bitter blow to meaningful political participation for the majority of citizens. For these and many other reasons, we must sigh and say that demos is a word for what we cannot have – the possibility of ruling our own state – but an imperfect word which fends off worse fates. I share George Orwell's view that the term 'democracy' increasingly has become a blanket term to praise any regime and its dishonest use as a convenient deception device would stop "...if it were tied down to any one meaning." Refer to his insightful 1946 essay, Politics and the English Language, available from the site http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0300011h.html#part42

32. Such criticism is occasionally leveled at Bahá'ís too, where routine election outcomes on local national, and international administrative bodies seem to suggest an inbuilt bias to the 'status quo' rather than to change and innovation. The issue of stability and change from a purely electoral point of view can always be explored but it is only one level of granularity and even then handicapped by the fact that such analysis does not consider all-important spiritual norms governing Bahá'í elections. Just using the criteria of turnover and membership is utterly misleading. It is impossible to ignore the individual and the group, or community, in analyzing how stability/change at one level influence (or fail to influence) stability/change at the other levels (up or down) in this three-part hierarchy (see Note 122 on page 38). Do elections on their own help us to understand any better the relationship between institutional capabilities and change? Is the temporal dimension – annual elections to local and national Assemblies (or quinquennial in the case of the Universal House of Justice) of any significance in the coordination and interdependence of activities, the development of institutions, stability, change? Do these time scales at all matter to help us understand direction, dependence, and drift? Shoghi Effendi thought that in one aspect such a frequency of elections is advantageous, to "...give the community a good opportunity to remedy any defect or imperfection from which the Assembly may suffer as a result of the actions of its members." [Quoted in Arash Abizadeh, Democratic Elections without Campaigns? Normative Foundations of National Bahá'í Elections, World Order Magazine, 2005, Vol. 37, No. 1, page 37] Should there be limits on the term of service on membership which force change over repeated elections? This question may be discarded as it violates the freedom of persons to vote for whomever their conscience moves them. With no reference made to personalities before election and where electioneering, party-formation, and nominations are explicitly banned in Bahá'í elections – do these prohibitions not make it difficult to understand the role of elections in enabling coordination and stability? How are the procedures and functions that exist within Bahá'í institutions able to (re)create institutional contexts (and vice versa)? Does the practice-based nature of Bahá'í consultation play a role in creating and recreating the contexts in which they are practiced? Is there any way we can evaluate how the interactions of routines within an Assembly affect the nature of the Assembly? Are these considerations of practical importance when a norm relevant for Bahá'í elections is the Assembly's year round duty of institutional transparency? Assemblies must "...within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their

plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel. [Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Arash Abizadeh, idem, page 42] Under appropriate conditions individuals can learn and change their patterns of action through feedback. What is the role of feedback as expressed through formal channels, such as the 19 Days' Feasts and the annual National Convention, in the stability or change of institutions? Does feedback work to change the routines from staying the same, or prevent changing others we wish to stay the same? These questions should be asked, but of greater relevance, in the increasingly uncertain and fast-changing environments in which today's organizations operate, is to shift our attention from institutions as fixed entities to the study of the distributed and situated dynamics by which they emerge and are constructed? Capturing how institutions learn to strike a balance between stability and coherence, on one hand, and flexibility and change, on the other, however, is non-trivial and requires abandoning static views of organization. While pertinent, some of these questions and observations nevertheless suggest an inordinate emphasis on one side of the argument – that outcomes are the only measure of electoral institutions' value. Clearly, they are not. "Inherent features of the Bahá'í electoral process are also important for their own sake, independent of the kind of outcomes to which the process leads. Even if the best representatives could be elected by a totally unfair process that required lying and humiliating participants, there would be something inherently wrong with the process itself. Thus one way to justify and evaluate electoral rules and norms is according to features of the electoral process that are valuable for their own sake." [Arash Abizadeh, ibid, page 15]. But the more usual, persistent, view of elections is that they are instruments for realizing certain outcomes—such as choosing qualified persons as one's representatives. See also Note 65 on page 22.

33. James Madison, statesman and Father of the United States Constitution (for being instrumental in its drafting), in one of his more memorable political polemics, will have answered peremptorily: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal goals on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men…you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself." Paragraph from Federalist Paper No: 51, quoted in Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves or Be Ruled by Others?, by John Fonte, New York, Encounter Books, 2011, page 46.

34. Rousseau is famous here wishing to liberate the individual from the toils and traps of society by approximating the individual as nearly as possible to the state of nature, independent of his fellow men but dependent on a higher law. In a letter to Mirabeau he wrote: "It is of the essence of society to breed incessant war among its members; and the only way of combating this war is to find a form of government that will set the law above them all." Quoted in Robert Nisbet, The Social Philosophers: Community & Conflict in Western Thought, concise paperback edition, Washington Square Press, 1973, page 39.

35. The step to a religious community is not a logical one as the preoccupation with community has taken many forms in the past, and not just restricted to the political and religious kind. We have had the utopian traditions, anarchist philosophies, ecological communes, revolutionary traditions, like the Puritan revolt in seventeenth century England, the French Revolution and the Jacobins, Marx and Communist Revolution, the revolt of the Third World and so on. But may not such philosophical and political manifestations be seen as

anything more that contemporary man's substitute for religion – a secularization of religious thought? This tradition exerts a real, imaginative, and moral purchase to our discussion.

36. Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Wilmette, BPT, 1990, XLV p. 99

37. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan Revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the North American Bahá'ís" rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1977), p.49)

38. Op.cit. page 335

39. This three-part hierarchy of individual, institution and community is adopted from the Bahá'í approach to reconciling the individual and society. It recognizes the fact that a vast area of human conduct and activity in society proceeds quite unregulated or controlled by public authority but forms, nevertheless, a coherent set of patterns and regulates itself. In each group there exists a reservoir of the able-and-willing (the individual) who actually fill the leadership roles at any one time (the institutions) and who forward the purposes of members with certain objectives (the community) more effectively.

40. To discuss liberal democracy solely from the point of view of the West is admittedly narrow albeit important given that 'The light of liberty is the light of the West' [Talk by 'Abdu'l-Bahá given at the Unity Meeting of Misses Jack and Herrick, September 22nd, 1911]. If it is morally defensible then what is there to prevent its application in non-Western contexts? Is there any enthusiasm for liberal values in Asian philosophy comparable to the uncritical identification we have of mainstream values of the West? Few, if any, Western liberal democratic theorists in the post-Word War II era have sought to learn from the traditions and experiences of Asian or non-European societies to fulfill, at least, the desire of some luminaries for a synthesis of 'East' and 'West'. Just as Western medicine has become less impervious to Asian influence – the acceptance of acupuncture, herbal remedies and other alternative medicine have become increasingly common in treatment – so too the insularity in Western political thinking must be broken to begin to appreciate the valuable Eastern political traditions and practices born out of these different philosophical backgrounds.

41. Shoghi Effendi, WOB, page 65

42. A fascinating study on the relationship between religious experience and brain function has shed light on the mysterious connection between human consciousness and the divine. The biology of belief can be found in a fascinating book by A. Newburg, E. d'Aquili and V. Rause, Why God Won't Go Away, New York, Ballantine Books, 2001.

'The Religious Danger'[1]

One of the most important founders of Sociology, Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), was not wrong when he said that in the very origins of religion is society. A religion may or may not have a belief in heaven or hell, may or may not have gods in the ordinary sense, may or may not have rites, ceremonies, priests or formal worship, but what religion always has is the sense of the sacred community.[2] Durkheim's older contemporary thinker, Karl Marx, similarly saw the utilitarian role that religious belief plays in binding communities together. But both were wrong in seeing religion as a product of material conditions of the groups that pertain to it. Religion can never be explained simply by reference to prior material conditions. Religious ideas have played an independent role in shaping political outcomes.[3] Its magic and its art as well as its doctrine and philosophy, have played a central part in humanity's major episodes, most especially in the evolution, not just of society, but of the good society identified as one which "gives freedom to all its citizens and encourages them to achieve their full potential — physical, mental, and spiritual."[4] Religion has contributed the most to this noble concept, directly and indirectly, since earliest times. In the religion of Abraham, for example, we see the idea and central importance of a covenant where God guides man on condition that man abides by His laws. Obedience comes to be seen not just as a duty but as a right to receive — a novel calculus with implications not just for individ-

ual conduct but social advancement in general.[5] Its twin secular version reappears in Rousseau's 'Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique', intact with the same suprahuman, indivisible, and inalienable qualities —the idea of a higher, 'General Will' — and even given the status of the 'voice of God'. It similarly demands unqualified obedience of every individual, the complete surrender to an omnipotent liberator who shall deliver, but which Rousseau calls the state.[6] The Covenant of Abraham was renewed by Moses and restated in terms of specific teachings to be known as the Ten Commandments, inspiring a vibrant civilization under the reigns of David and Solomon and uniting the Israelites. Similarly, other world religions, like Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, (the last being more a philosophy rather than religion and with the added deficiency of emphasizing solely worldly matters) have to be credited for the brilliance of their civilizations and for their continued hidden strength in man's quest for community, but a chronological narrative is not our objective here.[7] It is to show how much these religions contain the ethics necessary for a stable society, how they have established important reforms and their impact on the community of man comparable to Christianity or Islam.[8] It is to these two latter monotheistic faiths, however, that much attention is given as both are profoundly oriented toward a communal character and their corporate conceptions continually militating against the secular accentuated no less by their strong focus on the strategy of nation-building as the only true and real form of kinship, akin to ethnic nationalism in relation to the clan system. Fukuyama, by focusing on Islam, for example, makes it clear that religion should be taken seriously as a potential pathway not just to override lesser loyalties, a perennial stumbling block to state-building, but harmonize the three corner struggle between central authority, the elites and the masses. Empires, he says, are more lasting when bearers of a salvationist creed. But even these cannot resist disunity and disputed successions, as illustrated by the Sunni-Shia split which resulted in lesser loyalties, such as the tribe, to reassert themselves.

In the very visibility of ecclesiastical dominance, some might see both Christianity and Islam, as too corporate, too communal, too repressive of individual faith and reason.[9] Such disconsolate elements in these recognized types of theocracy discredit the theocratic order (God governs His people through a revealed Book and through legal institutions divinely ordained and granting infallibility, viz. the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, in the Bahá'í movement) but it is to degree we must turn. The real safeguard lies in that the relationship between the Creator and his subject is direct and unique and does not require the intercession of a salvational institution. In this profound sense, the Bahá'í Faith can never be seen to be repressive to individual faith or to be too corporate. Such guarantee of the freedom and inviolability of an individual's personal convictions reflects 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call that conscience is 'one of the private possessions of the heart and the soul' and that cannot be surrendered to any institution, whether spiritual or secular.[10] "From two ranks among men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics."[11] The abolition of priesthood removes both the corporate hold on the day-to-day affairs of the community and, more importantly, the imminent risk of tearing the Faith to pieces 'by the conflicting opinions of scholars applying limited human reasoning to divinely revealed truths.'

In addition to India and Christian Europe, Islamic Middle East is the other world civilization in which a rule of law came into being, rooted and deeply scriptural and codified from a very early point, not unlike Judaism; it is divine in origin, exercising universal jurisdiction and the source of all truth and justice. (In the case of Islam, those rules are not just the Holy Koran but also the corpus of sunna and the hadith). The interpretation of these rules is in many cases uncertain and has to be delegated to a special class of priests — clergy of the Church or the ulama, or scholars. In both cases, law comes not from political power but from God, who has dominion over political authorities. Muhammad (570 a.C — 632 a.C) may have been a tribal ruler in his lifetime but his command did not rest on political leadership so much as in his role as the transmitter of the word of God. Bahá'ís do not

consider the Papacy or the Caliphate as divinely given systems of theocracy but that, although man-made, are 'partly derived from the teachings of Christ and Muhammad.' "The Bahá'í theocracy, on the contrary, is both divinely ordained as a system and, of course, based on the teachings of the Prophet Himself."[12]

Political and religious authority were frequently united in Christian Europe and in the Muslim world.[13] There is no doubt, however, that law based on religion has created the foundation for the modern rule of law and which existed in medieval Europe, the Middle East, and India well before any of these regions made a transition to modernity. Rulers in all of these societies acknowledged that they had lived under a law that they themselves did not create. The existence of a separate religious authority accustomed rulers to the claim that they were not the ultimate source of the law and success of resistance to these claims reasserted the primacy of law in the eyes of the public, over and above legislation. The divine word itself was law. Such resistance is made easier when a religious tradition gave law a sanctity, autonomy, and coherence that it otherwise might not have. We are using the term law in its widest meaning, as "an embodiment of a broad social consensus regarding rules of justice."[14] This turns law to be prior to legislation and, in various ages social consensus was expressed religiously because religion played a greater role in people's daily lives, especially critical when the attitude is taken to connect politics, the activity behind social consensus, to the human good — not only thinking together but also a working together. But the communal, corporate, social and aesthetic qualities of religion most under attack with the rise of modernity three centuries before resurged, paradoxically, as celebrated themes to be studied in the nineteenth century.

We began this section with two famous thinkers of the nineteenth century not by coincidence but because of an irony 'and fertile instruction in the fact that this century — coming as it does hard on the heels of the Protestant Reformation, the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment, and the

Revolution — should be one of the richest of all centuries in philosophical and literary expressions of religious community.'[15] The irony is clear. For centuries, the tendencies of Western thought has been in the direction of secularization, rationalization, 'dechristianization decrees', positivism, democracy, and technology. Religion was contending for a final blow but despite such confidence in high-minded wordly wisdom, evidence of religious revival in the nineteenth century can be seen in many areas: philosophy, sociology, literature, and theology.[16] Nisbet observes that in this period we are confronted with a diffusion of more sects and faiths within Christianity than perhaps in any other, certainly after the Reformation. Such a veritable 'tidal wave of religious enthusiasm' was not shared by all. Some of the greatest and most influential remained as impervious as had any philosophe in the century before: Jeremy Bentham, Karl Marx, Nietzche and many other intellectual children of the Age of Reason. One Danish and Protestant colleague, however, did not share their indifference or arrogant derision (Marx referring to religion as 'the opium of the people' is a case in point)[17] and an agonizing state of personal crisis springing from his sense of aloneness in the spiritual universe produced a powerful presentation of the authority of the community of God. In his passionate Christian Discourses (1848) Kierkegaard declares that religion alone can provide the supporting pillars necessary for reasserting, at one and the same time, individuality and community. Interestingly, the terminology of community is not found in Kierkegaard's writings, neither is there any abundant reference to community of any kind but his thought is relevant in that it emphasizes the vital authoritarianism of religion and the presence of authority may be considered one of the oldest and most visible manifestations of community. There can be no community, he seems to say, without an internal authority that binds the individual to itself and that provides him sanctuary from the alienation and atomization of an age of crisis. But communities do not naturally coalesce in some organic, non-negotiated way from their constituent individuals or lesser communities. Different individuals and groups have interest that may not always harmonize peaceably with those of others. It must be recognized that no community can hold together without

the virtue of justice, the virtue that gives to others what is rightfully their own. Aristotle, in his Politics, refers to justice as 'the bond of men in states' and the administration of justice the principle of order and foundation of political society. The justice of the ruler or the law is to respect and to foster the good of this public thing: the common good. And the common good at which the laws of the political community should aim is the good regulated according to divine justice. It is this meaning of the term justice that is invested in the designation of the central governing body of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh: "Among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested are... to foster that which is conducive to the enlightenment and illumination of the souls of men and the advancement and betterment of the world."[18] Membership in the political community will naturally contribute to the individual's good. Alternatively, laws may make one a good citizen but not a good human being.

Political philosophy in the context of a religious community, the extension of governance of humankind with its implicit tension between regnum (the sphere of worldly administration) and sacerdotium (in its widest form as representing the entire religious order), the influence of institutions, and how certain features of Bahá'í teachings and Bahá'í administrative structure envisaged provide the flexibility and assurance to these concerns within the context of realism are all issues underlying religion in its relation to society, and, more specifically, in relation to a wider, World Order. The idea of global governance, in particular, is the prevailing orthodoxy and is becoming increasingly the basis of government decisions, bilateral agreements, and international treaties (viz. the Kyoto protocols or the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court). If political communities (sovereign states) now have a political superior (global political community) should religion too not have a global appeal and a global reach? Given that religion is indispensable to society as a mechanism of stability, as an integrating force, and as a body of symbols of allegiance to the social bond, to echo Chateaubriand — are there areas where religion does not, should not, intervene?

As religion begins to renew itself under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh, we see that the ecumenical idea in history has been realized. Saint Augustine, the first Western philosopher to conceive mankind as a single, unified entity, possessing a history of its own, envisaged a total, unified, organismic mankind with the various peoples — Hebrews, Greeks, Romans and others in his day — as manifestations of 'stages' of development in the life of mankind. The following brief passage from his City of God is perhaps the most quoted in Western writing on the philosophy of history:

"The education of the human race, represented by the people of God, has advanced, like that of an individual, through certain epochs, or, as it were, ages, so that it might gradually rise from earthly to heavenly things, and from the visible to the invisible."[19]

Bahá'ís readily relate to this idea of stages in mankind's collective growth and believe that the coming of age of the entire human race is a signal of the organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh. This is to be viewed "...as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture ...should...be regarded..., as the furthermost limits in the organization of human society..."[20] In this sense, religion becomes indivisible from other types of authority and the fact that there is no functional separation of religious and secular authority in Bahá'u'lláh's World Order and, consequently, no two parallel judicial establishments may come to exist, this makes the Universal House of Justice 'the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth' to exercise 'all the rights, the duties and responsibilities incumbent upon the world's future superstate.' The principle of unity in diversity, however, acting as pivot in world government will devolve upon national and local bodies much responsibility, but not with the unrestricted sovereignty which nation-states enjoy today.[21]

In such an arrangement, the idea of politics undergoes a radical transformation. As society interacts with the spiritual evolution of individuals in accordance with enunciated ethical and social principles currently being applied, disagreement about the ends becomes ever so remote ("The principle of the oneness of mankind...calls for...a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life...infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated states."[22]). With no universal disagreement on ends, discord cannot thrive and politics, as understood today, loses much of its meaning. The political question becomes a merely technical one, about means, and how these should be settled, a bit like arguments between engineers and doctors. If all agree on a common policy and all 'spontaneously' agree on what that policy should be, as Bahá'í Administrative Order is inclined to pursue, in such a situation, the argument continues, the only activity required is the execution of policy —a simple matter of administration in its most mechanical and narrow sense (pure governmental activity) and the cycle of political activity ceases. It invites the situation of political rest and not political unrest. Such a line of reasoning is not incorrect but requires qualification. "Clearly the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is a 'political' enterprise and the teachings of the Faith are filled with 'political' principles — using the word in the sense of the science of government and the organization of human society. At the same time the Bahá'í world community repeatedly and emphatically denies being a 'political' organization... Bahá'ís are following a completely different path from that usually followed by those who wish to reform society. They eschew political methods towards the achievement of their aims, and concentrate on revitalizing the hearts, minds and behavior of people and on presenting a working model as evidence of the reality and practicality of the way of life they propound."[23] The new politics connotes a special case of the exercise of power profoundly revised. Bahá'ís are not in the exploit of attempting to change the conduct of others in their own desired direction nor to make their own views prevail — both correctly denote power. "Our mission', Bahá'u'lláh asserts, 'is to seize and possess the hearts of men".[24] And the mission of Bahá'í institutions "does not comprise a series of specific

answers to current problems, but rather the illumination of an entirely new way of life. Without this way of life the problems are insoluble; with it they will either not arise or, if they arise, can be resolved."[25] Bahá'u'lláh demands an interfaith dialogue, aimed to serve the highest purpose of religion, namely "to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men"[26] and warns against proselytization. What all this infers is that the term power should refer to the whole spectrum of influence being brought to bear upon an individual to move his or her life in a required direction. To use the power of love or the power of the recreative Word in the same vein as in the context of politics is wrong, as in the Weberian sense of controlling the behavior of others despite opposition with the most direct source of power being coercion. This other, broader, view is equating belief to the institutional modalities of sanctions. But even the various modalities assumed — love, persuasion, rewards and punishment — are really not the only modalities for exercising power. Desired change may be induced by authority. Authority is also a source of power. It is not sermonizing to say that one of the most influential means of getting others to behave in the way required 'to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization' is to invest the policy with authority, with a degree of moral acceptability. In the Bahá'í context, moral acceptability exists as much as by reason of its source, no less than God and His Manifestation for this Day ("The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God's immutable Purpose for mankind in this day. The Source from which it derives its inspiration is no one less than Bahá'u'lláh Himself.")[27], as by reason of the nobility of anticipated results, conducive to the general welfare, happiness, and greatness of human society ("... to ensure the peace and tranquility of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established"[28]), exhorting all mankind to participate in the development of a global civilization. The greater the authority, the less need to employ other modalities of power. A reason why historically politics has generated such arduous, protracted and, yes, bloody struggles, is because the distinguishing mark of the state — that 'territorially delimited population who accept a common organ of government' — is its high degree

of compulsiveness and the motive behind why the modalities of power have shifted so often to the other end of the power spectrum —coercion. As a corollary, stable and effective exercise of government depends on that which is derived from authority. As guidance of Bahá'í institutions is seen as proceeding from persons who — no matter whether it is logical or reasonable or justifiable by any objective criterion — are believed to be persons with a moral right to issue it, then, for those to whom guidance is given, there emerges a moral duty to obey it.[29] This is the secret of Bahá'í administration. The 'esteem' and 'real affection' which believers attach to their legally elected representatives is the sentiment which holds together the framework of this vast Administrative Order and itself the fruit of a universal consciousness "...that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other."[30]

Authority in the Bahá'í Faith has a reservoir of public support which is inexhaustible. This is understandable predicated as it is upon what has been termed the miranda and the credenda of power: the things that arouse favorable emotional responses ('miranda' or things to be admired) and the rationalizations that contain the reasons which oblige the intellect to give assent ('credenda' or things to be believed).[31] The human forces of admiration and personal belief in the Bahá'í community act as lubricants in the mechanics of administration and act as true antidotes to the 'arid secularization' which may infect it if 'divorced from the animating spirit of the Cause.' There are many aspects in Bahá'í institutional life that provide vivid examples of this sway between the two alternating states of awareness — the emotional appeal and the rational and legitimate features of an order which allow a systematic explanation of why people should obey and give assent to the continuance of authority. Here we shall mention two of the

most compelling: (1) the procedure of voting and the election process and; (2) the conferred infallibility of the Universal House of Justice.[32]

Because of the absence of clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'í communities are governed by regularly elected representative institutions at local, regional (in some areas), national, and international levels. For many students of politics, the most surprising feature of Bahá'í elections is that they are conducted without nominations, competitive campaigns, voting coalitions, or parties. Bahá'í elections are governed by formal institutional rules and informal norms that specifically prohibit such familiar features of the political landscape. The question is why Bahá'í elections are governed by these rules and norms. The answer lies in the distinctive values that are the foundation for the rules and norms. Bahá'í Administration "...is the ideal instrument to make spiritual laws function properly in the material affairs of this world"[33]. This acknowledges the fact that the key to prosperity and stability is sound government but that beyond the hidden institutional foundations of rights, rule of law, and basic political order, a purified spirit must exist. Given that the Spiritual Assembly is a 'gift of God'[34] within each community and the Bahá'í community continually expands, administrators and decision-makers are challenged to stretch mind and spirit to encompass new and evolving requirements. This makes it absolutely necessary that 'every one should conscientiously take an active part in the election of these Assemblies', and makes of voting both a responsibility and an opportunity. This refers not just to participating actively in Bahá'í elections but in elections as a whole as 'Abdu'l-Bahá was wont to encourage: "...it is necessary that the citizens shall take part in elections. This is a necessary matter and no excuse from it is possible. My object in telling the believers that they should not interfere in the affairs of government is this: that they should not make any trouble and that they should not move against the opinion of the government, but obedience to the laws...is necessary."[35] Bahá'ís are not invited to participate in party politics but are exhorted to obey government and are strictly to abstain "...from associating themselves, whether by word or deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their

governments and the schemes and programmes of parties and factions..."[36] Such platforms are divisive, corrupt, and inflaming — of little appeal to a new race of man convinced that conflicts are solved only by peaceful means ("Without such unity, rest and comfort, peace and universal reconciliation are unachievable"[37]). It can be argued that political parties have only developed in Western democracy because of an absence of social solidarity. Their absence is a boon for a serving community with no partisan weighting in the distribution of this service. Voting becomes an important part of Bahá'í community life and the adult Bahá'í must see himself as an 'intelligent, well-informed and responsible elector' because institutions matter, long recognized as such by economists and political scientists alike. For example, poor countries are poor not because they lack resources, but because they lack effective political institutions.[38] Bahá'í Administrative Order, through its unifying and harmonizing functions, has been established precisely to make firm and strong "...the foundation of fairness and justice...that all regions of the world may become even as Paradise itself."[39] With this exhortation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in mind, participating in building institutional capacity through the very first formal acts of voting and elections, really becomes a spiritual privilege, much more significant than simply exercising civic pride, especially when knowing that "institutions invested with authority see themselves as instruments for nurturing human potential, ensuring its unfoldment along avenues productive and meritorious."[40] The conduct of Bahá'í elections, when properly studied and applied, portrays an aspect of an organic unity of the spiritual and the material necessary to the construction of a mature society in this new Age. "In no other system do individuals exercise such a breadth of freedom in the electoral process."[41]

When politics no longer serves special interest groups, the nature of political decision making must also be different. When power is needed to order human affairs but the struggle for power threatens to destroy society, a new process must exist to resolve this paradox. A searching modus operandi which successfully addresses both dilemmas is Bahá'í consultation. In Bahá'í consultation we find a new method for searching out truth

and a 'rational instrument for the joint definition of goals and for their joint realization' —a perfect gift of mercy where divine assistance is vouchsafed to the reliant and the pure-hearted and the Holy Spirit assuredly present in meetings 'organized for the purpose of unity and concord'. The authority of the Universal House of Justice is further exalted above this universal measure of divine confirmation with the consecrated assurance that it is "the source of all good and freed from all error"[42], sheltered with infallibility. Infallibility, in this case, becomes an attribute of authority and not its separate. Authority and inspiration, together, enable the House of Justice to guide the Cause of God and to discharge its functions. The legal authority of the Supreme Body is derived from the ordinance of Bahá'u'lláh Himself and the fact that its decisions and command "will be guarded from mistake" [Some Answered Questions, 172], makes infallibility as much the cause and substance of the capital seat of authority as authority itself. The sovereignty of the institution is divinely ordained and its laws divinely inspired. Evincing confidence, then, in such a promise of the Manifestation of God to protect His community is surely a better route than convincing oneself (or others) as to all the provisions and safeguards of the Universal House of Justice. In other words, this subject fulfils the conditions of great story better than any other, for, more than any other, it leaves things which we have yet to find or are unable to ever find. The closing is never final because as soon as we put into words "that which the Tongue of Utterance hath spoken in the Kingdom of His knowledge..." [Epistle to Son of the Wolf, 1] we falsify it.

"Virtually every problem which is blamed on a deficiency of structure is, in fact, traceable to a defect in the manner in which the individual believers understand and implement the administrative principles of the Faith."[43]

Notwithstanding its infallibility[44] and the nature of its authority, the Universal House of Justice neither eschews the principle of consultation nor dismisses the inquiries of the believers with impatience or indifference or permits a climate of intolerance. In the process of consultation the House of Justice wants to be provided with facts when called upon to render a

decision and it may well change its decision when new facts emerge. "[The] Universal House of Justice is not omniscient."[45] As to its compassion and forbearance in attending the infinite petition or queries of the believers, this letter gives a sample: "The friends should learn to radiantly accept such decisions and if, as a result, at any given time a certain point of guidance is unclear, they assuredly have the right to seek clarification or verification."[46] In the very early days of its existence, the newly established House, was in constant consultation with the Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land and from the tone of their earliest communication, a marked cordiality characterized these meetings.

> To the Hands of the Cause of God Residing in the Holy Land
> May 26, 1963
> Beloved Friends,
>
> We have been most grateful for the consultations we were able to have with you over the past two days, and look forward to others in the coming weeks as the process of our taking over the administrative work of the Cause progresses....
>
> [Ministry of the Custodians, Page 428]

Consultation of the infallible Body with specialists, with the high and low, continues to this day, even as it never ceases to explain and elucidate 'all important fundamental questions'. Set against this background, the absence of an aura of omniscience is not only a reassuring and wonderful contrast but a true reflection of the principle of balance and moderation evidenced in the Faith of God. Somewhere between the two terms of justice and mercy there are links uniting the two. The Universal House of Justice may well be its official designation but mercy gives it its fullness. Mercy is not a relaxation of justice but its exaltation. Its opposite is also true, restating C.S. Lewis that 'mercy, detached from justice, grows unmerciful.'

If time never remains the same and change is a necessary and an essential attribute of this world, adaptability becomes a criterion for measuring the degree of development of institutions, that is, the more adaptable an institution is the more developed it will be. Such an organization best evaluates a changing external environment and modifies not just its own internal procedures but legislation in general as a response. To quote an influential intellectual: "Adaptable institutions are the ones that survive."[47] The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, of which the Administrative Order is its 'nucleus' and 'pattern', allows itself to adapt to changing conditions in the world through the unfamiliar dichotomy of 'immutability' and 'elasticity' — the unity of doctrine and the unity of administration, respectively. Two premises, one conclusion. "Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, together with absolute prohibition against anyone propounding authoritative or inspired interpretations or usurping the function of the Guardian. Unity of administration is assured by the authority of the Universal House of Justice",[48] to legislate on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá'í Writings — legislation, to be sure, that "...is not about what we should believe, merely about what we must do."[49] "Its pronouncements, which are susceptible of amendment or abrogation by the House of Justice itself, serve to supplement and apply the Law of God."[50] Shoghi Effendi concludes: "Such is the immutability of His revealed Word. Such is the elasticity which characterizes the functions of His appointed ministers. The first preserves the identity of His faith, and guards the integrity of His law. The second enables it, even as a living organism, to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society."[51]

The conviction that Bahá'í institutions are important rests on the fact that in their absence, spirit will dissipate: form must exist for spirit to continue to operate. On the global level, the agency of the Universal House of Justice has been ordained "... to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings."

[Constitution, 4]. On the micro-level, with the division of countries into small geographic areas, the cluster construct has seen a new form administration of growth which involves not just the Local Spiritual Assembly but "the close collaboration of the institute, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, and an Area teaching Committee."[52] Beyond these, the leadership role of the National Spiritual Assembly cannot be underestimated in maintaining the vision and refocusing the priorities before the believers, impressing upon them the unique and irreplaceable role the individual plays in the prosecution of any undertaking and devolving to Regional Councils much of the expansion and consolidation work. In the course of organic growth, we see both divine structure and infrastructure, on all levels, are continually being tested to support the multiplication of activities and the diversification of functions. In theory and in practice, particularly in the area of teaching, one sees the power of individual initiative released, the flow of resources secured and coordination freed to operate. This is encouraging as it offers the expectation that Bahá'í administrative processes and structure will continue to evolve in response to exigencies.

All these institutions on all levels (international, national and local), 'auxiliary branches' and 'subordinate agencies',[53] these should not be misconstrued as a division of social or political power or examples akin to distinct separate branches or offices of state or government as implied by the constitutional theory of checks and balances. The traditional theory of checks and balances spells out the idea that by distributing political functions among different institutions of society and government freedom and justice are preserved and no one person or group can hold all power. Power in the Bahá'í community, as we have seen earlier (page 47), has an altogether different meaning. So too with the concept of checks and balances which, unlike the traditional sense of separating and spreading out power within the state to promote justice, and this includes centralized versus decentralized government, in the Bahá'í Faith the term checks and balances refers to an altogether different dimension, namely that well balanced souls are as important to freedom as a well-balanced constitution. This is the message

which comes out strongly when the phrase is used by the House of Justice in its message to the US Bahá'í community in December 29th, 1988: "Thus there exist in the system of Bahá'u'lláh checks and balances necessary to the beneficial uses of this freedom in the onward development of society." [Individual Rights & Freedoms, paragraph 27]. A utilitarian and perfectionist view, as it were, may now be appended to the traditional political question of separation of powers. Social stability is not just a 'mixed' government but also individuals that are spiritually balanced. Religion alone can play the role of regulator between man the angel and man the beast — two distinct humanities that any government must rule. In a democratic society, to counter the materialistic tendencies natural to man, as much depends to be done on behalf of the angel. Religion balances the imperatives and inclinations of human nature and offers an alternative ideal to democratic society, the ideal of human perfection (e.g. the love of God), a good in itself regardless of its utility. "Love and harmony, purity of motive, humility and lowliness amongst the friends, patience and long-suffering in difficulties — these inform the attitude with which they proceed "with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views..." [Individual Rights & Freedoms, paragraph 28]. That very keen observer of the democratic soul, himself living in the early years of the Bahá'í Era, Tocqueville, seeking to protect democracy from its individualism and pettiness, was inspired to call on religion for that check and balance which self-interest is powerless to achieve: "The greatest advantage of religions is to inspire entirely opposite instincts. There is no religion that does not place the object of the desires of men above and beyond the good things of the earth, and that does not naturally elevate his soul toward realms very superior to those of the senses. Nor is there any religion that does not impose on each man some duties toward the human species or in common with it, and that does not in this way drag him, from time to time, out of contemplation of himself."[54]

NOTES

1. In a journal entry dated March 27, 1848, Kierkegaard wrote: "...I sit in a quiet room... I recognize only one danger: the religious danger..." quoted in Robert Nisbet, The Social

Philosophers: Community & Conflict in Western Thought, Concise Edition, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1973, page 143. By 'religious danger' Kierkegaard meant the danger that comes from failing to live within the strict and absolute authority of Christ and seeking refuge instead in the spurious manifestations of security which fill modern society.

2. The main proponent of the theory of functionalism, Émile Durkheim saw the concept of the sacred as the defining characteristic of religion, not faith in the supernatural. He saw religion as a reflection of the concern for society. His book, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse), published in 1912, analyzes religion as a social phenomenon. Durkheim attributes the development of religion to the emotional security attained through communal living.

3. Arguments discarding religion as simply another political actor in society's formation may be found in Francis Fukuyama, The Origins of Political Order, New York, FSG, 2011, pp 442–445.

4. John Huddleston, in his Preface to The Search for a Just Society, Oxford, George Ronald, 1989, p. xiii. The implications of a just society, however, are not as well resolved and remain controversial. Galbraith, for example, in his slim volume, The Good Society: The Humane Agenda, published in 1996, focuses exclusively on the purely economic and material components of the good, or just, society such as, economic growth, universal access to education, protection for the young, old, disabled, and the environment and seeks solutions in NAFTA, the balanced budget amendment, and the flat income tax. Not surprising for an economist but especially disappointing for a brilliant mind to be so reductionist. To say that "Nothing…so comprehensively denies the liberties of the individual as the total absence of money" is a truism in need of a vision. Galbraith, however, wisely uses the term 'achievable society' rather than 'perfect society' because any useful, working concept must "take into consideration the institutional structure and the human characteristics that are fixed, immutable" and part with ideologies and rigid philosophies. Pages 2–4.

5. The Law of Huqúqu'lláh in the Bahá'í Faith is the complete material and spiritual expression of this concept. See the article, "Wisdom Created: The Law of Huqúqu'lláh" in Huqúqu'lláh Newsletter # .....

6. Rousseau resolves the interference of religion, a powerful compatible force to his volonté générale, in this way: it is not enough that a nation should have a religion to make good people but that religion be identified with the values of the nation to make good citizens. And since all religion is spiritual, 'occupied solely with heavenly things' and 'not of this world', no religion can ever be the religion of the state.

7. These religious teachings, to be observed, all arise from the East, Near or Far, as if the 'Sun of Truth' parallels the life-giving physical sun ("The West has always received spiritual enlightenment from the East" Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p.33). The entire Bahá'í paradigm of physical reality rests as much on its portrayal of physical reality as transient, unreliable, a shadowy and illusive imitation of the eternal changeless spiritual reality ("Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out. A shadow hath no life of its own; its existence is only a fantasy, and nothing more; it is but images reflected in water, and seeming as pictures to the eye. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections 178) as on its metaphorical nature, that is to say that whatever exists in heaven is reflected in this phenomenal world, as in "…a bright morning dawned and a rising light lit up the

eastern sky. Then rose the Sun of Truth and the splendours of the Kingdom were shed over east and west." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selection from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 1983, page 33. In His Lawh-i-Aflákiyyih, 'Abdu'l-Bahá further expounds that lower orders are images and counterparts of higher things and that there is a definite connection between all foundational or fundamental entities of reality. For a provisional and unauthorized translation refer to http://bahai-library.com/abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih

8. In East Asia, for example, two main political traditions – Confucianism and Legalism – have shaped and continue to shape understandings informing political practices and ways of dealing with social problems. See Daniel A. Bell, Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context, Princeton, UP, 2006, especially Chapter 1 –Introduction.

9. The erosion of the sense of religious community in Christianity, for example, began in the early-modern period of history, the very beginning of the sixteenth century, as testified in the writings of Erasmus. Unlike Luther and Calvin, however, Erasmus did not take his criticism of the corporate church to the point of outright rebellion; not for lack of personal courage but, rather, because he felt that no religious matter should be regarded as vital enough to be carried to the point of revolt.

10. Udo Schaefer, Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics, Oxford, George Ronald, 1995, page 445.

11. Bahá'ú'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day Is Come, Wilmette, BPT, 1980, page 20

12. Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual Bahá'í, dated September 30th, 1949.

13. It is of a remarkable coincidence that, although separated by six centuries, Christianity and Islam divide a common geology of culture: their founding berths in Palestine (modern Israel), and in the Arabian Peninsula, respectively, conjoin in the same region and their Prophet-Founders, Jesus of Nazareth (although born in Bethlehem) and Muhammad, born in Mecca, are Semite, (one Galilean and the other Arab), having had their beginnings through the prophet Abraham. In terms of eschatology, both give hope of a spiritual awakening: the Second Coming of Jesus and the coming of the Qa'im (the One who Arises) as expected by Shi'I Muslims, or the Mahdi (the Guided One) as expected by Sunni Muslims. The expectation of the coming of a new prophet, of course, also exists in Zoroastrianism and Buddhism, the former naming the figure as the Shah Bahram who will found a true universal religion which will unite mankind and Buddha proclaiming: "In due time another Buddha will arise in the world, a Holy One, a supremely enlightened one...a master of angels and mortals." Quoted in John Huddleston, The Search for a Just Society, Oxford, George Ronald, 1989, p. 27. Interestingly, Hadith reference both the Mahdi and Isa (the Arabic name for Jesus Christ) simultaneously and the return of the Mahdi will coincide with the return of Christ both figures being ultimately inseparable according to the Prophet. Though Isa is said to descend upon the world once again, the Mahdi will already be present, testing the believers. "What will be your reaction when the son of Mary (Jesus) descends and your Imam is from among yourselves?" (Sahih Muslim, bab nuzul 'isa, Vol. 2; Sahih Bukhari, kitab bad' al-khalq wa nuzul 'isa, Vol. 4) [See Oxford Islamic Studies Online. Eschatology. Oxford University Press]. The homogeneity of the two faiths can also be seen in the terrible blows they suffered close to the first millennium of their inception

– Christianity facing hostility in secularism and subjectivism, the two epithets of the post-medieval era we call Renaissance; and Islam, from the fourteenth century onwards, becoming ever known as a violent and reactionary force (Timur-i Lang, in Persian, historically known as Tamerlane, a devout Muslim and feared Turkic ruler who reigned from 1370–1405, caused the deaths of 17 million people by some estimates. See J.J. Saunders, The History of the Mongol Conquests, Philadelphia, UP, 1971, page 174). Within a modern, purely political perspective, and in the only two examples of its kind, both the State of Israel and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan emerged because of official religion: Pakistan was established in 1947 and Israel, exactly nine months later, in 1948. We are not saying that there are no other national identities not inextricably bound with strong religious beliefs, as in many Middle Eastern States, but these two countries, especially, are the only two historical, statehood manifestations of a peculiar religious necessity at a particular point in time. For a succinct historical explanation on how authority was effectively split between secular and religious authorities in the Middle East, refer to Francis Fukuyama, The Origins of Political Order, New York, FSG, 2011, Chapter 19.

14. Francis Fukuyama, The Origins of Political Order, New York, FSG, 2011, p. 274

15. Robert Nisbet, The Social Philosophers: Community & Conflict in Western Thought, Concise Edition, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1973, page 130.

16. To Bahá'ís, such recrudescence in religious community and thought, can only coincide with the birth of the Babi and Bahá'í religions in the first half of the nineteenth century. "What is the cause of this sudden awakening throughout the world? Bahá'ís believe that it is due to a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the Prophet Baha'u'llah, Who was born in Persia in 1817 and passed away in the Holy Land in 1892. Baha'u'llah taught that the Prophet, or "Manifestation of God," is the Light-bringer of the spiritual world, as the sun is the light-bringer of the natural world...[T]hrough the Divine Manifestation, the Sun of Truth shines upon the world of heart and soul, and educates the thoughts, morals and characters of men." John E. Esslemont, Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, Wilmette, BPT, 2006, page 6. Is it pure conjecture to suppose that as the leaders of a new religion were meeting in a small village in north-east Iran [Badasht] in 1848 boldly exposing its rupture with the past and setting in motion the public existence and promulgation of a new world religion, out of this same single year should come ideologies of radicalism, conservatism, and liberalism which have guided Western social thought ever since? Marx, Tocqueville, and Mill published their particular philosophies that year (1848): The Communist Manifesto, Critique of Socialism, and Principles of Political Economy, respectively. We should also mention the European Revolutions of 1848 –a series of political upheavals which remain the most widespread revolutionary wave in European history.

17. A more recent example is Francis Fukuyama explaining that "the problem with Christianity ... is that it remains just another slave ideology..." quoted in Roger Kimball's paper, Francis Fukuyama & the end of history, published in The New Criterion Vol: 10, # 6, Feb. 1992, page 6.

18. The Universal House of Justice, The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa, Bahai World Centre, 1972, page 5. While the central role of justice in Bahá'í moral and political philosophy is clear, emphasized by Shoghi Effendi as "a principle that must be regarded as the crowning distinction of all Local and National Assemblies" [Advent of Divine Justice, page 27] there has been little systematic philosophical investigation of the

concept in Bahá'í thought, given that the term justice actually corresponds to two distinct terms ('adl and insáf) from the Arabic. Refer to article by Dr. Arash Abizadeh, Democratic Elections without Campaigns? Normative Foundations of National Bahá'í Elections, published in World Order Magazine, 2005, Vol. 37, No. 1, page 18.

19. St. Augustine, City of God (413 a.D), quoted in Robert Nisbet, The Social Philosophers: Community & Conflict in Western Thought, Concise Edition, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1973, p. 91
20. Shoghi Effendi, WOB, page 163
21. It is beyond our scope to discuss at length the Bahá'í teachings on the future world commonwealth and world civilization. Nor does space permit us to describe the series of transitional steps necessary to arrive at this future res publica and its associated civitas, or civilization — humanity as opposed to barbarity, virtue as opposed to vice. A good introduction can be found in John Huddleston, The Search for a Just Society, Oxford, George Ronald, 1989, Part III. But we would be amiss not to quote this exquisite text on the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order: "Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the world-wide Law of Bahá'u'lláh. Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity..." (Shoghi Effendi, WOB letters, 1938:41-42).
22. Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Page 43
23. Letter to na individual believer written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, April 27th, 1995.
24. Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings 105:6
25. House of Justice, op.cit..
26. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets, 11:15
27. Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Page 156
28. Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, Page 80
29. Rousseau's maxim in Book One of his Social Contract is particularly à propos: 'The strongest is never strong enough...unless he succeeds in turning might into right and obedience into duty.
30. Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, Page 64

31. The expressions are originally from the political scientist Charles Merriam (Chicago School), quoted in S.E. Finer, Comparative Government, Pelican, 1970, page 31, emphasizing the importance of psychological factors in political life and their various symbols of identification.

32. One area where the two states of awareness come into conflict is the exclusion of women from membership to the Universal House of Justice. In a letter to Corinne True in June, 1902, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes: "The House of Justice... according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men, this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon." It is intuitive to expect a lawmaker to overrule his own rule but seems unreasonable if there is no justification stated or when a moral rule which can plausibly establish grounds for alteration seems absent, especially when the writings of Bahá'u'lláh unequivocally proclaim the equality of men and women, asserting that "in this Day the Hand of divine grace hath removed all distinction. The Servants of God and His handmaidens are regarded on the same plane." [Bahá'u'lláh, A Compilation on Women...] In its Promise of World Peace [1985], the Universal House of Justice writes emphatically: "The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged, prerequisites of peace...There are no grounds, moral, practical or biological, upon which such denial can be justified." This assertion make missing desiderata all the more keen. Or is Divine law unlike man's law, where we do have the need of tight, precedence-justifying arguments that nonetheless admit latitude? That there is a differentiation of functions – be it biological or occupational – does not infer "...that either sex is inherently superior or inferior to the other..." [Shoghi Effendi, Dawn of a New Day: Messages to India, New Delhi, BPT, 1970, p. 86] –the traditional differentiated roles being mothers as primary educators or fathers as primary providers in the family unit; or the exemption of women from combat military service, for example. God's ordinance for men alone to share House membership is to be taken as inviolable but optimistic in that there is the assurance that in the new age of the future the balance of the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be fully demonstrated, as clearly as the midday sun, and the "distinctions... utterly removed" (The Compilation of Compilations, vol. II, p. 371). Furthermore, service to elected positions in the Bahá'í Faith is not a manifestation of individual power and influence, hence the exclusion of women can never be viewed in the feuding context of inherent advantage or disadvantage. Looking at current gender statistics in the non-Bahá'í world to provide even the barest outline of what gender equality balance might be makes for pretty dismal reading: the number of female CEOs is barely inching up. As of mid-August, 2012, there were 20 female CEOs running America's largest companies. That paltry number (4%) is actually a record. In the UK, as of October 2013, there were only three women at the top FTSE 100 companies. The gender pay gap is also embarrassing. On the confirmation of Justice Kagan to the Supreme Court, President Barack Obama wrote in his White House blog, in August 2010: "For nearly two centuries [the Supreme Court was created in 1789], there wasn't a single woman on our nation's highest court. When Elena takes her seat on that bench, for the first time in our history, there will be three women." Just as there were three women – a full one-third –who graced the first elected International Bahá'í Council in 1961: the two sisters Jessie and Ethel Revell, and Mildred Mottahedeh. It is clear that hierarchical systems that place men above women in a divinely ordained order have no sanction within the Bahá'í scriptures. In this respect the Bahá'í Faith is unique among

revealed religions, in theory and in practice. (It must not be forgotten that in the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahiyyih Khánum, we find a dramatic departure of male-dominated prophethood. She served as de facto head of the Baha'i community several times in the absence of the Master and Shoghi Effendi – see, for example the letter of Shoghi Effendi to the American Bahá'ís on his temporary absence from Palestine in April 1922 and leaving the affairs of the Cause under "the headship of the Greatest Holy Leaf" – see Star of the West XIII, # 4, pp 81–82). The Bahá'í Faith is not alone however in testing our faculties of reason and faith (ratio et fides) when we are confronted with divine revelation. For man to stall belief on the basis of additional evidence, as it might in a position of contention, ("contentiousness begets contention" letter of the House 20.07.97) is to falter and vitiate the very purpose of his existence.

33. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 16, 1945, in Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File, compiled by Helen Hornby, page 1.

34. Phrase found in the Naw Ruz message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, 1974, quoted in Eunice Braun, The March of the Institutions, Oxford, George Ronald, 1984, page 13. The term gift should not mean we should view Bahá'í institutions as panacea to all our ills. "Ultimately all the battle of life is within the individual. No amount of organization can solve the inner problems..." Shoghi Effendi, in the Bahá'í Life, page 10.

35. See Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/TAB/tab-407.html#pg342

36. Letter of Shoghi Effendi dated March 21st, 1932, to the Bahá'ís in the United States and Canada.

37. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections, 77:1

38. Institution meaning as much organizational as Huntingdon's broader "stable, valued, recurring patterns of behavior". See Francis Fukuyama, The Origins of Political Order, New York, FSG, 2011, page 450. A study by Dani Rodrick and Arvind Subramanian, entitled The Primacy of Institutions, published in the quarterly magazine of the IMF, F&D [Finance & Development], June 2003, a special issue on institutions and development, shows that the quality of institutions overrides everything else in explaining the huge difference in average incomes between the world's richest and poorest nations. "Controlling for institutions, geography has, at best, weak direct effects on incomes, although it has a strong indirect effect through institutions by influencing their quality. Similarly, trade has a significant effect on institutional quality, but it has no direct positive effect on income."

39. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Wilmette, BPT, 1971, page 15

40. Message of the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, December 28th, 2010. The reader is invited to read two excellent articles on voting and Bahá'í elections written by Associate Professor of Political Science at McGill, Montreal, Dr. Arash Abizadeh, that explains the criteria for voting, the distinct ethical, spiritual, and pragmatic values according to which national Bahá'í electoral rules and norms are justified and which lay bare the philosophical foundations of national Bahá'í elections. Refer to How Bahá'í Voters Should Vote, published in The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 18. 1/4. 2008 and Democratic Elections without Campaigns? Normative Foundations of National Bahá'í Elections, published in World Order Magazine, 2005, Vol. 37, No. 1.

41. The Universal House of Justice, in a letter addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States, dated December 29th, 1988, about rights and freedom of expression in the Bahá'í community. Paragraph #20
42. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament, 1:25 p. 14
43. Letter of the Universal House of Justice written on its behalf to an individual believer, dated February 16th, 1996.
44. The conferred infallibility of the House of Justice must be distinguished from essential infallibility. The latter is an inherent attribute of prophethood and aside from immunity of error it also implies, for the personage, immunity from sin: sinlessness, immaculacy and moral infallibility. The infallibility of the House of Justice conveys institutional immunity from error – it does not imply individual members' freedom from sin or error. Subtle and incessant intellectual activity in this one subject, however, given our incapacity to understand it, is prone not to enlightenment but to self injury. The God that drew this difficult picture, however, also enabled us to admire and to receive it. For additional reflection, refer to the letter of the House of Justice in the Appendix as well as to Udo Schaefer et al., Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics, Oxford, George Ronald, 1995, pages 166–188.
45. Letter of the Universal House of Justice written on its behalf to an individual believer, Aug.22nd 1977.
46. Letter of the Universal House of Justice written on its behalf to an individual believer, July 10th,1988.
47. Francis Fukuyama, The Origins of Political Order, New York, FSG, 2011, page 450. He goes on to say that the English system of Common Law, for example, in which law is constantly being reinterpreted and extended by judges in response to new circumstances is one prototype of an adaptable institution.
48. Letter of the Universal House of Justice written on its behalf to an individual believer, August 12, 1998.
49. Alí Nakhjavani, Shoghi Effendi: The Range and Power of His Pen, Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 2006, p 15
50. Letter of the Universal House of Justice written on its behalf to an individual believer, August 12, 1998
51. Shoghi Efendi, WOB, page 23
52. The Universal House of Justice, Learning to Respond to Emerging New Realities, Messages from the Universal House of Justice, Palabra, Florida, 2006, p 10
53. The following text of the House of Justice provides a succinct overview of the various components of Bahá'í Administrative Order today: "The Administrative Order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh accomplishes its divinely ordained purpose through a system of institutions, each with its defined sphere of action. The central governing body of the Order is the Universal House of Justice, whose terms of reference are the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh together with the interpretations and expositions of `Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. Under its guidance, legislative, executive and judicial authority over the affairs of the Bahá'í

community is exercised by Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. This authority is also exercised by Regional Councils, committees and other agencies established by these institutions, to the extent that it is so delegated. Together with the authority vested in elected corporate bodies to make decisions binding on the community is the spiritual, moral and intellectual influence that the Administrative Order exerts on both the lives of believers and the work of the Faith's institutions. This influence acquires a special character through the services performed by those individuals who are appointed to the high rank of Counsellors and by their deputies. More specifically, the Continental Counsellors and the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants are charged with functions relating to the protection and propagation of the Faith. In carrying out their duties, the Continental Counsellors receive their guidance from the International Teaching Centre, an institution whose mandate is global and which functions in close proximity to the Universal House of Justice." Compilation, Institution of the Counsellors, 2001, p 1.

54. Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, page 745

Conclusion

"There has rarely been a crisis in which Hope and Peril have presented themselves so vividly and so simultaneously upon the world scene."[1] These words ring bitingly true today where hope, as represented in the aborning era of a 'modern' Bahá'í World Community[2], stands beside peril, that seething magma of 'liquid modernity'[3]; where "pervading cynicism, emptiness, and negativity...subtly color our thoughts"[4]; where "consumerism acts to maintain the emotional reversal of work and family"[5]; where religion is feared as a "mental delusion [and] a great moral evil" (a particularly astonishing declaration coming so early from an ex-Church Minister living in Georgean England)[6]; where political consciousness is no longer a synonym of civic virtue but symbolized by outrageous partisanship, where voter abstention (barely half of the US voting population has turned out to vote since 1996)[7] is symptomatic of apathy fed by corruption and, even, mockery of the high position and sanctity of public office;[8] where public street protests against both government and the financial establishment were front-page news in 2011, — the Movimento 15-M in Madrid, then with Occupy Wall Street in New York, along with Occupy Boston, Occupy Los Angeles, Occupy London, Occupy Melbourne, Occupy Rome and other variants; where religion is viewed "not just amoral, but positively immoral"[9]; where political debates have become the ultimate fighting championships of verbal combat with the sole objective of attacking faulty reason[10] rather

than discovering truth (John S. Mill's famous 'negative logic'); and still other manifestations of leadership's bloated and marred supremacy. But just as hope cannot be prognostication nor should peril be regarded as condemnation. Extremes of Winston Churchill's spectrum highlighted at the beginning of this final section help form what the late John Rawls called an "overlapping consensus" in which different groups of citizens accept the same conclusions from either side and with quite different arguments.

Given the exigency of the times, to which some refer as misfortune in that we are uncertain and without a compass, these diverse camps with their different political hues are compelled to reconsider man's progressive movement, now divided and directionless and met with growing indifference. This is the danger and contradiction of our age: it has been precisely in the Bahá'í Era, that is during the last one hundred and seventy years, where unprecedented democratization of political life and a tremendous amount of political activity is everywhere apparent. But participation in public affairs is regarded with indifference by a vast majority of the public. The danger lies in that citizenship, so vital for social movement and for compulsion to emerge, is weakened as a result. "The average citizen seems to find the exercise of political rights burdensome, boring, and often lacking in significance. To be a citizen does not appear an important role, nor political participation an intrinsic good."[11] The Bahá'í Faith calls for a revival, not just of citizenship, but of world citizenship, 'a consciousness that can alone provide an adequate basis for the organization of world unity.' To bring this to fruition, a system must exist to interact with the spiritual evolution of individuals, in accordance with spiritual principles and needs and, consonant with the spirit of the age, a 'planetized world', to win the hearts and to gain the world.[12] Is such a charter comprehensive enough to confer all the advantages of civilization, without inhibition or shrill or the leaden weight of fideism? Or are these the ideals of a mythical sage-king?[13] We leave these questions for the reader to decide.

We discussed liberty and found the need for it to triumph but not at the cost of individual independence or more atomized, private citizenry. Excessive individualism in the end advocates serfdom. True freedom is a freedom that limits itself and yet does not lose its hold on the universal as embodied in the principles and laws of a divinely ordained central authority. To lose hold of the universal is to cease to place checks upon our collective appetite so necessary for the survival of true liberty. Combined hedonism and egalitarianism has a destructive impact on the power of hierarchy that is native and vital to the social bond. Moreover, to say that liberty is individuality made normative ignores the fact that we are consciously and unconsciously, wittingly or otherwise, always enlisted into situations not of our own choice.[14] We are also dependent on the effort of others to bring us to the point of understanding the choices we are to make. The core of individual liberty depends on the support of others. The nature of society is such that we, dissenters or not, are compelled to contribute, to participate, to accept perfectly reasonable goals. But as compelled as we are to submit to impositions, these must not be unjust. The Universal House of Justice exists to help us to emerge as free and rational persons in communities protected by the religion of God and His divine law. The fact that we are never born fully equipped to think and judge for ourselves, however, does not mean that our relationship with the Centre of our Faith should be characterized by total dependency or that that our intellectual space is occupied circumscriptive. An important area of the application of laws has been intentionally left to the conscience of each individual believer.[15] We are told that "[r]eligion... showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind."[16] The Universal House of Justice exists to safeguard this covenant. Might not this suggest, then, that our rights are also predefined and therefore to speak of them makes no sense? Does such institutional omnipresence in the Bahá'í Faith make liberty insecure? Such a line of argument is clearly flawed as our right to freedom of mind has been extolled in the Holy Writings and can never be, therefore, the creature of central authority in the formal institutional sense although as spiritual beings we can never flee from dependency and from that infinite conductor, our conscience. We

also showed that society cannot prosper without stable institutions to elicit the thought and efforts of its members and none of this is possible without a community of trust and mutual respect. To accept authority as an enabler rather than a hindrance, people must trust each other and trust requires and engenders respect.

This study is irremediably incomplete: the range of fact is great, the fact itself is almost an unspeakable — what is at issue is something which cannot be put into words but which makes itself manifest, that moving nucleus between a living relation of heaven above and earth below. And the changes are too rapid, none the least being one's own self altering in the interim. Other studies on several omitted aspects must inevitably arise. But might not further speculation on any future development of the institutions of the Faith itself be counterproductive, a "...speculation which can only give rise to those very differences of interpretation forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and against which they repeatedly warned us"?[17] An advertence, it seems, that we cannot be artists of conjecture while professing to be servants of truth. (The Universal House of Justice gives us a profound yet brief guidance on this matter and which we copy in full in the Appendix to deepen our understanding further).

Unquestionably these last fifty years have been significant ones, anni mirabili, a "... notable, perhaps heroic time for the Faith"[18] and 'in the erection of the last unit crowning the structure of the embryonic World Order of Baha'u'llah' (the Universal House of Justice). While this episode may be considered as fundamentally the most important part of our recent history, it is but one stream in the auspicious Bahá'í work for the reconstruction of human society in a world grown old and weary. ("Mundus senscit"—the world grows old—was the phrase employed by Gregory of Tours in the 6th century to describe the twilight of the Roman Empire). Concurrent with this must surely be the streams of "the contribution to human advancement...made by individual Bahá'ís in the pursuit of their daily work" and the many "projects and institutions for human advancement launched and

operated by Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies as their resources grow and the range of their activities expands."[19] But it has been the destiny of these early epochs of the Formative Age to blazon the birth and functioning of the twin institutions of the Bahá'í Faith — the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. They must be catalogued and rewritten extensively,[20] for the 'psychic curvature' is getting stronger by the day with attention, both within the Bahá'í community and outside of it, concentrating on the World Centre as never before — after all, the axis of mankind's advancement is the Cause of God and the axis of the Cause of God is protected by the Universal House of Justice, "...the sole infallibly guided institution in the world to which all must turn...".[21] Only when we have the book can we understand the story.[22] One draft must succeed another to accompany these changes as "...all experience is an arch wherethro'/Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades/For ever and for ever when I move.[23] Nor should this survey should not be seen as poetic lore, with jotted conversations "overheard in the dusk, from speakers far or hid, of which we get only a few broken murmurs".

It is an earnest appeal against the dour prognostications of civilizational decay made by Spengler, Toynbee, and Voegelin which increasingly find a large and eager audience. The vaunted idea of progress transforms itself into heresy when matched with man's innate capacity for pessimism. Human loyalties uprooted from accustomed soil must now find a larger purpose to fix them. The dusk of nations is dissipated by this renewed call to the nations. "It is towards this goal —the goal of a new World Order, Divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, equitable in principle, challenging in its features —that a harassed humanity must strive."[24]

That final morning in May, 2003, my parents left the Council Chamber vested in garments of light, leaving behind a life having forsaken their own, relived in the 'eternal city'[25], a 'legendary world framed within its own conventions in which the characters, suffused with unnatural brightness, perform with terrific responsiveness.' The entire membership of the House

arose to escort them down the Concourse and to the ground floor of the Seat, the moving spectacle of a new regiment exchanging duty with the old. Nearer to the Eastern side-entrance of the building a large collection of staff, foot guards, were waiting, chanting a parting refrain of Alláh'u'Abhá. Here, stepping into the waiting car, ended two score years of unique service at the Bahá'í World Centre, overbearing in its majesty, overwhelming in its demand of work, overburdened in daily supervisory functions, and overarching in the manifold tasks that Divine Providence has vouchsafed to this, the world's crowning institution. On this last day, we see emotions of a matchless moment where a company of equals bid adieu —a memorable picture, to be sure, of plain humanity amongst the trappings of divinity. In this final exchange there is no agony, just a poignant recognition of master time marshalling the lives of nine honorable men, 'the men of the House of Justice'[26] trustees of a timeless and peerless institution, founded "...to ensure the continuity of that divinely —appointed authority which flows..."[27]

Many, like my parents, have proven to be archetypes which aid us in the discovery of perpetual meaning in the lives and events surrounding the early epochs of the Formative Age[28] and give us a vivid interpretation not just of service but of a special attitude to service which places faith in authority before, but never excluding, rational understanding.[29] Such an unusual cognitive function cannot be pinned to spots on the brain like towns on a map but involve a complicated web of circuits which interact with the world not like fixed parts in a machine but like the instruments in a symphony orchestra combining their tenor, volume, and resonance to create a particular musical effect.

Father, by virtue of his unique position, completed a form of understanding which we are to emulate, namely, to unite the reflective attitude with very practical concerns — the former aiming to understand the significance of service and the latter to form a reasonable conception of it. It is only with this wisdom that we are able to see how a nascent institution, "a House which posterity will regard as the last refuge of a tottering civilization",[30]

successfully channels the vitality of the two agents at work — the divine and the human. And for the human to work, one prized quality stands above the rest, a duty placed on those who follow, a word 'whispered privily' in the argot of the new man: 'By the Lord! I found not from these idle claimants the breeze of Faithfulness!'[31]

NOTES

1. Winston S. Churchill, Step by Step 1936–1939, Odhams Press, London, 2nd Ed, 1947, page 1
2. The word 'modern' is used purposefully to adhere to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarkable characterization of the term in one of His talks in the West:"This re-formation and renewal of the fundamental reality of religion constitute the true and outworking spirit of modernism..." [Foundations of World Unity, page 11]. In the height of the Enlightenment era, some 120 years earlier, a similar assertion was made by Edmund Burke: "We know, and what is better, we feel inwardly, that religion is the basis of civil society, and the source of all good and of all comfort." [Reflections on the French Revolution]. As monotheistic faiths have all emerged outside of Europe, (see Note 132 on page 41), the argument that the presuppositions or formulas of modernizers, without exception, derive their inspiration only from the transmitting European or North American cultures and modern states, eg the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, Communism, must be contested.
3. A term used by Zygmunt Bauman in his Does Ethics have a Chance in a World of Consumers, Harvard University Press, 2008, page 186, to refer to society in a permanent state of flux "with no stable, secure island among the tides, ideological or otherwise and with markets frail like gossamer and brittle like china".
4. David S. Ruhe, in a paper presented at the Hasan M. Balyuzi Memorial Lecture, at the 18th Annual Bahá'í Studies Conference, August 13, 1994, at Harvard Law School, published in the Journal of Bahá'í Studies, Volume 6, Number 4, December, 1994 — March, 1995, p. 46
5. Arlie Hochschild, quoted in Does Ethics Have A Chance In A World Of Consumers, by Zygmunt Bauman, Harvard University Press, 2008, page 59
6. John Stuart Mill, on his father James, quoted in Christopher Hitchens' book God is not great: how religion poisons everything, Twelve, 2007, page 15.
7. Refer to Michael P. McDonald (March 13, 2010). General Election Turnout Rates. United States Elections Project, George Mason University. Former U.S. President Bill Clinton seems to have the antidote for low voter turnout. Speaking at a convention of the National Community Pharmacists Association in Orlando, October 15th, 2013, suggested that "constant conflict is actually often good politics. Because the more you can inflame your supporters the more likely they are to show up at election day. And if they're more inflamed than the other side, even if the other side has more people agreeing with it, you'll win because your crowd will show up." Visit http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2013/10/14/bill-clinton-politics-is-not-theology-its-work/?hpt=hp_t2

8. In a recent survey on the prestige of professions two of the least valued and least respected occupations were members of Congress (or Parliament) and the public servant. Visit https://conteudoclippingmp.planejamento.gov.br/cadastros/noticias/2013/3/5/bons-lideres-publicos-fortalecem-a-al
9. Christopher Hitchens, God is not great: how religion poisons everything, Twelve, 2007, page 205.
10. There is even a popular book by this name Attacking Faulty Reason: A Practical Guide to Fallacy-Free Arguments, by T. Edward Damer [7th Ed. Cengage Learning, 2013] used for teaching debate in colleges and universities.
11. Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought, Princeton, UP, revised edition 2006, page 315.
12. The emphasis on the word spiritual should not be taken to mean that the new society is made only for the moral or religious nor is it to be confused with the establishment of a 'reign of virtue' which has rung throughout the centuries down to our own day as the basic theme of all those committed to politics. Rather it is trying to stress the fact that mankind has reached a stage of maturity (spiritual evolution) and is capable of unification in the tissue of a world community (spirit of the age) by renewing their allegiance to a spiritual principle, namely the oneness of human race, achieved not by decree but by "the transmuting spirit of God, working through His chosen Mouthpiece in this day...". [Shoghi Effendi, from his Preface in The Promised Day is Come, page vi].
13. The question is not to be seen as purely derogatory as it contains the wisdom of the most famous Confucian after Confucius himself, Meng Tzu, or popularly, Mencius (372 – 289 BCE): "There is a way to gain the whole world. It is to gain the people, and having gained them one gains the whole world. There is a way to gain the people. Gain their hearts, and then you gain them." Quoted in Daniel A. Bell, Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context, Princeton, UP, 2006, page 25. In the cynicism of today, this cardinal concept has lost both its nobility and its reason, hence the appeal to legend and the mythical sage-king.
14. Refer to Chapter 1 of Prof. Charles Fried's Modern Liberty and the Limits of Government, Norton & Co., New York, 2007.
15. In a letter written on its behalf to an individual believer, dated June 5th, 1988, the House writes:"This is the age in which mankind must attain maturity, and one aspect of this is the assumption by individuals of the responsibility for deciding, with the assistance of consultation, their own course of action in areas which are left open by the law of God."
16. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", pp. 129–130
17. In a letter of the Hands of the Cause to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1958, during a particularly trying time in the history of the Formative Age, the period immediately after the sudden passing of Shoghi Effendi, which occurred in November 4th, 1957, and published in Ministry of the Custodians, Page 101
18. David S. Ruhe, in a letter to Hushmand and Shafiqeh Fatheazam, dated 7th December, 2002
19. Message of the Universal House of Justice, August 1977

20. A more comprehensive discussion is best achieved through a book written by an authentic source which best leads us to that broader understanding on common ground. For this reason, the reader is invited to acquire the indispensable study guide on the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh compiled from a week-long study course conducted by a former member of the Universal House of Justice, 'Alí Nakhjávání. The notes are transcripts of six presentations made in 2004 in Acuto, Italy. Now in its second edition, 2007, Towards World Order, contains seven chapters including a new topic on the significance of the Bahá'í Covenant. The book is available in pdf format and may be downloaded from http://bahai-library.com/nakhjavani_talks_world_order
21. The Universal House of Justice, Letter of May 27th, 1966, to an individual, published in "Wellspring of Guidance: Messages, 1963–1968", pp. 81–91.
22. This alludes to a description made by Shoghi Effendi on the Administrative Order in his New Year message of 111 B.E to the believers in Iran. He likens the dots in God's handwriting to isolated centers, letters to Bahá'í groups, words to Local Spiritual Assemblies, sentences to National Spiritual Assemblies, and the book to the Universal House of Justice.
23. A line from Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Ulysses, written in 1833.
24. Shoghi Effendi, WOB, page 34
25. Rome, the capital of empire, referred to as such by ancient poets and writers but might not Haifa, we may well ask, be that "...world metropolis [to] act as the nerve center of a world civilization..." to which Shoghi Effendi refers but does not identify? See WOB, page 204
26. Bahá'u'lláh, TOB, Page 69
27. The Universal House of Justice, The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa, Bahai World Centre, 1972, page 4.
28. The idea of perpetual meaning here is to copy that particular disposition of discovering ever higher goods. To quote Saint Gregory of Nyssa, c. 335 – c. 395: "For the desire of those who thus rise never rests in what they can already understand; but by an ever greater and greater desire, the soul keeps rising constantly to another that lies ahead, and thus it makes its way through ever higher regions towards the Transcendent."
29. An achievable state of mind best exemplified by the preeminent Bahá'í scholar Mirza Abu'l-Fada'il (1844–1914), who has been heard to comment "that when he first read the Iqan [the Book of Certitude], as a non-believer, its deep meaning remained obscure to him, but when he read it afterward as a believer it was the key that unlocked all the holy Scriptures of the past." Cited in Summon Up Remembrance, by Marzieh Gail, page 113.
30. Shoghi Effendi, WOB, Page 90.
31. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of the Holy Mariner, line 103

Part Three

Appendices

House Member Composition
Letter of the House of Justice
Acknowledgements

House Member Composition

Year	Election	New	Observations	
			INCOMING	OUTGOING
2013	■	2	Rouhani, Malitonga	Arbab, Barnes
2010	□	2	Birkland, Hall	Dunbar, Khan
2008	■	2	Correa, Rezavi	Grossman, Mitchell
2005	□	2	Lample, Mohajir	Semple ◆, Martin
*2003	■	2	Grossman, Javaheri	Fatheazam, Nakhjavani ▾
2000	□	1	Barnes	Taherzadeh ✚
1998	■	0	Membership Unchanged	
1993	■	2	Arbab, Martin	Chance, Ruhe
1988	■	2	Taherzadeh, Dunbar	Hoffman, Kavelin
1987	□	1	Khan	Wolcott ✚
1983	■	0	Membership Unchanged	
1982	□	1	Mitchell	Gibson ✚
1978	■	0	Membership Unchanged	
1973	■	0	Membership Unchanged	
1968	■	1	Ruhe	Hakim ◓
1963	■	9		
Total	16	27		

■ Election

□ By-election

* No international convention took place. Mailed ballots only, owing to "...a high state of alert in the country." letter HF 4.04.03 to author

✚ Died while surving

◓ Oldest member elected (at 75)

▾ Oldest member to retire (at 84)

◆ Longest serving memeber

#	YEARS	Origin			NAME
		IRANIAN	AMERICAN	OTHER	
1	42			British	Ian C. Semple ▼
2	40	●			Alí Nakhjavání ▼
3	40	●			Hushmand Fatheazam ▼
4	30		●		Hugh Chance ▼
5	26			Jamaican	Glenford Mitchell
6	25			British	David Hofman ▼
7	25			Russian	Borrah Kavelin ▼
8	25		●		David S. Ruhe
9	24		●		Charles Wolcott ▼
10	23			Indian	Peter Khan
11	22		●		Hooper C. Dunbar
12	20	●			Farzam Arbab
13	19		●		Amoz Gibson ▼
14	13		●		Kiser Barnes
15	12	●			Adib Taherzadeh
16	12			Canadian	Douglas Martin
17	10	●			Firaydoun Javaheri ▲
18	8		●		Paul Lample ▲
19	8	●			Payman Mohajer ▲
20	5	●			Lutfu'lláh Hakím ▼
21	5			German	Hartmut Grossman
22	5			Columbian	Gustavo Correa ▲
23	5	●			Shahriar Razavi ▲
24	3		●		Stephan Birkland ▲
25	3			Australian	Stephan Hall ▲
26	0			Zambian	Chuungu Malitonga ▲
27	0	●			Ayman Rouhani ▲
	AVG= 13 YRS	9	8	10	

▼ First Elected Body

▲ Current Member (2015)

Letter of the House of Justice

Discussion of the Bahá'í Concept of Infallibility
Extract from a Letter Written on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice

In general, the House of Justice wishes to preserve the widest possible latitude for the friends to explore the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to share their individual understanding of the Teachings. Yet it must be remembered that, with regard to deductions drawn from the Texts, the Master clearly states:

> ...the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá'í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.

The Universal House of Justice does not intend at this time to elaborate further on previous explanations given of its duties and powers. That the House of Justice itself does not find it necessary to do so should alert the friends as to the unwisdom of their attempting to define so precisely its sphere of action. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that, while there are explicit passages in the authoritative texts that make reference to the infallibility of the House of Justice in the enactment of legislation, the argument that it is free from error only in this respect is untenable. Surely, the many emphatic statements found in the Writings, such as the following excerpt from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, should suffice to dismiss any claims of this kind:

> The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God....

Apart from the question of infallibility, there is the matter of authority. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states: "It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian's authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgement. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism." In regard to the Universal House of Justice, the same understanding applies.

Infallibility is a profound spiritual concept inherent in the Bahá'í Writings. In meditating upon the relevant passages, the believers will naturally reach their own understanding of the subject. Individual opinions, however,

should not be imposed on others, nor so promoted as to crystallize into doctrines not found in the explicit Text. When exchanging views about

the Universal House of Justice—the body to which all things must be referred—the friends should exercise care lest they go to extremes, by either diminishing its station or assigning to it

exaggerated attributes. What better admonition to heed in a matter of this nature than that given by the beloved Master, when some believers fell into disagreement about His own station:

> These discussions will yield no result or benefit: we must set all such debates and controversies entirely aside—nay, we must consign them to oblivion and arise to accomplish that which is enjoined and required in this Day. These debates are mere words bereft of inner meaning; they are mere illusions and not reality.
>
> That which is true and real is this: that we become united and agreed in our purpose and arise to flood this darksome world with light, to banish enmity and foreignness from among the children of men, to perfume and revive the world

with the sanctified breezes of the character and conduct of the Abhá Beauty, to cast the light of divine guidance upon East and West, to raise the tabernacle of the love of God and gather all people under its sheltering shadow, to confer peace and composure upon every soul beneath the shade of the blessed Tree, to show forth such love as to astonish the enemy, to turn ravenous and bloodthirsty wolves into the gazelles of the meadows of the love of God, to cause the oppressor to taste the sweet savour of meekness, to teach them that kill the submission and acquiescence of those that suffer themselves to be killed, to spread abroad the verses of the one true God, to extol the virtues and perfections of the all-glorious Lord, to raise to the

highest heaven the cry of "O Thou the Glory of Glories!", and to cause the call of "The earth will shine with the light of her Lord!"[1] to reach the ears of the denizens of His Kingdom.

The House of Justice appeals to the friends not to become embroiled in the kind of fruitless theological discussions that caused conflict and contention in past dispensations, lest they lose sight of their responsibility to promulgate the oneness of humanity and of the role of the Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh in uniting minds, hearts, and souls.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice dated 7 April 2008)

NOTES

1. Qur'án 39:69.

Acknowledgements

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