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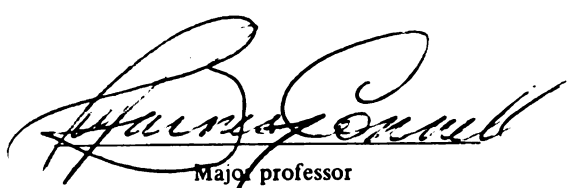


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Ronald James Whitmore, Jr.

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TRANSFORMING DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE
AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP:
A SYSTEMIC EXPLORATION OF SPIRITUALLY-INSPIRED
DEVELOPMENT IN THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

VOLUME I

By

Ronald James Whitmore, Jr.

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMING DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: A SYSTEMIC EXPLORATION OF SPIRITUALLY-INSPIRED DEVELOPMENT IN THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

By

Ronald James Whitmore, Jr.

One way in which to abate environmental degradation may be to transform human behavior. But the systemic nature and spiritual dimensions of that process of transformation are poorly understood. The objective of this study, therefore, is to explore the role of spirituality in the systemic transformation of individuals and communities into better environmental stewards who practice more sustainable development. Using systems concepts and theological data, a model is developed of one example of this process of transformation as delineated in the writings of the Bahá'í Faith. This model is then compared to similar models to develop a more comprehensive framework for understanding the spiritually-inspired transformation of environmental stewardship and development practice.

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1998

To my mother, my father, and Sasha
for their love, guidance, and support

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Ultimately, I could never have finished this study without the love and assistance of our Creator, who, through its Manifestation for this age, Bahá'u'lláh, inspired me to embark on this exploration and supplied me with the endurance to complete it.

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INTRODUCTION

This study is a preliminary effort at filling two gaps in human understanding. The first gap could be called the ‘process’ gap. Most research focuses on ‘what is’; that is, it attempts to empirically explain or describe the world in order to better understand it. Likewise, in response to ‘what is’, visionaries often articulate their hopes for ‘what could be’, or improved versions of ‘what is’. This study is premised on the assumption that both the ‘what is’ and the ‘what could be’ are already well articulated but that the ‘process’ by which people can move from ‘what is’ to ‘what could be’ is less well understood.

The second gap could be called the ‘spirituality’ gap. Most research focuses on material reality to the complete exclusion of all things spiritual. The assumption in this study is that ‘what is’, ‘what could be’, and the ‘process’ that connects them can all be better understood by accounting for their spiritual dimensions. The objective of this study is to begin filling these two gaps by exploring a process of spiritually-inspired change through which individuals and communities

become better environmental stewards who practice more sustainable development.

This study examines *spiritually-inspired resource development* as one example of that process. But what is ‘resource’ development? Most generally, it is resources being developed by people **. More specifically, it is a system, a complex whole with interrelated, interacting, and interdependent components. These components include tangibles, such as human and nonhuman (i.e., natural) resources (which together comprise nature); intangibles, like attitudes, world views, and theories ***; and the linkages between them, like behavior and practice, which connect people’s attitudes, world views,

*The term ‘resource’ is used despite the anthropocentric utilitarian connotations that it may have for some people.

**Again, the author recognizes that this entire discussion of resource development is anthropocentric in orientation. Whereas one of his major assumptions is that the thoughts and actions of people are the root of the environmental crisis, he feels that such an orientation is justified.

***Attitude (a state of mind or feeling), world view (a framework of belief about the world and one’s relationship with it), and theory (knowledge, abstract thinking, or a set of assumptions) are used synonymously throughout the study to refer to the cognitive or affective components of resource development.

and theories with natural resources and other people. Moreover, resource development is a dynamic system or process, and this dynamism is captured in the word ‘development’, which is used in this context to mean ‘qualitative improvement’ of both human and natural resources. In short, **resource development is the dynamic, systemic interaction between natural resources and human theory and practice**; it is the process that connects ‘what is’ with ‘what *will* be’ in the context of environmental stewardship and development practice. Resource development that is spiritually-inspired has the added dimension of being infused with spirit — animating force(s) distinct from, yet interacting with, material and intellectual existence. In other words, it is resource development that includes spiritual components, such as faith and love and their linkages throughout the rest of the system. Spiritually-inspired resource development is therefore ***the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice***. Resource development and its spiritually-inspired rendition are explained in more detail in Chapter 1.

The model of spiritually-inspired resource development considered in this study is developed using the literature of the Bahá'í Faith. A major assumption of this study is that a *religion*, like the Bahá'í Faith, is essentially spiritual in origin and nature and can therefore be used to develop a model of spiritually-inspired resource development. It is useful to explore resource development in the Bahá'í Faith, in particular, because 1) a central teaching of the Faith is the transformative power of spirituality, 2) sustainable development and environmental stewardship are explicit goals of the Faith, 3) both have been explored in depth by Bahá'í scholars, and 4) the Faith lends itself to scholarly study. It should be made clear from the start, however, that this study is primarily an exploration of spiritually-inspired resource development, not of the Bahá'í Faith. The author proposes that insights into spiritually-inspired resource development can best be gained by comparing one model of it with related literature, as is done in the penultimate chapter of the study.

A second important caveat worth mentioning is that resource development is a predominantly subjective process, and its impacts are

therefore not always positive for those involved with or affected by it; what is 'qualitative improvement' for some may not be for others. In other words, the 'what *will* be' is not always the 'what *could* be' for everybody. It is therefore useful to distinguish *sustainable* resource development from unsustainable resource development. Sustainable resource development is conducted on equal and just terms and does not threaten ecological stability or compromise the development of present and future generations. Because the objective of this study is to explore processes of spiritually-inspired change through which individuals and communities become *better* environmental stewards who practice *more sustainable* development, the study focuses on a model of spiritually-inspired resource development whose explicit goal is positive, sustainable change (i.e., 'what *could* be').

What follows in Chapter 1, the 'Problem Analysis', is further clarification of the rationale behind such an undertaking. Given the study's unconventional nature, it is useful to be explicit about the assumptions being made to justify it. These assumptions, each of

which builds upon those previous, are explicitly noted below. In Chapter 2, the ‘Research Design’, an appropriate research methodology for such a study is outlined. It is proposed that, because the subject of the study is a complex systemic process, it can best be understood using systems methods and tools. Similarly, because the initial model is being developed using the literature of the Bahá’í Faith, the ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations of Bahá’í scholarship are then outlined. It is proposed that a theological approach be taken in the study, using the literature of the Bahá’í canon as the source of primary data. Chapter 3 is the heart of the study in which the systemic model of spiritually-inspired resource development in the Bahá’í Faith is created. Drawing from the Bahá’í canon, the process of Bahá’í resource development is first described. Then the systemic nature of Bahá’í resource development is explored. In Chapter 4, the systemic model of Bahá’í resource development is compared to three similar models: Parker Palmer’s process of ‘knowing as we are known’, Richard Bawden et al’s systemic development, and Ken Wilber’s integral vision of evolution. In Chapter 5, the four

models are synthesized into one comprehensive framework of spiritually-inspired resource development, and supplementary observations and recommendations for future scholarship and practice are offered.

This is a very unconventional study. The investigator, therefore, has justified in detail each line of reasoning. As a result, the study is relatively lengthy. An effort was made to organize it with useful headings and subheadings so that the reader can more easily follow the arguments, and major points are highlighted in bold. The reader who is most interested in short synopses of the purpose of the study, the research design, Bahá'í resource development, and the study conclusions can turn directly to pages 46, 127, 214, and 325, respectively. Although terms are defined as they are introduced in the text, there is also a glossary on page 497 for easy reference.

CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM ANALYSIS

'What Is': The Current State of Environmental Stewardship and Development Theory and Practice

Assumption #1: Environmental degradation persists despite existing knowledge about how to steward natural resources more sustainably: There is wide recognition of the threat of global climate change, loss of biodiversity, water pollution, depletion of soil and water resources, hazardous wastes, deforestation, and other forms of worldwide ecological degradation (Miller; Brown). Many researchers and scholars go no further than to identify, describe, or decry these environmental problems. Conversely, a great deal is also known about, and more research is being done to develop, technologies or practices to more sustainably steward natural resources. A sustainable stewardship of natural resources enhances short and long term, local and global ecological stability. Nevertheless, as was made clear at the 1997 Rio+5 conference, current scientific, technical, economic, and political approaches to addressing environmental threats have produced only limited successes.

Assumption #2: Environmental stewardship and development practice are inextricably linked, so one root of environmental degradation is unsustainable development: Some have argued that the **roots of environmental degradation are in the modernization paradigm of development that is founded on the premise that development is equivalent to linear economic growth** (Braidotti et al; Daly and Cobb; Merchant). In this discussion, ‘paradigm’ and ‘world view’ are used to refer to the framework of beliefs through which individuals and cultures understand the world and their relationship with it. In other words, world views and paradigms are expressions or functions of both ontological and epistemological assumptions. ‘Paradigm’ is used when discussing societal or cultural perspectives, while ‘world view’ refers to the perspectives of individuals (Kuhn, 23; Kuhn and Pirages and Ehrlich, in Engel, 8; Clark, 17; Coufal, 23; Bawden 1996). The assumption underlying this perspective is that paradigms and world views are important because they are the foundation for ethical, economic, scientific, and environmental decision-making and action (Coufal, 9).

The modernization paradigm of development is grounded in two products of Western Enlightenment thought: 1) neoclassical capitalist economics and 2) positivist science, with the former being driven by technologies produced by the latter (Braidotti et al; Capra 1982; Merchant). The basic assumptions of neoclassical economics include: private ownership of the means of production, including labor, land, and capital; individuals rationally pursue their self-interest; self-interest is equivalent to private gain; pursuit of self-interest provides the motive force for the market; scarce resources are allocated most efficiently by responding to aggregate demand; and competition over resources serves the public welfare (Daly and Cobb). Positivist science, in turn, provides the technologies for increasingly more efficient use of resources. Ontologically, it assumes a universal, knowable, decontextualized, material reality, and epistemologically, it assumes that this reality can be discovered through value-free, dualistic, objective reductionism.

From this perspective, the modernization paradigm has profoundly influenced the way in which people understand and

practice development. Development, in this paradigm, is defined as economic growth, and the industrialized countries, after having adopted this paradigm themselves, have been exporting it to less industrialized countries since the end of World War II. It is assumed that as aggregated material standards of living increase, the lives of individuals and communities improve. Therefore, a significant percentage of development thought, planning, and money is invested in ways to raise income, and this usually requires exploiting natural resources. In short, the goal of modernization development is elevated incomes, irrespective of negative impacts on the environment.

Granted, modernization development has resulted in many tangible benefits, particularly for the minority of the world's population who occupy the middle and upper classes. However, critics argue that this paradigm of development is unsustainable (Daly; Daly and Cobb; Engel and Engel et al; Goulet 1992). They challenge the paradigm's ontological and epistemological assumptions by suggesting that capitalism and positivist science have elevated individualism, consumption, and competition as well as dualistic, mechanistic, and

hierarchical thinking to the rank of virtues and have made the extraction of non-renewable natural resources, the production of disease-causing pollution, the extinction of species, and human exploitation necessary and acceptable externalities of 'progress'. Without even considering the social and cultural impacts of modernization development*, it is clear that the Earth cannot sustain limitless economic growth founded on the consumption of largely non-renewable natural resources. Ironically, even the Brundtland Commission's report, *Our Common Future*, which includes a commonly-quoted definition of sustainable development, suggests that it is possible for "economic growth and environmental protection [to] go hand-in-hand around the world" (in Engel, 1). Critics reject these approaches as essentially camouflage for maintaining the status quo mode of development that created the crisis to begin with.

From that perspective, development may be better defined in

*There exists a large literature on the economic, social, political, and cultural injustices associated the modernization paradigm of development, including but not limited to the works of Denis Goulet, Robert Chambers, Rosi Braidotti et al, Carolyn Merchant, David Korten, and Jan Knippers Black.

terms other than economic growth, like the evolutionary, qualitative improvement of any and all aspects of life (Goulet 1992, 467, 469; Engel, 10; Bawden 1996). Likewise, the term ‘developmentalism’ (as used by Escobar) can be used to better describe professional development practice, or the what is commonly referred to as ‘international development’, ‘urban development’, or ‘rural development’ — the business of promoting economic, commercial, and other forms of development programs, projects, interventions, etc. Developmentalism is distinct from development, which is an organic (in the sense of being analogous to the development of a living organism) process of improvement. Sustainable development then becomes participatory paths to human progress that equitably meet the holistic, long term aspirations of the present generation without either compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs or threatening short and long term, local and global ecological stability.

In sum, ‘what is’ is worldwide ecological degradation fueled by unsustainable developmentalism.

'What could be': Alternative Developmental-Environmental Theories

Assumption #3: There exist alternative paradigms and world views of environmental stewardship and developmentalism: Following the above critique, many eco-philosophers, environmental ethicists, social ecologists, ecofeminists, post-modernists, and systems thinkers have called for a developmental and environmental paradigm shift (Engel and Engel et al; Daly and Cobb; Capra 1996; Naess; Berry; Tucker and Grim et al; Milbraith). Laszlo suggests that efforts should focus on changes inside of people rather than external, symptomatic problems:

The critical but as yet generally unrecognized issue confronting mankind is that its truly decisive limits are inner, not outer. They are not physical limits due to the finiteness or vulnerability of this world, but psychological, cultural and political limits inner to people and societies, manifested by individual and collective mismanagement, irresponsibility and myopia. They eventuate in scores of other world problems. . . .

There are hardly any world problems that cannot be traced to human agency and which could not be overcome by appropriate changes in human behaviour. The root causes even of physical and ecological problems are the inner constraints of our vision and values. We suffer from a serious case of 'culture lag'. We cast about for innovative

ways to satisfy obsolete values. We manage individual crises while heading towards collective catastrophes. We contemplate changing almost anything on this earth but ourselves (Laszlo *Inner Limits*, 3).

Sterling likewise argues that “The most pressing need is for the emergence, clarification, and adoption of a new ecological world view that can create a sustainable culture capable of treating the Earth with gentleness and respect. As Gregory Bateson wrote, ‘the world partly becomes — comes to be — how it is imagined’” (Sterling 1990, 77). Sterling and Laszlo’s views are shared in a general sense by a wide variety of scholars who question the ontological and epistemological foundations of the modernization paradigm of development. Rather than a more functional incremental approach, the basic argument here is for structural change, which is based on the assumption that if paradigms and world views change, behaviors and practice will follow suit.

Some have outlined the elements of ‘what could be’, or ecological world views or paradigms that could inspire more sustainable environmental stewardship and developmentalism. The three most

popular world views are *deep ecology*, *social ecology*, and *ecofeminism* (Braidotti et al; Capra 1996). Many others, including Wendall Berry and Henryk Skolimowski, have articulated elements of alternative, ecological world views. Milbraith's comparison of the 'New Environmental Paradigm' with the 'Dominant Social Paradigm' is representative of the way in which these ecological world views depart from the modernization paradigm (Figure 1).

Resource Development as the 'Process': Transforming Developmental-Environmental Theory and Practice

But the problem of how to get from 'what is' to 'what could be' remains. What does the 'process' of getting from a state of worldwide ecological degradation fueled by unsustainable developmentalism to a different state characterized by an ecological paradigm that could inspire more sustainable environmental stewardship and developmentalism look like? In other words, how can humans become better stewards of the world's natural resources? This section outlines efforts made to answer those questions.

Contrasts between Competing Paradigms	
New Environmental Paradigm	Dominant Social Paradigm
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High valuation on nature <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. nature for its own sake—worshipful love of nature b. wholistic—relationship between humans and nature c. environmental protection over economic growth 2. Generalized compassion toward <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. other species b. other peoples c. other generations 3. Careful plans and actions to avoid risk <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. science and technology not always good b. halt to further development of nuclear power c. development and use of soft technology d. government regulation to protect nature and humans 4. Limits to growth <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. resource shortages b. increased needs of an exploding population c. conservation 5. Completely new society <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. serious damage by humans to nature and themselves b. openness and participation c. emphasis on public goods d. cooperation e. simple lifestyles f. emphasis on worker satisfaction 6. New politics <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. consultation and participation b. emphasis on foresight and planning c. willingness to use direct action d. new party structure along a new axis 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lower valuation on nature <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. use of nature to produce goods b. human domination of nature c. economic growth over environmental protection 2. Compassion only for those near and dear <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. exploitation of other species for human needs b. lack of concern for other people c. concern for this generation only 3. Risk acceptable in order to maximize wealth <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. science and technology a great boon to humans b. swift development of nuclear power c. emphasis on hard technology d. deemphasis on regulation—use of the market—individual responsibility for risk 4. No limits to growth <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. no resource shortages b. no problem with population c. production and consumption 5. Present society okay <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. no serious damage to nature by humans b. hierarchy and efficiency c. emphasis on market d. competition e. complex and fast lifestyles f. emphasis on jobs for economic needs 6. Old politics <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. determination by experts b. emphasis on market control c. opposition to direct action—use of normal channels d. left-right party axis—argument over ownership of means of production

Figure 1: Contrasts between the modernization paradigm and an alternative ecological paradigm (Milbraith, 119).

Assumption #4: Processes of change in world views and behavior are commonly explored, but rarely systemically: Some have suggested how or why world view and paradigm shifts occur or have explored the different factors that may influence the evolution, modification, and adoption of world views and the practices they inspire. Kuhn suggests that scientific revolutions are non-cumulative developmental episodes in which an older paradigm is replaced in whole or in part by an incompatible one (Kuhn, 1). Students of adult learning explore the role of learning in attitudinal and behavioral change. Those in the field of community development and leadership examine similar dynamics within communities and organizations. Senge, for instance, employs the term 'metanoia' to describe fundamental shifts, changes, or movements of mind. Similarly, the field of 'soft systemics' is an exploration of how new ontologies, epistemologies, and systems of shared values emerge from dynamic, collaborative, 'epistemic cognition'. Given the transdisciplinary nature of the transformation process, scholars from many different fields have addressed it. For example, philosopher Warwick Fox, psychologist

Theodore Roszak, biologist Mary Clark, and many others explore the different dimensions of environmental and developmental world view shifts.

Gaps in the Understanding of Resource Development

Few, however, think about these processes holistically or systemically within the context of the environment and development. Some focus on the integration of theory and practice, the interplay between ontology, epistemology, and methodology, or what Argyris calls 'action science': "an inquiry into how human beings design and implement action in relation to one another. Hence, it is a science of practice . . ." (Argyris, 1). Others refer to this integration as 'praxis', a productive, free, and creative activity that integrates theory and practice (Goulet, Marković, Crocker, and Omo-Fadaka, in Engel, 11). Schön calls this 'reflection-in-action' (Schön, 30). Those who prefer to blur the lines between scholarship and practice are sometimes called 'scholar-practitioners'. From their point of view, in contrast to the perspective of those who suggest that a change in world view

automatically implies a change in behavior (see Engel and Engel et al; Daly and Cobb; Capra 1996; Naess; Berry; Tucker and Grim et al; Milbraith; Sterling 1990), world views (theory) and behavior (practice) are mutually-reinforcing. That is, there exists a dynamic interplay between the two as both are simultaneously transformed. Therefore, if **the concern is to mitigate environmental degradation, the answer may not lie so much in the shifting of world views as it does within the dynamics of action science, praxis, and reflection-in-action.** In other words, it makes little sense to call for paradigm shifts without first understanding the nature of the world view-behavior, theory-practice interplay.

Others focus on the interaction among people, their development activities, and the environment. As is demonstrated above in the discussion of 'what is', developmentalism and the environment are tightly integrated (see Sachs). Regardless of how much people may venerate the Earth, natural resources must be developed for humans to eat, build shelter, clothe themselves, and otherwise live productive lives.

If one were to synthesize these two areas of study — the integration of theory and practice at the convergence of the environment and developmentalism — and to think of the product as a systemic ‘process’, it could be called ‘resource development’.

Resource development is an appropriate label for this process because its human, natural, and other resources are engaged in the process of their mutual, interactive development. For this discussion, ***resource development is used to refer to the dynamic, systemic interaction between natural resources and human theory and practice.*** It is important to note that resource development is not being used here to refer to an alternative process of change reserved for use or study by scholars, practitioners, and ‘experts’. Rather, it is simply a label used to simplify the discussion that follows, a name for a ‘process’ of transformation connecting the ‘what is’ with ‘what will be’ in which everybody is regularly engaged. The change or transformation can be positive or negative and may often be both depending on one’s perspective. Sustainable resource development is the process toward ‘what could be’ by engaging humans and the environment on equal

and just terms and not threatening ecological stability or compromising the development of present and future generations. The modernization paradigm of developmentalism outlined above, in contrast, fuels *unsustainable* resource development.

Despite the universality of resource development, it is not commonly studied as a whole, systemic process. As noted above, much is understood about ‘what is’ and ‘what could be’ — a considerable amount is known about ecology and techniques for how to more sustainably steward natural resources, and theoretical models of more sustainable environmental-developmental paradigms and world views have been articulated. But much more needs to be learned about the ‘process’ connecting ‘what is’ and ‘what could be’ that has been labeled sustainable ‘resource development’. Questions about the dynamic, systemic nature of the relationship between theory and practice and between world views and behavior need to be addressed in the context of the interaction among people, their development activities, and the environment.

Several scholar-practitioners have identified the need to address

these questions. Engel and Engel et al began to explore the dynamics of resource development, but Engel also concluded that much more work needs to be done:

. . . ecofeminist ethics must be integrated with ecophilosophy; the leaders of the various religions of the world must continue their dialogue with one another and with more secular points of view; environmental ethicists and development ethicists must expand the dialogue that is now just beginning between them; professional ethicists must find new ways to collaborate with their peers in the fields of environment, development and resource management; and serious collaboration must begin between ethicists and educators, artists, writers and other creators and bearers of human culture (Engel, 19).

Kothari suggests that “There is a vast area of research and development that lies ahead in this field” (Kothari, 34-35). In short, while some isolated elements and relationships of resource development have been examined, more must be done to explore its systemic characteristics.

Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development

Spiritualizing Environmental Stewardship and Developmentalism

Assumption #5: People are inherently spiritual, so spirituality is an important dimension of resource development: Scholar-practitioners have suggested that an important dimension of ‘what is’, ‘what will be’, and ‘what could be’ is *spiritual* (Berry; Engel and Engel et al; Tucker and Grim et al; Rockefeller and Elder et al; Daly and Cobb). For example, Schumacher identifies the aspiritual nature of modernization development (i.e., ‘what is’) as a problem: “[T]here is the immediate question of whether modernization, as currently practiced without regard to religious and spiritual values, is actually producing agreeable results. As far as the masses are concerned, the results appear to be disastrous . . .” (Schumacher, 180). Roszak does the same for ‘what will be’: “It’s not that our technological achievements are all worthless. . . .It is rather that they are *meaningless* in the absence of a transcendent correspondence. They leave ungratified that dimension of the self which reaches out into the world for enduring purpose, undying value” (Roszak, 348).

Others express their hope for the role spirituality can play in creating 'what could be'. Some twenty-five years ago, when finishing work on *Limits to Growth*, Jorgen Randers concluded: "Probably only religion has the moral force to bring about [the necessary] change" (Rasmussen, 175). The Universal Code of Environmental Conduct of the Declaration of the NGO/Media Symposium on Communication for Environment, which took place in Thailand in 1990, also states:

The world is in a deep environmental crisis. This crisis is rooted in global patterns of human behaviour that are ecologically unsustainable, socially alienating and economically unjust. We need a *transformation of human purpose that unites material and spiritual realities* and creates a common conscience which restores and nurtures a world of balance and harmony, peace and justice, caring through community trusteeship, stewardship and accountability for now and future generations (in Lalonde *Geographical*, 5) (emphasis added).

Korten is less subtle:

Now, spiritually impoverished and on the brink of destroying the natural and social fabric on which human life and civilisation depend, we face a fatal choice. Forsake the ways of greed and violence. Acknowledge and nurture our capacities for love and compassion. Or perish forever from this earth as a failed evolutionary experiment (Korten 1997, 46).

Interestingly, even those whose lives are testaments to the influence of the modernization paradigm of developmentalism agree. In “An Open Letter to the Religious Community”, thirty-four internationally renowned scientists led by Carl Sagan and Hans Bethe wrote that “Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred” (Rasmussen, 175).

Proponents of these perspectives argue that developmentalism failures and environmental degradation are rooted in a spiritual failure; that the human will is in bondage to the forces of greed, desire, and selfishness; that cravings for power and pleasure are the motivating powers behind the dominant materialistic world view; that new ethics, world views, or moral resolve are not enough* ; **that a change in the human will is necessary; that this can only be accomplished with the help of spiritual discipline, grounded in faith, that restores the proper relationship of humans to the ‘ground of being’; and that for**

*“The knowledge upon which a global environmental ethic might be founded already exists. Ideas regarding the interdependent relationship between human beings and the rest of creation can be found in numerous cultures around the world. We do not need to devise new or ‘radical’ formulas” (Lalonde *Geographical*, 4).

many people, spiritual beliefs are guideposts for living that both ward off despair and provide an alternative to flawed secular guideposts (Engel, 12; Gottlieb, 11). Others, from a slightly different perspective, suggest that, although actions, ideas, values, beliefs, world views, and cosmologies are all interrelated and interdependent, far too little attention is given to cosmologies — people’s fundamental beliefs about the nature of life (Sterling 1998). If viewed hierarchically, cosmologies are the core, the foundation of people’s thought and behavior; they are ‘deeper’ than world views and paradigms. And because cosmology is the realm of the spirit, spirituality is an integral dimension of resource development.

This is not to ignore, however, the fact that spiritual and religious beliefs have contributed to many of the world’s environmental problems. White’s classic essay implicates the Judeo-Christian tradition as one of the pillars of the modernization paradigm of developmentalism and therefore one of the roots of environmental problems (White, L., 184). Others have since suggested that environmental apathy or abuse can be linked to religious beliefs (Guth

et al; Greeley); commonly heard fatalistic calls to denial and inaction like “God won’t let it happen” or “It must be God’s will” support this view. Without ignoring these perspectives, those who argue for strengthening the role of spirituality in resource development choose to highlight traditions that undergird positive environmental and developmental world views and their translation into behavior and practice (Engel, 13). Responding, in part, to the criticisms noted above, many religious organizations and movements have publicly supported spiritually-inspired alternatives to unsustainable developmentalism (Engel, 4; Gottlieb; Rockefeller and Elder, 10-11).

A dialogue about the spiritual dimensions of ‘what is’, ‘what could be’, and resource development is taking place in the scholarly and popular press, at conferences, and on web pages. For example, *Resurgence* is a thirty-year-old periodical that publishes articles “promoting creativity, ecology, spirituality and frugality” and advocating “science with a soul” (<http://www.gn.apc.org/resurgence/>). Another periodical, *Earthlight*, recognizes that “The root of this environmental crisis is a spiritual crisis” and “explores the relationship

of nature and religion, science and the sacred, cosmology and community to the end of grounding and empowering its readers” (<http://www.earthlight.org>). In 1997, the first issue of an academic journal, *World views: Environment, Culture, Religion*, was published to “explore the environmental understandings, perceptions and practices of a wide range of different cultures and religious traditions” (<http://www.cep.unt.edu/wview.html>). *Development and World Development*, two popular scholarly journals in the field of developmentalism, devoted entire issues to the connections between religion and development in 1980. There are also conferences like *EarthVision* held “on ways of integrating and deepening environmental and religious witness . . . , for the earth is an essential component of . . . religious faith” (<http://www.earthlight.org/earthvision.html>). Many other examples can be found.

Of particular interest are the meetings and conferences that have been sponsored by the World Bank and the United Nations. In February 1998, the World Bank co-hosted a dialogue on “World Faiths and Development” (<http://worldbank.org/html/extdr/faithsdialogue/>),

during which avenues for communication and collaboration between organized religions and the World Bank were explored. The Bank also co-sponsored (with the World Bank Spiritual Unfoldment Society) a conference in 1995 entitled “Ethics and Spiritual Values: Promoting Environmentally Sustainable Development”. Similarly, in preparation for the 1995 World Summit on Social Development, the Secretariat of the United Nations sponsored a seminar on the “Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions of Social Progress”.

There are also many examples worldwide of spiritually-centered families, societies, communities, and organizations exploring the spiritual dimensions of resource development and ‘what could be’. A few examples include: Amish communities; traditional Native American cultures; spiritual communities like Claymont in West Virginia; and the cultures described in Croll and Parkin’s anthology. Some spiritually-inspired conservation projects also exist (Sullivan, 568-70; Daneel, 572ff). Others have created new practices (meditations, prayers, worship services) and organizations in response to environmental degradation (Gottlieb, 10, 448ff). Still others

actively work for change through political action and activism
(Gottlieb, 514ff).

The Theory of Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development

Assumption #6: One dimension of processes of change can be spiritual, and religions are spiritual in origin and nature: For this discussion, ‘spiritual’ is broadly defined as “of, relating to, consisting of, or having the nature of spirit” — animating force(s) distinct from, yet interacting with, material and intellectual existence (Webster). Similarly, religion is defined broadly as “those systems of belief, ritual, institutional life, spiritual aspiration, and ethical orientation which are premised on an understanding of human beings as other or more than simply their purely social or physical identities” (Gottlieb, 8). It is assumed for this study that religions are spiritual in origin and nature. Examples of spirituality therefore include traditional, organized religions, indigenous beliefs, practices, and traditions, and other forms of experiencing and interpreting transcendence involving meditation, prayer, martial arts, dance, music, and the like. Spirituality can

therefore be understood as another way of knowing or form of intelligence as discussed by Gardner, Goleman, Palmer, and Bawden; as a nonmaterial way of being as outlined by Vaill; or as one dimension of ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies.

Clearly, one's world view is a function not only of social, cultural, and environmental but also spiritual influences and experiences. Spirituality strongly influences behavior, so it is a vital force, a resource that complements human and nonhuman natural resources. A critical aspect of resource development, therefore, can be spiritual. If resource development is defined as "the dynamic, systemic interaction between natural resources and human theory and practice," then *spiritually-inspired resource development* becomes *the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice*. Spiritually-inspired resource development, as a more comprehensive example of sustainable resource development, is the topic of this study.

Few scholar-practitioners have begun examining spirituality's role in influencing paradigms, world views, and behavior, including

ecological world views and the developmentalism they inspire.

Mirroring the arguments of eco-philosophers, environmental ethicists, social ecologists, and ecofeminists, Nasr frames the challenge in terms of the need for a paradigm shift that would “make available a world view where religious understanding of the order of nature in the traditional sense would be accepted as authentic along with sciences based on particular dimensions of nature, such as the quantitative, all within a metaphysical whole . . .” (Nasr, 273). A number of such spiritually-inspired ecological world views (i.e., ‘what could be’) have been articulated (Engel and Engel et al; Gottlieb et al; Kinsley; Rockefeller and Elder et al). These generally either reinterpret old traditions, extend more familiar religious beliefs, or synthesize elements of different traditions into ecological world views (Gottlieb, 10). Typically, what is described is the “dream” or vision of what might be, while the assumption is made that the process of change is already known and that people can be “enchanted” into changing their behavior (Carroll, 5).

Others, who are less willing to assume that the process of change

is well understood, have explicitly called for strengthening the role of spirituality and religion in the 'process' of resource development (Gottlieb, 183). Some draw on the community development, leadership, adult learning, and systems traditions to explore spiritually-inspired resource development. In his discussion of learning as a way of being, Vaill suggests that people "are capable of seeing and feeling the spirit in virtually anything" (including nature), and the extent to which they are able to do this as part of their spiritual development partially determines their success in life (Vaill, 177-188). As an adult educator, Elias grapples with the "opposition of theory and practice" in religious education and concludes that "the integrity of both must be maintained in their integration" (Elias, 3-15). Toward that end, in *Studies in Theology and Education*, he explores the theory-practice dialectic in spiritual development. While Vaill and Elias do not specifically address environmental issues, their discussions are relevant to spiritually-inspired transformations of any kind.

Palmer suggests that education is central to processes of transformation and that conventional, objectivist education could be

improved by acknowledging spiritually-inspired epistemologies. This process begins by interacting with the world rather than passively observing it, by engaging the inner reality of teachers and students rather than just the mind and body, by creating communal learning experiences rather than rewarding individualism and competition, and by acting as participants and co-creators of the world rather than manipulators (Palmer, 34-39). This implies that, in addition to curiosity and control, compassion or love should serve as a source of knowledge (Palmer, 7-9). In other words, Palmer suggests that resource development can be improved if understood and practiced as a holistic system in which people are engaged with one another and the environment in a spiritual way. He concludes *To know as we are known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* with practical suggestions for how to do this.

Using different language and a more concrete framework, Bawden (1997) makes many of the same arguments. He models the 'inspirational learning subsystem' of an integrated critical learning system, which has "practical application as a 'road map' for the design,

maintenance, development, and evaluation of ‘learning communities’.”

Bawden suggests that resource development is essentially a learning process and that meaning, which is the prerequisite for responsible action, emerges from the systemic interaction of the inspirational (or spiritual) subsystem with an experiential subsystem.

Wilber offers perhaps the most comprehensive model of spiritually-inspired transformation (Wilber 1996). He develops what he calls the ‘integral vision’ of evolution driven by internal and external self-transcendence by both individuals and societies. He suggests that the key to evolution is holarchic emergence (which is explained in more detail below) and that Spirit is the process of evolution that manifests itself more in each emergent holon.

The Problem: Gaps in the Understanding of Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development

Again, as is the case for all resource development, the problem of how to get from ‘what is’ to ‘what could be’ remains. What does the spiritually-inspired ‘process’ of getting from a state of worldwide

ecological degradation fueled by unsustainable developmentalism to a different state characterized by an ecological paradigm that could inspire more sustainable environmental stewardship and developmentalism look like? In other words, how can spirituality facilitate the process of humans becoming better stewards of the world's natural resources? Despite how loudly people call for spiritualizing environmental stewardship and developmentalism or adopting spiritually-inspired world views, little is understood about how this can be done. A considerable amount is known about ecology and techniques for how to more sustainably steward natural resources, and secular and spiritual models of more sustainable environmental-developmental paradigms and world views have been articulated. But much more needs to be learned about the 'process' connecting 'what is' and 'what could be', one example of which has been labeled spiritually-inspired resource development. Questions about the dynamic, systemic nature of the relationship between spirit, theory, and practice and between faith, world views, and behavior need to be addressed in the context of the interaction among people, their development

activities, and the environment.

Engel suggests that an urgent task at hand is exploring “how to implement moral principles more effectively in practice [to] create the new sustainable communities of the future” (Engel, 19-20). Similarly, Rockefeller observes that “[T]he environmental crisis cannot be addressed without coming to terms with the spiritual dimension of the problem, and the spiritual problems of humanity cannot be worked out apart from a transformation of humanity’s relations with nature” (Rockefeller, 141). Gottlieb also questions how spiritual teachings and approaches relate to secular environmental philosophies and activism (Gottlieb, 10). In short, **while some isolated elements and relationships of *spiritually-inspired* resource development have been examined, much remains to be done to explore it as a systemic ‘process’.** Exploring that process in more depth and detail could benefit all scholar-practitioners interested in sustainable development. More specifically, it could help improve the scholarship and practice of individuals and communities interested in the dynamics of resource development.

Assumption #7: For an improved understanding of spiritually-
inspired resource development, it is useful to develop a theoretical
framework grounded in an established spiritual system: Several
alternative approaches could be taken to address this gap in
understanding. One possibility is to empirically study examples of the
'process', to consider a single real-world case or compare several cases
of spiritually-inspired resource development. While this would shed
light on the process, it is premature. What is needed first is the
integration of the secular and spiritual literature in relevant fields,
including environment, development, adult learning, community
development, and systems, into a more comprehensive resource
development framework. Such a theoretical framework could be
considered the 'what could be' of the 'process' that connects the 'what
is' and the 'what could be' of environmental stewardship and
developmentalism. Individual cases of spiritually-inspired resource
development could then be empirically studied in light of such a
framework. A purely theoretical framework could be developed, or
one that is based on an established system of spiritually-inspired

resource development could be outlined. The latter has the advantage of being rooted in a belief system of relevance to certain individuals and communities. Therefore, this study explores spiritually-inspired resource development using an established spiritual system, that of the Bahá'í Faith, as a case in point.

Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development in the Bahá'í Faith

It is useful to explore resource development in the Bahá'í Faith, which is simply referred to as 'Bahá'í resource development', because 1) a central teaching of the Faith is the transformative power of spirituality, 2) sustainable development and environmental stewardship are explicit goals of the Faith, 3) both have been explored in depth by Bahá'í scholars, and 4) the Faith lends itself to scholarly study. The first three of these reasons are explained in more detail in the section that immediately follows, while the fourth is addressed in Chapter 2.

The Bahá'í Faith

Assumption #8: The literature of the Bahá'í Faith is a useful resource with which to develop a model of spiritually-inspired resource development: The Bahá'í Faith, established in 235 countries and territories throughout the world, is the youngest but second most widespread of the world's independent, organized religions. Its founder, Bahá'u'lláh* (1817-1892), is regarded by Bahá'ís as the most recent in the line of Messengers of God that stretches back beyond recorded time and that includes Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ, and Muhammad. The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification into one global society. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh, "The earth is but one country, and mankind** its citizens" (*Gleanings from*

*Bahá'u'lláh translates from the Persian as 'the Glory of God'.

**It is important to note that much of the Bahá'í canon was translated when 'man' and 'mankind' were still used to refer to the entire human race, regardless of gender. One of the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith is the equality of women and men, so references to 'man' and 'mankind' in Bahá'í literature can be accepted as genderless.

the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 250).

Among the principles and measures that the Bahá'í Faith promotes as vital to the achievement of world unity are the abandonment of all forms of prejudice; the equality of women and men; the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth; the realization of universal education; the establishment of a world federation; the adoption of an international auxiliary language; the coordination of the world's economy; the adoption of a code of human rights for all peoples; the development of an integrated mechanism for global communication; and the use of a universal system of currency, weights, and measures.

Bahá'ís believe that these ideals can only be achieved through the respiritualization of humanity. For those reasons, Bahá'u'lláh instituted mechanisms and laws designed to prevent secularization and division within the Faith, the core of which was the establishment of a democratically-elected administrative order with local, national, and international components. There are no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, decisions are made by consensus, and individuals are encouraged to

investigate truth on their own, so power is decentralized, and the responsibility for the spiritual development of individual Bahá'ís and their communities lies largely in their own hands. Mostly for these reasons, there are no sects or denominations in the Bahá'í Faith, and the power of spiritual growth as an instrument of change continues to be a central teaching of the Faith.

Sustainable development and environmental stewardship are explicit goals of the Faith. Bahá'í community development institutes and schools have been established worldwide based on the premise that spiritual development can transform people's lives. Bahá'ís are actively engaged in development work, and the Bahá'í International Community (BIC), an international non-governmental organization that both encompasses and represents the worldwide membership of the Bahá'í Faith, is a member of World Wildlife Fund for Nature's Network on Conservation and Religion.

Resource Development in the Bahá'í Faith

Many elements of 'what could be' have been explored in the Bahá'í scholarly literature. Coleman outlines the relevant ecological principles for responding to the environmental crisis as well as Bahá'í principles for more sustainably stewarding the environment. Dahl outlines a framework of ecological and community values founded on the concept of global unity. Hanley suggests that agricultural development is a fundamental principle conducive to development; he outlines the Bahá'í teachings about the importance of agriculture in the development of an ecologically sustainable world order. Vick and Momen (*Development* 1988) outline the basic elements of Bahá'í development. Compilations of Bahá'í writings on "Social and Economic Development," "Conservation of the Earth's Resources," and "Nature" have also been published. The BIC has also published several related statements. In short, as is true in general, the 'what could be' of Bahá'í developmentalism and environmental stewardship has been outlined, but **no one has yet explored the 'process', i.e., Bahá'í resource development, for getting there.**

However, several Bahá'í scholars have called for more closely examining the systemic integration of theory and practice in the fields of environment and developmentalism. Bell calls for more studies that examine the “nexus between environmentally sustainable development, the ethical principles that derive from the Bahá'í scriptures, and the model of social order being developed by Bahá'í communities . . .” (Bell, 87). That call has yet to be answered. White, after outlining a Bahá'í ecological world view, concludes that “[T]he Bahá'í writings offer a vision of wholeness in our relationship to Nature and of spiritual purpose in the whole evolution of life that empowers individuals to become agents of transformation in developing an ecologically sustainable global civilization” (White, R., 71). The question: “*How* can that vision empower individuals and communities?” remains unanswered, however. Similarly, Lalonde concludes with:

One way in which many of the ideas expressed in this article could be analyzed in more depth is to examine the feasibility of this proposition: The development and environmental ethic toward which humanity is striving is based on an all-encompassing spirituality . . .; the practical

means by which global systems could be managed on a cooperative basis is based upon that ethic. This article has highlighted the first part of this proposition. . . .Examining the second part of the proposition presents a challenge, since there is not yet a substantial body of evidence upon which to base one's analysis. Through further investigation of some of the movements described earlier and their activities and communities around the world, it would be possible to determine whether such an ethic is feasible and effective. Many people in general and Bahá'ís in particular perceive a growing coalition of effort to begin creating the mechanisms for change (Lalonde *Unity*, 70).

Scholar-practitioners have yet to accept the second part of Lalonde's challenge by investigating the secular and Bahá'í literature for clues about how that ethic can be realized as a mechanism for change. In sum, these scholar-practitioners acknowledge that the gap in understanding of resource development outlined above also holds true in the case of the Bahá'í Faith and are calling for more exploration of the systemic characteristics of Bahá'í resource development.

Purpose of the Study

Environmental degradation may be mitigated with sustainable resource development. Some characteristics of resource development

have been well articulated. Others emphasize the spiritual dimension of resource development. But the dynamic, systemic nature of spiritually-inspired resource development, which integrates theory, practice, and spirituality within the context of the interaction between people and natural resources, is poorly understood. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to develop a framework for understanding spiritually-inspired resource development by modeling the systemic characteristics of resource development in one belief system, that of the Bahá'í Faith, and examining that model in light of literature in which similar processes or elements thereof are examined.

Organization of the Study

In the process, several questions are addressed by chapter as follows:

- Ch. 2: What is an appropriate research methodology for such an exploration? To answer this question, spiritually-inspired resource development is situated within the systems literature and the Bahá'í studies literature.
- Ch. 3: What are the systemic characteristics and dynamics of Bahá'í resource development? To answer this question, a theoretical model of spiritually-inspired resource

development is developed to describe Bahá'í resource development.

Ch. 4: How does this model of Bahá'í resource development compare and contrast to the literature of related fields? Specifically, how have other scholars, by examining similar models or elements thereof, explored the nature and extent of the relationship between theory, practice, and spirituality and between people and the environment, and how does their inquiry compare to the model developed for Bahá'í resource development? To answer this question, the model from Chapter 3 is considered in light of select relevant literature in related fields.

Ch. 5: What implications does the above exploration have for scholarship and practice in the field of resource development? This question is answered by developing a general framework based on the comparison in Chapter 4 for understanding spiritually-inspired resource development.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN

Tao can be talked about, but not the Eternal Tao.
Names can be named, but not the Eternal Name.

As the origin of heaven-and-earth, it is nameless:
As “the Mother” of all things, it is nameable.

So, as ever hidden, we should look at its inner essence:
As always manifest, we should look at its outer aspects.

These two flow from the same source, though differently named;
And both are called mysteries.

The Mystery of mysteries is the Door of all essence.

- Lao Tzu *Tao The Ching*

What is an appropriate research methodology for the exploration described in Chapter 1? How can one best “develop a framework for understanding spiritually-inspired resource development”, using Bahá’í resource development as a case in point? These questions can be answered by addressing four sets of more specific questions, namely:

Part I: Can systems theory and methods be used for this study?: What are systems? What are the strengths of the systems perspective? Why does the study of Bahá’í resource development lend itself to systemic exploration? Where does this study fit within the different areas of systemic thought and practice? How are systems appropriately explored? What are the characteristics of systems?

Part II: How are religious systems studied? and What is the nature of Bahá'í scholarship?: What is the difference between theology and religious studies, and which is most appropriate in this exploration? What is an appropriate theological methodology, and what are the data of theology? Is this study appropriate for a Bahá'í? What is a Bahá'í ontology? What is a Bahá'í epistemology? What is a Bahá'í methodology? What are the data of Bahá'í scholarship? What is the role of the researcher in this type of study? What was actually done? What data were collected? How?

Part III: How were the data examined?: The Problem-Focused Literature Review: What was read? Why? How was literature selected?

Part IV: What are the limitations of this design?

Part I: Can systems theory and methods be used for this study?

What are systems?

According to Bawden:

To the systems theorist, a system is an organised, coherent, whole entity, which has, or can be assumed to have,

properties which are unique to it as a whole entity. More formally stated “a system is a group of interacting components (subsystems) that conserves some identifiable set of relations with the sum of the components plus their relations (i.e., the system itself) conserving some identifiable set of relations to other entities (including other systems) (Laszlo and Laszlo, 8)” (Bawden 1997, 2).

‘System’ derives from the Greek *synhistanai* (“to place together”).

Therefore, as Capra points out, “To understand things systemically literally means to put them into a context, to establish the nature of their relationships” (Capra 1996, 27). According to Brush and Turner (1987, 27), “[T]he systems approach . . . helps identify **what** processes exist and **how** sets of interrelated components function together” (in Moore, 21-22) (emphases in original).

While systems can be useful intellectual constructs, it is important to remember that “Systems are not objective realities of Nature; they are subjectively defined by human observers” (Waelchli, 5) and that “Systems are tools of understanding devised by human minds for understanding situations. . . . They are arbitrary constructs” (Vickers, 7). Moreover, a clear distinction must be made between ‘systemic’ (i.e., holistic) and ‘systematic’ (i.e., step-by-step) thinking or

approaches.

What are the strengths of the systems perspective?

A common tendency in contemporary society is to identify a problem (i.e., one superficial dimension of ‘what is’) and then try to address it directly without giving careful consideration to its underlying roots. As a result, problems tend to persist or quickly reemerge because their underlying causes are not addressed (i.e, ‘what is’ persists and ‘what could be’ remains illusive). This is particularly true in the case of developmentalism and environmental stewardship. Measures are generally taken to address problems at a superficial level (e.g., to combat poverty, poor health and sanitation, soil erosion, pollution, etc.), but usually less is done to address the roots of those problems.

At the opposite extreme, classical reductionist approaches to science seek to “analyse complex phenomena by looking for explanations at a lower, more basic level” and then to develop, by induction, generalized hypotheses (Momen 1991, 15). Little attention is paid to the interrelationships among the basic parts of the whole

(i.e., the rest of the system). This approach works well to the extent that the subject or system in question is relatively simple, but its usefulness is indirectly correlated with the complexity of that system.

In response to the weaknesses of both superficial and reductionist approaches to investigation, many have suggested that complex processes like resource development can best be studied using systemic tools (Bohm; Clayton and Radcliffe). Korten notes that “When we limit ourselves to fragmented approaches to dealing with systemic problems, it is not surprising that our solutions prove inadequate. If our species is to survive the predicaments we have created for ourselves, we must develop a capacity for whole-systems thought and action” (Korten 1995, 11). Such a systems paradigm is grounded in a unique set of ontological and epistemological assumptions — that the nature of reality is a function of one’s perspective (i.e., a relative rather than objective ontology) and that the nature of reality is best understood as a whole (i.e., a holistic rather than reductionist epistemology). The systems paradigm, therefore, is characterized by a focus on:

- the *whole* rather than the parts;
- systems within their context or *environment* rather than in isolation;
- the interconnectedness and interrelationships of *networks* rather than linear cause-effect chains of individual objects or variables;
- *patterns* rather than details;
- structure and *process* rather than structure alone;
- *dynamic* change rather than static ‘snapshots’;
- *synthesis* rather than reductionism;
- *cyclical* rather than linear processes;
- *epistemic agency* rather than scientific objectivity; and
- *more adequate approximations* and understanding rather than scientific certainty (from Sterling 1998 drawing on the work of Capra and Benathy; Capra 1996, 36-42; Senge, 68-73).

It is important to note, however, that systemic approaches are different from but not necessarily better than other approaches, including reductionism. There is an element of truth in all perspectives; no perspective is ever ‘wrong’, and most are ‘inadequately right’ (Sterling 1998), so the dualistic replacement of reductionism (or any other approach) with systems thinking is inappropriate.

Recognizing this truth, the faculty of the Centre for Systemic Development at the University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury) developed the Hawkesbury Spiral, a hierarchy of problem-solving

strategies (Figure 2). It is a vertically arranged helix structure that ranks a variety of problem-solving approaches along the reductionism-holism continuum. The premise of the spiral is that the problem-solving approach used depends on the question asked. Starting at the top and working down the helix/continuum, one matches the question being explored with sample questions provided in the spiral (ranging from “Given this phenomenon, why is it so?” at the bottom to “Given this conflict situation, how can it be improved in an ethically defensible way?” at the top). Each question corresponds with the most useful and appropriate problem-solving strategy for addressing that question (ranging from “basic learning” at the bottom to “Critically normative heuristic” at the top). The Hawkesbury Spiral, or a similar heuristic, can be used to determine the most appropriate approach for a given situation. The important point, which is often ignored, is to consciously choose the strategy best suited for the question at hand.

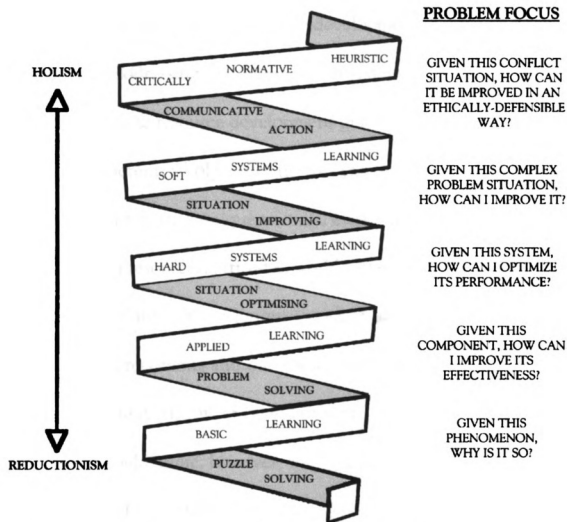


Figure 2: The Hawkesbury Spiral: A hierarchy of problem-solving strategies (adapted from a handout distributed by Roger Packam of the Center for Systemic Development during the course “Systems Thinking and Learning for Change” at Schumacher College, Devon, England, April 1998).

Why does the study of Bahá'í resource development lend itself to systemic exploration?

In this case, the question at hand is “What is the nature of the process of spiritually-inspired resource development?”. The strategy best suited to addressing that question is a systemic one because spiritually-inspired resource development qualifies as a system. It is an organized, coherent, whole entity (in this case a subjectively defined process) with properties unique to itself, interacting components (e.g., people, natural resources, attitudes, world views, behavior, faith, love, etc.), an identifiable set of relations among those components and between the components and the whole system, and relations with other systems (e.g., the ‘what is’ and the ‘what could be’).

Some would argue, however, that spiritual or religious systems are unworthy of study because of their complexity and subjectivity:

[T]he positivistic position regards religion as too hopelessly lacking in objectivity to be accessible to scientific treatment. It is true, of course, that the subject matter of religion is more complex than that of, say, physics because it includes more parameters. In the same way, biology is more complex than physics, psychology more complex than either and religion the most complex of all. In this sense, religion is indeed more “subjective” for the presence of

many parameters makes objectivity harder to obtain since the effort to make all parameters explicit is correspondingly much greater (Hatcher 1977, 35).

But neither a system's complexity nor its subjectivity should preclude it from study. As a matter of fact, as is explained above, some (emergent) properties of systems cannot even be revealed using reductionist approaches; they can only be discovered by studying the system itself, including its objective and subjective dimensions, making systems approaches are more useful in the study of complex systems (Bawden FSR/E, 8-9).

In particular, when accounting for the spiritual dimension (which is both complex and highly subjective) of human systems, it is especially useful to take a systemic approach (Momen 1991, 17). The natural alternative to reductionism in the study of spiritual or religious systems, therefore, is a more integrative, relativistic, holistic approach:

For scholars who adopt this approach, the key to the study of religion lies in understanding the phenomenon of religion in itself (i.e., at its own level and not by reduction to lower levels). The goal must be to understand the religion or the religious phenomenon in its own terms (i.e., at its own level of complexity) — to understand how men come to believe as they do and why they act as they do

(Momen 1991, 16).

Bahá'í resource development is a subsystem of the Bahá'í belief system. If religious systems are best understood systemically, then so are their subsystems. Therefore, the study of Bahá'í resource development lends itself well to systemic exploration.

Where does this study fit within the different areas of systemic thought and practice?

While there is not complete agreement among scholars, the different areas of systemic thought and practice may be distinguished as follows (please refer to the outline below): There are two major categories, (1) the development of systems thinking and (2) the application of systems thinking to explore holistic systems and processes. Within the former, a distinction can be drawn between (1.1) the theoretical development of systems thinking and (1.2) problem solving applications of systems thinking. Examples of subdisciplines concerned with the theoretical development of systems thinking include (1.1.1) cybernetics, the science of communication

and control, and (1.1.2) general systems theory (GST), which “offered a meta-methodology of holism which aspired to embrace different sciences by discovering concepts, laws and models applicable to systems of all types” (Lane and Jackson, 219). Problem solving applications of systems ideas can be subdivided into (1.2.1) ‘hard’, ‘purposive’ (i.e., externally specified) systems applications such as systems engineering that “seek to model [a] system of concern with a view to optimizing its performance in pursuit of some pre-defined goal” (Lane and Jackson, 221); (1.2.2) the use of systems ideas as decision making aids like operations research; and (1.2.3) ‘social’, ‘soft’, or ‘purposeful’ (i.e., internally generated) systems applications on weakly structured, usually human-centered problems. Soft systems applications may also be subdivided into at least (1.2.3.1) systems design; (1.2.3.2) general evolution theory; (1.2.3.3) ‘emancipatory’ systems thinking, which “deals with ways in which systems approaches can be used in coercive situations to assist less powerful groups” (Lane and Jackson, 226); and (1.2.3.4) ‘critical’ systems thinking, which is founded “on critical reflection and social awareness, on

complementarism and on ethical commitment” (Lane and Jackson, 227). This may best be understood in outline form (adapted from Checkland, 95-96 and Laszlo and Laszlo, 13):

1. The development of systems thinking
 - 1.1 Theoretical development of systems thinking
 - 1.1.1 Cybernetics
 - 1.1.2 General Systems Theory
 - 1.2 Problem-solving applications of systems thinking
 - 1.2.1 Work in ‘hard’ systems
 - 1.2.2 Aid to decision-making
 - 1.2.3 Work in ‘soft’ systems
 - 1.2.3.1 Systems design
 - 1.2.3.2 General evolution theory
 - 1.2.3.3 Emancipatory systems thinking
 - 1.2.3.4 Critical systems thinking
2. Application of systems to explore holistic systems and processes

This study falls under “2. Application of systems thinking to explore holistic systems and processes” by applying the theory of (1.1.1) cybernetics, (1.1.2) general systems theory, and other systems theory. The objective of the study is to model spiritually-inspired resource development, to apply systems thinking to the dynamics of spiritual transformation. This is distinctly different from (1.2) the more proactive, problem-solving application of systems thinking in

which prominent authors like Bawden and Checkland engage.

Providing an example of the difference between the two applications, Bawden draws a distinction between (2) “research into farming systems” (describing the nature of nature) and (1.2) “systems research into farming” (exploring the nature of knowledge) (Bawden FSR/E, 3).

This study uses the former to describe an example of the latter. In other words, this is an exploration of or investigation into a system, not the use of systemic methods in practice.

How are systems appropriately explored?

Capra provides some useful insights into how to best approach the exploration of systems:

[S]ystems cannot be understood by analysis. The properties of the parts are not intrinsic properties but can be understood only within the context of the larger whole. Thus the relationship between the parts and the whole has been reversed. In the systems approach the properties of the parts can be understood only from the organization of the whole. Accordingly, systems thinking concentrates not on basic building blocks, but on basic principles of organization. Systems thinking is “contextual,” which is the opposite of analytical thinking. Analysis means taking something apart in order to understand it; systems thinking

means putting it into the context of a larger whole (Capra 1996, 29-30).

This requires identifying the context, the whole within that context, the parts of the whole, their interrelationships, and their relationships with the whole. To embark on such an exploration, it is first necessary to understand the basic characteristics of systems, which are outlined below.

What are the characteristics of systems?

The key characteristics of any system include (following Flood and Carson, 7ff and others as cited below):

Observer: The observer and his/her subjective purpose in observing the system in question are essential aspects of any system, as is demonstrated below in the discussion of system boundaries. These were identified in the previous chapter for this exploration.

Unifying or organizing principle: This principle defines the system. It is what makes the system interesting for the observer, distinguishes it from the sum of its parts, and maintains the system's

integrity.

Emergent properties: This unifying principle is an emergent property. ‘Emergent properties’ are those characteristics of a system that are unique to the system and cannot be explained as the sum of the parts of the system. According to Laszlo and Laszlo:

Structurally, a system is a divisible whole, but functionally it is an indivisible unity with emergent properties. An emergent property is marked by the appearance of novel characteristics exhibited on the level of the whole ensemble, but not by the components in isolation.

There are two important aspects of emergent properties: first, they are lost when the system breaks down to its components — the property of life, for example, does not inhere in organs once they are removed from the body. Second, when a component is removed from the whole, that component itself will lose its emergent properties. . . .

The notion of emergent properties leads to the concept of synergy, suggesting that, as we say in everyday language, the system is more than the sum of its parts (Laszlo and Laszlo, 9).

Checkland elaborates further on emergent properties:

[T]he general model of organized complexity is that there exists a hierarchy of levels of organization, each more complex than the one below, a level being characterized by emergent properties which do not exist at a lower level. Indeed, more than the mere fact that they ‘do not exist’ at the lower level, emergent properties are *meaningless* in the language appropriate to the lower level. ‘The shape of an

apple', although the result of processes which operate at the level of the cells, organelles, and organic molecules which comprise apple trees, and although, we hope, eventually explicable in terms of those processes, *has no meaning* at the lower levels of description. The processes at those levels result in an outcome which signals the existence of a new stable level of complexity — that of the whole apple itself — which has emergent properties, one of them being the apple's shape (Checkland, 78) (emphases in original).

Comte's scientific hierarchy (math, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and sociology) is one familiar example in which new properties emerge (and complexity correspondingly increases) with each move up the hierarchy (Checkland, 61).

Two notions are worth elaborating upon at this juncture. The first is the use of 'hierarchy' in the systems literature. Unlike most other fields in which hierarchy is used to describe vertical organizational or power relationships, systemic hierarchy is usually used in the sense of horizontal 'nestedness'. This is more akin to the original use of the word by Dionysius to mean 'governing one's life by spiritual principles' (*hiero-* = sacred; *-arch* = governance or rule) (Wilber 1998, 40). If a given system is 'nested' within its environment,

and that system's subsystems are 'nested' within it, there exists a systemic hierarchy. In two-dimensional space, such a hierarchy can be depicted using a series of horizontally-arranged concentric circles, which clearly distinguishes it from vertical power hierarchies (Figure 3). Three dimensionally, 'nestedness' can be conceptualized as

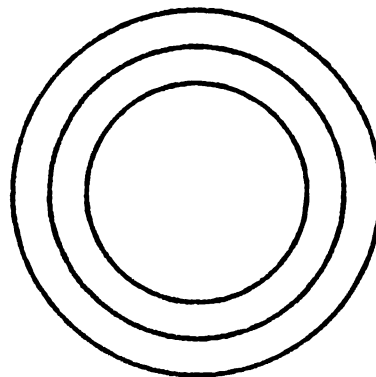


Figure 3: A two-dimensional 'nested' hierarchy

a Russian *babuschka*, with the outer figurine containing another figurine, which contains a third, and so on.

The second point requiring explication is the distinction between 'emergent properties', 'emergence', and 'evolution'. As explained above, emergent properties are those characteristics of a system that are unique to the system at the level of the whole

ensemble (like an apple's shape). An emergent property, therefore, is a *state* or level of new complexity. Evolution, on the other hand, is a dynamic *process* of change. Evolutionary processes create emergent properties. The use of 'emergence', therefore, is often confusing. It is usually used synonymously with 'evolution' in the context of the 'evolution' of new 'emergent properties'.

Boundary: A system's boundary maintains the system as a coherent whole and separates it from other systems and from its environment, or the supra-system (Bawden FSR/E, 9). Drawing boundaries while using a systems perspective may seem counter-intuitive because, after all, everything is connected. But, although everything is connected, not everything is connected equally, so boundaries can be useful tools (Sterling 1998). Boundaries are arbitrarily defined according to the level of resolution desired by the observer and are therefore heavily value-laden. Flood and Carson distinguish the 'narrower system of interest (NSOI)' from the 'wider system of interest (WSOI)' to separate the system in question from its environment (Flood and Carson, 14): "Any system exists in (or is

unique to) the eye of the beholder (be this a person or a group) and is associated with interests, as is suggested by ‘SOI’ (Flood and Carson, 8); “systems are situations as perceived by people, . . . which implies that even the most concrete situations may be seen from a variety of perspectives” (Flood and Carson, 20). Differences in magnification, for instance, can have dramatic effects on one’s perspective:

Although the systems approach tends to push the investigator toward descriptive holism, effective limits on the scope of system modeling are imposed by problems of scale. The larger the descriptive model the weaker it becomes for describing specific behavior. Finer-grained models, on the other hand, may lack the explanatory power of more general ones (Brush and Turner (1987, 27) in Moore, 21-22).

When establishing boundaries, Flood and Carson recommend that one be suspicious of recognized boundaries or apparently obvious ones (Flood and Carson, 57). Jones also suggests the following guidelines for boundary setting in social situations: 1) identify the ‘behavior of interest’ for the purposes of the study, and keep it within the system; 2) all elements in the system description whose behavior is wholly or partly under direct influence of the system’s primary actors

should be considered within the system; and 3) all feedback loops (explained below) are within the system, and only inputs and outputs that connect the system with the environment can cross boundaries (in Flood and Carson, 58-59).

Holarchy: A holarchy describes the hierarchical relationships of a system to its sub- and supra- systems (i.e., the system's internal and external linkages with the system components and the wider environment or context). Wilber popularized the term 'holarchy', which was originally developed by Koestler to represent the way in which 'holons' (the designation he uses for systems) are nested within and around one another. Koestler argues that the term 'system' inadequately describes what people refer to as systems because the system is simultaneously both a sub- and supra-system:

The members of a hierarchy, like the Roman god Janus, all have two faces looking in opposite directions: the face turned toward the subordinate levels is that of a self-contained whole; the face turned towards the apex, that of the dependent part. One is the face of the master, the other the face of the servant. This 'Janus effect' is a fundamental characteristic.

But there is no satisfactory word in our vocabulary to refer to these Janus-faced entities: to talk of sub-wholes (or

sub-assemblies, sub-structures, sub-skills, sub-systems) is awkward and tedious. It seems preferable to coin a new term to designate these nodes on the hierarchic tree which behave partly as wholes or wholly as parts, according to the way you look at them. The term I would propose is 'holon', from the Greek *holos* = whole, with the suffix *on* which, as in *proton* or *neutron*, suggests a particle or part (Koestler, 48).

In short, according to Wilber, "There are no wholes, and no parts, anywhere in the universe; there are only whole/parts", or holons (Wilber 1998, 100).

Components: The components of a system are the system's most basic elements. Important component attributes include their functions, organization, structure, and other properties.

Relative 'hardness' or 'softness' of the system: Hard systems are well structured and easy to measure and quantify, while soft systems are poorly structured, difficult to attach numbers to, and have human beings as principal components (Laszlo and Laszlo, 12; Flood and Carson, 16).

Relative 'openness' or 'closedness': In closed systems, relationships do not exist between elements of the system and

everything external to the system, while open systems exchange material, information, and energy with the environment across a boundary (Flood and Carson, 7).

Dynamics: The dynamics of a system are its behavior, its processes over time that bring about change. The dynamic characteristics of a system include internal processes and conversions, flows of inputs and outputs of materials, information, or energy, and their attributes and relative efficiency.

Cybernetics: One dynamic aspect of systems is cybernetics, the science of control and communication, of positive and negative feedback loops, of regulation and stability (Flood and Carson, 12; Checkland, 84). Feedback loops, the reciprocal flow of influence in which every influence is both a cause and an effect (Senge, 75), are a basic tool used to describe cybernetic dynamics:

A feedback loop is a circular arrangement of causally connected elements, in which an initial cause propagates around the links of the loop, so that each element has an effect on the next, until the last “feeds back” the effect into the first element of the cycle. The consequence of this arrangement is that the first link (“input”) is affected by the last (“output”), which results in self-regulation of

the entire system, as the initial effect is modified each time it travels around the cycle. Feedback, in Wiener's words, is the "control of a machine on the basis of its *actual* performance rather than its *expected* performance." In a broader sense feedback has come to mean the conveying of information about the outcome of any process or activity to its source (Capra 1996, 56-57) (emphases in original).

There are two types of feedback loop or iteration: self-balancing (negative; stabilizing; deviation attenuating) and self-reinforcing (positive; amplifying; deviation amplifying). Self-balancing feedback loops have a negative polarity because the output decreases the magnitude of the input, thereby balancing or stabilizing both. Typical self-balancing feedback loops include thermostats, the 'invisible hand' of market systems, and the 'checks and balances' of the US Constitution (Figure 4). Self-reinforcing feedback loops have a positive polarity because the output increases the magnitude of the input, thereby reinforcing or amplifying both. Typical self-reinforcing feedback loops include what are commonly known as 'runaway effects', 'vicious cycles', 'self-fulfilling prophecies', and 'bandwagon effects' (Capra 1996, 59-64) (Figure 5). A loop with multiple links will be self-balancing if it contains an odd number of negative links, or more

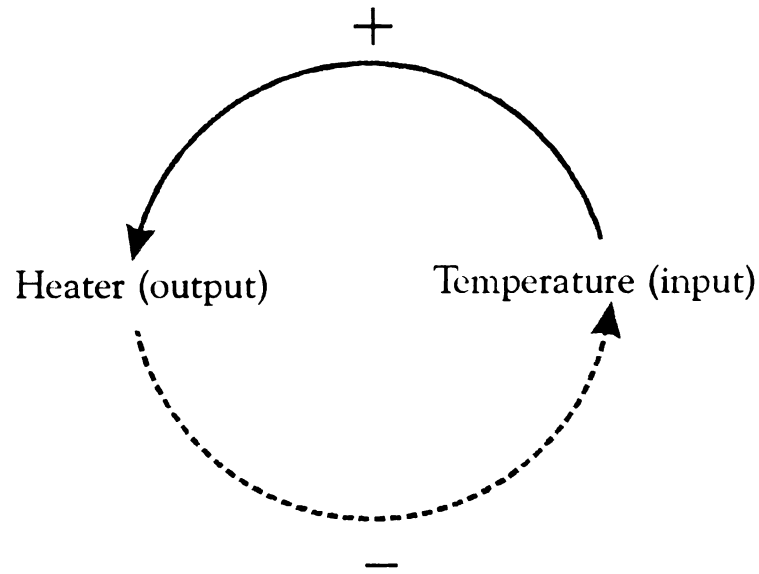


Figure 4: A thermostat as an example of a self-balancing feedback loop. As the temperature drops, the heater turns on, and the temperature rises. As the temperature rises, the heater turns off.

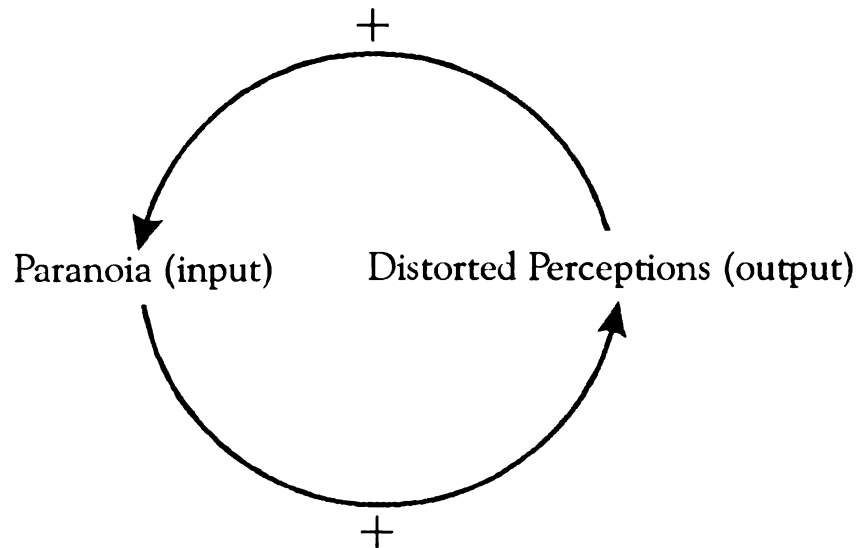


Figure 5: An example of a self-reinforcing feedback loop. As distorted perceptions develop, they fuel paranoia. As paranoia develops, it results in more distorted perceptions.

precisely “the polarity of a feedback loop is the product of the polarities of *its* causal links” (Capra 1996, 313). Even though they are called ‘*loops*’, it is important to remember that “The circular causality in a feedback loop does not imply that the elements in the corresponding physical system are arranged in a circle. Feedback loops are abstract patterns of relationships embedded in physical structures or in the activities of living organisms” (Capra 1996, 64). Senge identifies a number of common feedback loops, which he calls archetypes, that reoccur in a variety of different systems. It is also worth noting that there are frequently temporal delays or damping effects between the cause/effect links.

Requisite variety: Ashby’s Law of Requisite Variety states that “to control a complex system, the controlling system must generate at least as much variety (the possible distinguishable states of a system) as the system being controlled” (Waelchli, 7; Flood and Carson, 13).

“Most real systems possess so much variety that it is a physical impossibility to understand or control the system” (Waelchli, 7).

Requisite variety is closely associated with cybernetic processes:

Systems need to have sufficient (requisite) variety and redundancy to be able to deal with these inter-system tensions, just as they must have sensitive mechanisms for communication and feedback (cybernetics) within themselves, and between themselves and their environments. Another way of putting this, is that systems must be flexible enough to deal with the changes in their environment to which they are coupled through cybernetic processes. . . .

One way in which the bounded system retains its coherence, is through the inter-relationships between its component subsystems, which because they are necessarily different from each other, are often in tension with each other. It is the tension of these differences which gives rise to the oneness and to the uniqueness of the entity. Thus as one of the pioneers of systems thinking put it, “there is a glorious unity of difference” (Bertalanffy 1981) (Bawden FSR/E, 9).

Chaos: Chaos is stochastic (i.e., intrinsically unpredictable)

behavior in deterministic systems (Clayton and Radcliffe, 24).

Bawden, using a social system as an example, links the concepts of requisite variety, cybernetics, and emergent properties and introduces ‘chaos’ as another dimension of emergence:

As Ackoff (1981) sees this: each subsystem has an effect on the functioning of the whole, while each is also affected by at least one other subsystem within the whole. . . . [This] . . . is termed ‘requisite variety’. . . . Finally, systems can only retain their coherence within and across these embedded hierarchies through cybernetic networks of feedback communication and

control. The stability of systems is maintained through what is termed 'negative' (or deviation attenuating) feedback, while 'positive' (or deviation amplifying) feedback tends to provoke systems into unstable states. Typically these two types of forces are working concurrently; adding further to the 'tensions of difference'. Under certain circumstances, these tensions reach such a level that the whole system suddenly succumbs. As a consequence, it becomes destabilised and for a while acts quite 'chaotically'. This phase is often followed by an equally sudden re-stabilisation in a new, and frequently more complex form (Gleick 1988). These 'chaotic' transformations in organisation are also associated with emergent properties which are therefore also quite unpredictable from knowledge about the previous state of the system before its chaotic change. Such 'higher order' re-stabilisation does not always occur of course, in which case the system might either revert to its previous position or collapse altogether, following a chaotic episode. From this discussion it is apparent that there are two sources of emergence in systems dynamics: Firstly between different levels within a 'stable' hierarchy . . . and secondly, following a chaotic reorganisation to a higher order of complexity (Bawden 1997, 3).

From another perspective, in a world that tends toward entropy, despite cybernetic processes, "An open system seldom preserves its form absolutely unchanged even for a brief period. . . .[N]o system lasts forever" (Vickers, 13).

It is important to distinguish chaos from randomness or anarchy. Systems scientists call randomness 'noise', while chaos is considered to

be deterministic and patterned. The qualitative features of a chaotic system are predictable, yet its behavior is totally unpredictable.

Complexity at the Edge of Order and Chaos: Waldrop devoted an entire book to describing the Santa Fe Institute's efforts at capturing the essence of the 'tensions of difference' described by Bawden above that bridge order and chaos. He uses the word 'complexity' — complicated and unpredictable consequences arising out of simple systems — to characterize those tensions between stability and fluidity (Waldrop, 308, 329). Complexity is more than the boundary between order and chaos, it is a special region unto itself

in which the components of the system never quite lock into place, yet never quite dissolve into turbulence, either. These are systems that are both stable enough to store information, and yet evanescent enough to transmit it. These are the systems that can be organized to perform complex computations, to react to the world, to be spontaneous, adaptive, and alive (Waldrop, 293, 302).

From another perspective, complexity is the phase of transition between order and chaos analogous to physical matter's period of "phase transition" between solid and liquid form (Waldrop, 234).

Equilibrium: Conventionally, equilibrium is defined as the state

of being in a static, stable, fixed, unvarying state. When systems scientists describe a system as being 'far from equilibrium' or in 'disequilibrium' or 'nonequilibrium', they are distinguishing it from systems that are in static states. Often, however, systems 'far from equilibrium' are in fact in a state of dynamic equilibrium, as is the case for living systems or even a whirlpool (Clayton and Radcliffe, 25; Capra 1996, 181).

Bifurcation point: Bifurcation points are critical points of instability in open systems far from equilibrium at which new forms of order emerge spontaneously, resulting in development and evolution (Capra 1996, 136). A system's behavior at these points is a function of the history of the system yet totally unpredictable.

Characteristics of *Living* Systems

While each of the characteristics of systems described above can be used to describe most any system, other characteristics are unique to living systems. Capra identifies three primary, totally interdependent 'criteria' of living systems: pattern of organization,

structure, and process.

Pattern of organization: For Capra, “The study of pattern is crucial to the understanding of living systems because systemic properties . . . arise from a configuration of ordered relationships. Systemic properties are properties of pattern. What is destroyed when a living organism is dissected is its pattern” (Capra 1996, 81). Building on the work of Eigen and Maturana and Varela, Capra identifies the pattern of organization of a system as **an abstract description of the configuration of relationships among the system’s components and processes of production that determines the system’s essential characteristics and characterizes the system as belonging to a particular class**. Importantly, a system’s pattern does not identify and is independent of the properties of its components (Capra 1996, 98, 158). Pattern is *Gestalt*, German for organic form, as opposed to *Form*, which is inanimate form (Capra 1996, 31).

The most important property of the pattern of organization common to all living systems is that it is a *network* pattern of interlinked components and processes. “Whenever we look at life, we

look at networks” (Capra 1996, 82), and “Since living systems at all levels are networks, we must visualize the web of life as living systems (networks) interacting in network fashion with other systems (networks). . . .In other words, the web of life consists of networks within networks” (Capra 1996, 35). One way to think of networks is as non-linear, interlinked feedback loops. Homeostasis, the state of dynamic balance between interlinked feedback loops within living organisms, is a good example of living networks at work (Capra 1996, 58-59).

Autopoiesis (literally ‘self-making’) is the organization of the living — the network pattern of organization of living systems, of life (Maturana and Varela in Capra 1996, 96, 160, 162, 172). It is defined by Capra as a network pattern of processes of production of components — not merely a pattern of static components — in which the function of each component is to participate in the production or transformation of other components in the network while maintaining the overall circularity of the network. In a living organism, “the parts also exist *by means* of each other, in the sense of producing one

another” (Capra 1996, 22) (emphasis in original); “The being and doing of an autopoietic unity are inseparable” (Maturana and Varela, 49). The entire network, thereby, continually regenerates or “makes itself” — it is produced by its components and in turn produces those components. The entire organization stops if these processes of production stop (Capra 1996, 96, 98, 168; Maturana and Varela, 46).

According to biologist and philosopher Gail Fleischaker, autopoietic networks must meet three criteria: they must be self-bounded, self-generating, and self-perpetuating. Self-bounded systems have a boundary that specifies the domain of the network’s operations, defines the system as a unit, and yet is an integral part of the network. Self-generating systems produce all of their components, including those of the boundary, by processes within the network. Therefore, even though they are structurally open with regard to the flow of energy and matter, autopoietic networks are organizationally closed so as to maintain a stable pattern. Self-perpetuating systems continually replace all their components with their own processes of transformation, which means that the production processes continue

over time (Capra 1996, 98-99, 169, 208).

Building on these three criteria, Capra adds that living systems are therefore autonomous and self-organizing because their order and behavior are established by the system itself rather than imposed by the environment. “Autopoiesis, then, is seen as the pattern underlying the phenomenon of self-organization, or autonomy, that is so characteristic of all living systems” (Capra 1996, 167-168). Self-organizing systems acquire the ability to regulate themselves with feedback loops generated by networks of communication:

For example, a community that maintains an active network of communication will learn from its mistakes, because the consequences of a mistake will spread through the network and return to the source along feedback loops. Thus the community can correct its mistakes, regulate itself, and organize itself. Indeed, self-organization has emerged as perhaps the central concept in the systems view of life, and like the concepts of feedback and self-regulation, it is linked closely to networks. The pattern of life, we might say, is a network pattern capable of self-organization (Capra 1996, 82-83).

Self-organization has three key characteristics (Capra 1996, 85).

First, new structures and new modes of behavior can be created by self-organizing systems. In non-living systems, it is thought that structural

changes take place within a given ‘variety pool’ of structures, and the survival chances of the system depend on the richness, or ‘requisite variety’ of that pool (see above). In living systems, novel structures and modes of behavior are created in the process of development, learning, and evolution. Second, self-organizing systems are open systems far from equilibrium that require a constant flow of energy and matter for self-organization to take place. The evolution of new structure and behavior occurs only when the system is far from equilibrium. Third, the components of self-organizing systems are interconnected nonlinearly by physical feedback loops, which are described mathematically by nonlinear equations. In sum, “[S]elf-organization is the spontaneous emergence of new structures and new forms of behavior in open systems far from equilibrium, characterized by internal feedback loops and described mathematically by nonlinear equations” (Capra 1996, 85). **Living systems, therefore, are in essence autopoietic, self-organizing networks.**

Structure: Although structure — the way in which the physical components of a system are related to each other, “the physical

embodiment of the system's pattern of organization" — is a property of all systems, it is of particular importance in living systems (Capra 1996, 98, 158). Capra, building on the work of Prigogine and Haken, identifies *dissipative structures* as the structure of living systems (Capra 1996, 160). As the phrase implies, dissipative structures are both stable and dissipative in nature. They are stable because they maintain their structure while experiencing dissipation — not because they are static, fixed, or unvarying. Despite their stability, dissipative structures are structurally open, exist in states far from equilibrium, and dissipate energy as heat, friction, etc. (Capra 1996, 169). Dissipation, in this case, is a source of order rather than waste, as it is traditionally viewed (Capra 1996, 88-89). A whirlpool is an excellent example of a dissipative structure (Capra 1996, 181). Stability in the midst of disequilibrium comes from the system's flow processes that are interlinked through multiple catalytic feedback loops. Unlike systems at equilibrium that demonstrate repetitive phenomena and follow universal laws, dissipative structures demonstrate behavior that is unique to the system, does not follow universal laws, and creates

richness and diversity (Capra 1996, 182). Dissipative structures are also the embodiment of non-linear thermodynamics: “The farther a dissipative structure is from equilibrium, the greater is its complexity and the higher is the degree of nonlinearity in the mathematical equations describing it” (Capra 1996, 182). While Prigogine has written most abundantly about dissipative structures, other scientists study dissipative structures as synergetics in laser theory (Haken in Capra 1996, 91) and hypercycles (Eigen in Capra 1996, 93-94). Dissipative structures, with their unpredictable behavior, are good examples of the state Waldrop calls ‘complexity’.

Bifurcation points, the critical points of instability at which new forms of order may emerge spontaneously, resulting in development and evolution, are of particular importance to dissipative structures (Capra 1996, 171). When slight fluctuations in the structure of open systems far from equilibrium are amplified by repeated positive feedback or catalytic loops, instabilities are generated. At these points of instability, or bifurcation points, the system may jump to new structures of ever-increasing complexity. Therefore, amplifying

feedback, “which had always been regarded as destructive in cybernetics, appears as a source of new order and complexity in the theory of dissipative structures” (Capra 1996, 89). Laszlo has graphically illustrated the nature of bifurcation points (Figure 6).

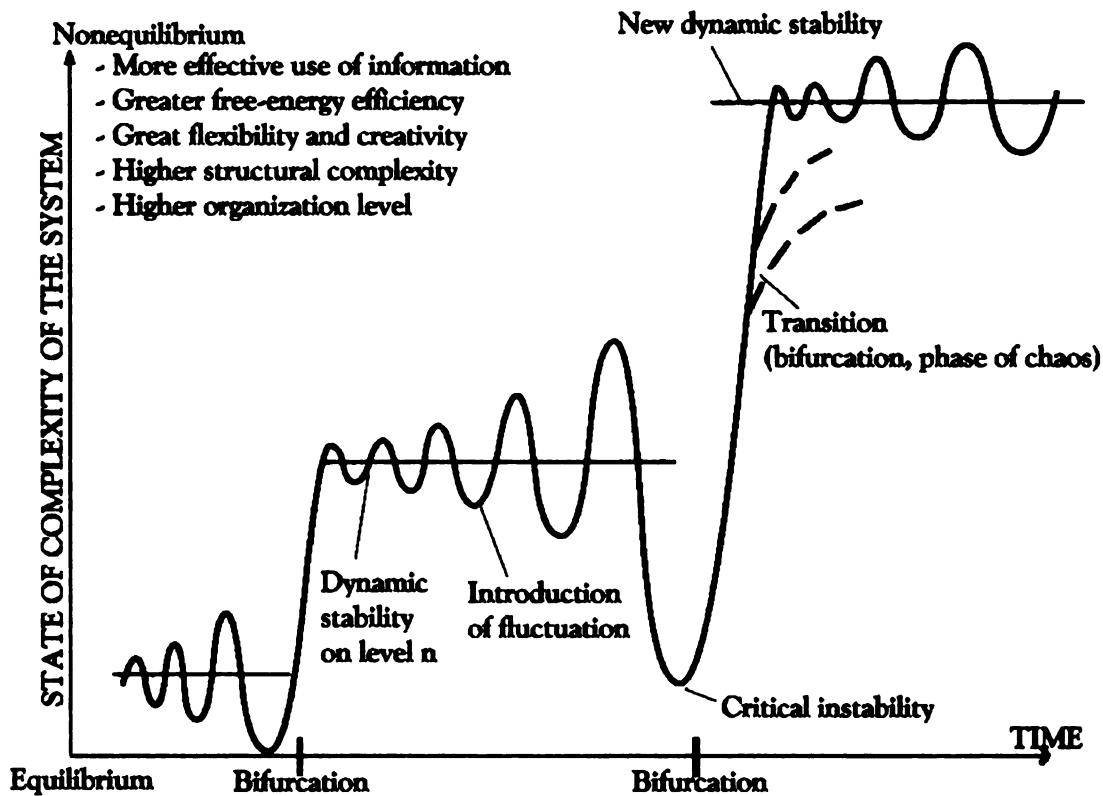


Figure 6: Bifurcation points in a dissipative structure (adapted from Laszlo 1994, 93).

Behavior at these points is a function of the history of the system yet totally unpredictable: “At the bifurcation point the system can “choose” — the term is used metaphorically — from among several

possible paths, or states. Which path it will take will depend on the system's history and on various external conditions and can never be predicted. There is an irreducible random element at each bifurcation point" (Capra 1996, 182-183) (Figure 7).

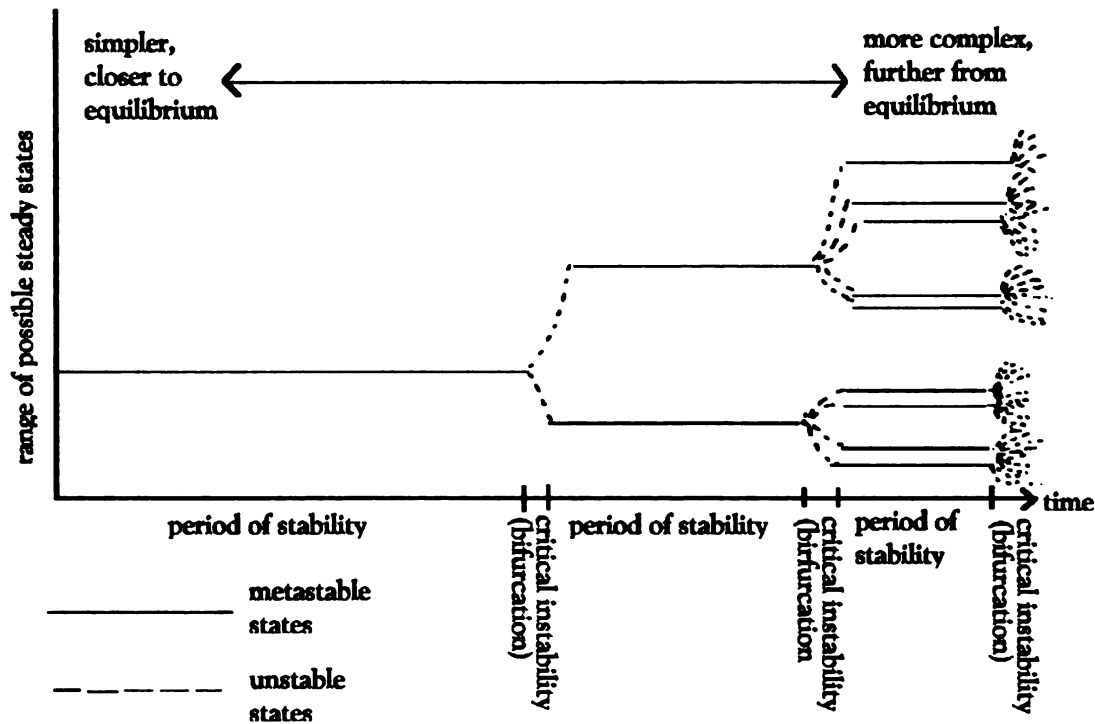


Figure 7: The unpredictable behavior of dissipative structures at bifurcation points (adapted from Laszlo "Science and Prophecy", 27).

Linking Organization and Structure: Capra suggests that the key to a comprehensive theory of living systems lies in the synthesis of two traditionally very different approaches, the study of structure (or

substance), which is the measurement of quantities, and the study of pattern (or form), which is the mapping of qualities (Capra 1996, 81). As noted above, an autopoietic system undergoes continual structural changes while preserving its web-like pattern of organization, which is its identity or essential set of characteristics. The network's structure continually produces and transforms itself in two distinct ways. First, through cyclical self-renewal of structures like cells, tissues, and organs. Despite this ongoing change, the network maintains its overall pattern of organization. This is the self-generation that Fleischaker describes.

The second means by which the network structure produces and transforms itself is through the *developmental creation of new structures or new connections* in the autopoietic network. These developmental changes also take place continually, either as a consequence of environmental influences or as a result of the system's internal dynamics. Living systems interact with their environment through *structural coupling* — that is, through recurrent interactions with the environment, each of which triggers structural changes in the system.

Structural coupling is learning because the living system responds to environmental influences with structural changes, which in turn alter its future behavior. This continual adaptation, learning, and development are key characteristics of the behavior of living things. An organism's ontogeny is its course of development, its history of structural changes without loss of organization based on its pathway of structural coupling. Living structure, therefore, is a record of previous development (Maturana and Varela, 74-75; 95-96).

Because structural changes are a function of both internal and external influences (both self-generation and structural coupling), Maturana suggests that living systems are both determined and free — the system's behavior is determined by its organization and free due to its connections with the wider environment through structural coupling (Capra 1996, 218-221). Extending these concepts to evolution, Laszlo suggests that the dynamics outlined above create “ensembles of possibilities within which evolutionary processes can unfold”, so “evolution is creative. While its past course is always logical and comprehensible, its future course is open to choice” (Laszlo

“Science and Prophecy”, 22).

Process: “The process of life is the activity involved in the continual embodiment of the system’s pattern of organization” (Capra 1996, 159) and is implicit in the system’s structure (Capra 1996, 172). According to the Santiago Theory developed by Maturana and Varela, process is *cognition*, which they define as the entire process of life — of the perception, emotion, and action that are all part of knowing (Capra 1996, 160, 172, 174). Process, therefore, is the domain of the cognitive sciences, and knowing is “effective action, that is, operating effectively in the domain of existence of living beings” (Maturana and Varela, 29). Likewise, “According to the theory of living systems, mind is not a thing but a process — the very process of life”, of cognition (Capra 1996, 172). In short, **the process of life is cognition, which is synonymous with mind, so the process of life is characterized primarily by knowing.** The relationship between mind and brain is one of process and structure: a brain may provide the structure through which the process of the mind operates, but a brain is not required for cognition because “The entire dissipative structure

of the organism participates in the process of cognition, whether or not the organism has a brain and a higher nervous system” (Capra 1996, 176). The traditional Cartesian split between mind and matter is no longer appropriate, as both represent different aspects or dimensions of the same phenomenon of life (Capra 1996, 175).

Unlike most epistemologies, the underlying assumption of the Santiago Theory is that cognition is not a representation of an independently existing, pregiven world. *Cognition*, rather, is *bringing forth a (not the) world*, and is dependent on the organism’s structure, not on the world (Maturana and Varela, 9, 23). In the words of Maturana and Varela: “All doing is knowing, and all knowing is doing” (Maturana and Varela, 26). Organisms of a particular species, because they share the same structure, bring forth similar worlds.

Summary of the Characteristics of Living Systems: Linking autopoietic pattern, dissipative structure, and the process of cognition, Capra suggests that the life process consists of all activities involved in the continual embodiment of a system’s (autopoietic) pattern of organization in a physical (dissipative) structure. In other words, the

qualities of a living system's autopoietic pattern of organization are embodied in its structure, which changes through three inextricably linked activities: autopoietic self-generation, the evolution of dissipative structures through bifurcation points, and structural coupling with the environment. Capra calls this process of embodiment 'cognition', or the process of life.

As noted above, Maturana and Varela suggest that the third activity — structural coupling — is the process that links autopoietic patterns of organization with dissipative structure and is therefore the underlying process of cognition. While preserving a living system's network pattern of organization, structurally-coupled interactions with the environment continually change the system's structure. According to the Santiago Theory, these structural changes that characterize life are acts of cognition (the living system specifies which environmental perturbations will trigger which structural change) that bring forth the world. Therefore, in the words of Maturana and Varela, "To live is to know", so development and learning are two sides of the same coin, or different expressions of structural coupling (Maturana and Varela,

174).

Intelligence, then, is a function of “the richness and flexibility of an organism’s structural coupling”, and a system’s ‘cognitive domain’ is defined as the “The range of interactions a living system can have with its environment”. Interestingly, some complex systems’ cognitive domain can extend internally to bring forth an inner world through internal structural coupling. In humans, this process is intimately linked with language, thought, and consciousness (Capra 1996, 266-270), which are the subject of the next section.

Human Systems as Living Systems: There is an ongoing debate among systems scientists about whether human social systems share the characteristics of living systems as outlined above. If the pattern of organization of human systems is autopoietic, for instance, then the basic components of the systems — humans — have a maximum degree of autonomy; as a matter of fact, the system exists for the components, the opposite of which is the case in most living organisms (Maturana and Varela, 199). Moreover, the definition of boundaries raises some difficult questions because social systems include intangible

components and processes like thought and emotion (Capra 1996, 210-211). Perhaps the greatest difference between human and other living systems is that non-human systems have no choice but to abide by 'natural laws', while humans can choose whether or not to follow social laws or norms (Capra 1996, 212). Even Varela and Maturana, who originally conceptualized autopoiesis, do not characterize social systems as autopoietic. Varela believes social systems are closed but not autopoietic, and Maturana argues that social systems are simply the media in which autopoietic systems interact (Mingers, 128-132). After studying in detail several different applications of autopoiesis to human systems, Mingers concludes that "it seems difficult to sustain the idea that social systems are autopoietic" (Mingers, 124) and "social autopoiesis remains a highly debatable possibility, no more" (Mingers, 152). He also suggests that using autopoiesis metaphorically, while less rigorous, is less problematic and perhaps more useful until the ontological debate matures (Mingers, 151). For the purposes of this study, the application of autopoiesis to human systems is strictly metaphorical.

The concept of dissipative structure is more useful in describing human systems. Capra sees an obvious application to social systems:

Many of the key characteristics of dissipative structures — the sensitivity to small changes in the environment, the relevance of previous history at critical points of choice, the uncertainty and unpredictability of the future — are revolutionary new concepts from the point of view of classical science but are an integral part of human experience. Since dissipative structures are the basic structures of all living systems, including human beings, this should perhaps not come as a great surprise.

Instead of being a machine, nature at large turns out to be more like human nature — unpredictable, sensitive to the surrounding world, influenced by small fluctuations. . . .

“Today,” Prigogine reflects, “the world we see outside and the world we see within are converging. This convergence of two worlds is perhaps one of the important cultural events of our age” (Capra 1996, 192-193).

Senge also stresses the importance of structure in human systems. He suggests that structure in human systems has three important characteristics. First, it influences behavior: “When placed in the same system, people, however different, tend to produce similar results” (Senge, 42). Second, structure in human systems is subtle: interrelationships among key variables seem to compel people to act in certain ways (Senge, 44). Finally, structure is oftentimes the

underlying cause of behavior, so the leverage required to create significant, enduring improvements can come from new ways of thinking, or restructuring: generative systemic structure creates responsive patterns of behavior which, in turn, cause reactions and events (Senge, 52-53, 114). In short:

Systems thinking finds its greatest benefits in helping us distinguish high- from low-leverage changes in highly complex situations. In effect, the art of systems thinking lies in seeing *through* complexity to the underlying structures generating change. Systems thinking does not mean ignoring complexity. Rather, it means organizing complexity into a coherent story that illuminates the causes of problems and how they can be remedied in enduring ways (Senge, 128) (emphasis in original).

Humans are unique in that they use abstract thought, communicating, and language to bring forth a world together through the **p**rocess of cognition (Capra 1996, 270). Maturana distinguishes **betw**een linguistic communication and language. The former is **learn**ed communicative behavior or the coordination of behavior **among** living organisms, which Maturana and Varela refer to as “co-**ontogeny**”, or “reciprocal structural coupling” (Capra 1996, 287-288; Maturana and Varela, 193). Linguistic communication plays a crucial

role in human social systems: “Coherence and harmony in relations and interactions between the members of a human social system are due to the coherence and harmony of their growth in it, in an ongoing social learning which their own social (linguistic) operation defines” (Maturana and Varela, 198-199, 207-212). Structural coupling through communication, therefore, is central to the cognitive process of bringing forth a world.

Language plays an equally important role in cognition. Language is communication about communication, or the coordination of coordinations of behavior (Capra 1996, 288). Capra summarizes the role of language in the cognitive processes of human systems:

The uniqueness of being human lies in our ability to continually weave the linguistic network in which we are embedded. To be human is to exist in language. In language we coordinate our behavior, and together in language we bring forth our world. “The world everyone sees,” write Maturana and Varela, “is not *the* world but *a* world, which we bring forth with others.” This human world centrally includes our inner world of abstract thought, concepts, symbols, mental representations, and self-awareness. To be human is to be endowed with reflective consciousness: “As we know how we know, we bring forth ourselves” (Capra 1996, 290; Maturana and Varela, 244-245) (emphasis in original).

Therein lies a paradox of unity between the individual and community, what Capra calls the “crux of the human condition”. On the one hand, people are autonomous, self-aware individuals. On the other, when people look for an independent self within their world of experience they cannot find any such entity; they are inextricably structurally coupled through the cognitive processes of language with the rest of the world. Jantsch, who made an early attempt at applying the characteristics of living systems to human systems, calls this ‘self-transcendence’, “the creative reaching out of a system beyond its own physical and mental boundaries” (Jantsch 1981, 91-92). Maturana and Varela call the same phenomenon ‘love’ — the acceptance of another person in an individual’s daily life, the cultural glue or the biological foundation of social phenomena (Maturana and Varela, 246-247); in other words, “we have only the world that we bring forth with others, and only love helps us to bring it forth” (Maturana and Varela, 248). According to Capra, by thinking systemically, people can realize that identity, individuality, and autonomy do not imply separateness and independence: “To regain our full humanity, we have to regain our

experience of connectedness with the entire web of life. This reconnecting, *religio* in Latin, is the very essence of the spiritual grounding of deep ecology” (Capra 1996, 295-296).

Given the characteristics of systems, living systems, and human systems as outlined above, the question still remains: *How are systems appropriately explored?* Realistically, there is no way of knowing before studying the system in more detail which characteristics will be identifiable or useful in understanding the system. As a matter of fact, Laszlo and Laszlo suggest starting with an open mind rather than a preconceived ideas when exploring systems (Laszlo and Laszlo, 11). Flood and Carson stress the importance of flexibility when describing systems and offer a number of different types of models (iconic, symbolic, analogous, digraphs, block diagrams, soft systems diagrams, unit diagrams, rich pictures) that may prove useful when describing systems (Flood and Carson, 57ff). Regardless, the goal when describing any system is to create a conceptual model that best captures the essence of the system in question. This goal must be kept

in the forefront of the investigator's mind when exploring any system.

The essence of the system being explored in this study is the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice, and the model being created to capture that essence is grounded in Bahá'í theology. The task of the next section, therefore, is to outline how religious systems are studied and to describe the nature of Bahá'í scholarship.

Part II: How Are Religious Systems Studied? and What Is the Nature of Bahá'í Scholarship?

Lincoln and Guba define four categories of truth: 1) empirical, that which can be tested by objective observations of "nature", 2) logical, that which is consistent with some other claim thought to be logically true, 3) ethical, that which conforms to some accepted moral or professional standard of conduct, and 4) metaphysical, that which must be accepted at face value because it cannot be tested against any external norm such as those used in the other three categories (Lincoln and Guba, 14). Using similar reasoning but in systemic language, Boulding (1956) outlines a hierarchy of real-world

complexity in which emergent properties arise at each defined level

(from Checkland, 105):

1. Structures, frameworks
2. Clock-works
3. Control mechanisms
4. Open systems
5. Lower organisms
6. Animals
7. Man
8. Socio-cultural systems
9. Transcendental systems.

Checkland explains that “Beyond natural, designed physical, designed abstract, and human activity systems there has to be a category to include the systems beyond knowledge. Following Boulding we may term these transcendental systems” (Checkland, 111). These transcendental systems are the source of Lincoln and Guba’s ‘metaphysical’ category of truth.

With that in mind, this study can be thought of as an exploration of the emergent properties (or the metaphysical truths) of a transcendental system of resource development. Despite the fact that transcendental systems are “beyond knowledge”, they can still be grounded in and tested against what some consider to be the data of

metaphysical truth. Data of spiritual systems could include everything from visions, to intuition, to dreams, to inspiration, to the 'voice of God'. But the spiritual system of concern for this study is a religious system with its own, clearly defined sources of data. The following sections discuss these data and their use in the study of religious systems.

Because the Bahá'í Faith is used in this study to develop a model of spiritually-inspired resource development, it is also appropriate to consider the unique nature of Bahá'í scholarship and how its principles can best be applied. During the twentieth century, Bahá'í scholarship has gradually evolved into a significant field of study, and a number of scholars have elaborated on the nature of that scholarship. Their work, along with the writings of the central figures of the Faith, are used below to outline the key elements of the ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations of Bahá'í scholarship and their relationship to this study.

What is the difference between theology and religious studies, and which is most appropriate in this exploration?

There is no agreed upon norm or overriding theory for the study of religion (Momen 1991, 15). “[T]here is today still great methodological uncertainty, even confusing contradiction about how religious studies are to proceed. There is ‘little or no methodological cohesiveness despite almost a century of discussion and debate’ (Wiebe 1981: 47). In particular, there is uncertainty about the possibility of a systematic ‘science of religion’” (Lott, 204).

There are, however, two general approaches to the study of religious experience: theology and religious studies (or comparative religion). The field of religious studies is primarily concerned with “the religious phenomena of man, and man in his religious dimension . . . , not directly with transcendence, but with man’s response to transcendence” (Lott, 3). It is reductive, empiricist, determinist, positivist, and “scientific” in its approach (Momen 1991, 18). In other words, it seeks “to explain religion in terms of the mechanisms found to be useful in other disciplines: sociology, economics, psychology, anthropology, etc. This approach regards the phenomena of religion as

being nothing but an instance of the workings of these other disciplines” (Momen 1991, 15), treating organized religion and the spirituality of religion objectively using traditional historical, behavioural, and analytical methods (Lott, 155ff).

Theology, on the other hand, “operates from within particular religious traditions and focuses upon the nature of transcendent reality, [so] its concerns are different from those of the study of religion” (Whaling, 15). It “begins as reflection on and formulation of perceived meaning from the perspective of grounding in a particular religious tradition and in the kind of faith-commitment expected of participants in this tradition” (Lott, 5). Theology, therefore, is usually *Normative* and is primarily concerned with the nature of transcendent *reality* from the perspective of members of a particular religious *tradition*. The concern of this study is the ‘transcendent reality’ of Bahá’ís and their ‘reflection on and formulation of perceived meaning’ in the context of resource development. Therefore, this study falls *within* the realm of theology, and not religious studies*.

*An important note about the nature of this study is worth *reemphasizing* here (see page 39). As a theological study, it is not

What is an appropriate theological methodology, and what are the data of theology?

Lott outlines the central elements of the 'theological task' or methodology. The goal is to "articulate [the religious community's] central vision of reality and their interpretation of the meaning of this world view and the life-values and commitments it involves . . ." (Lott, 89ff). The theologian's task is to "identify the ultimate goal of life for participants in the tradition . . . with the greatest possible cognitive clarity (not denying its 'beyondness')" and to "provide directions both *for a* life-style and life-actions appropriate to such an ultimate End"

(Lott, 90).

To do this, the theologian draws on sacred scripture or tradition, the data of theology. Lott explains:

Much theological articulation is in fact scriptural exegesis and interpretation, unavoidably so when a set of sacred writings is seen as the repository of authoritative, even

describing a real system. It is describing an ideal system as articulated in Bahá'í theology for use in developing a theoretical framework of spiritually-inspired resource development. The system is the Bahá'í 'what could be' of the 'process' that connects 'what is' with 'what could be'.

infallible, divine revelation: or as the decisive source of testimony to that 'truth' or 'true being' whose realisation the seeker aspires to: or as the reliable basis for the ultimately right way of life is sought (Lott, 80).

Scripture (or sacred verbal tradition) functions in this normative way because the sacred texts (or oral tradition) are held to embody the core vision in a special way, and this vision of the transcendent Focus is taken as central for theological reflection. Indeed, the theologian's task will be seen primarily to be that of communicating this vision of the Transcendent as that which gives ultimate meaning to life (Lott, 90).

From a systemic perspective, sacred scripture could be

considered the medium through which metaphysical truths, which

exist as a 'metalanguage', are translated into a language more

*com*prehensible to humans. Flood and Carson define a metalanguage as *that* which is "not contained in the system itself but is imposed, in *some* way, from an external system superior in the logical hierarchy of *systems*. Subordinate systems may have no understanding of the *metalanguage*, possessing only their own object language" (Flood and Carson, 13). An example of a metalanguage is any spoken human *language* from the perspective of an infant; because the infant (the *subordinate* system) has no understanding of the metalanguage, adults

must communicate with it using the infant's own 'object language', e.g., with hugs, tickles, or food. In order to communicate with the **subsystem**, "the metasystem switches from its own metalanguage to the language of the object system" (Flood and Carson, 13). For the **theologian**, sacred scripture is an example of the transcendental **metasystem's** attempt to communicate with the human subsystem **using** human object language.

What is a Bahá'í ontology?

Central to Bahá'í theology is the ontological belief that there **exists** an objective truth and that human reality is a function of one's **perception** or understanding of that truth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá* **differentiated** between "the essence of a thing" (i.e., truth), which "being one, . . . cannot be divided," (*Paris Talks*, 129) and "its **qualities**" (i.e., what one perceives or understands of that truth) and **stressed** that human knowledge of things "is knowledge of their

*'Abdu'l-Bahá, whose title means "Servant of the Glory", was the **son** of Bahá'u'lláh and his appointed successor as leader of the Bahá'í **Faith** until his death in 1921.

qualities and not of their essence” (*Some Answered Questions*, 220-221). Similarly, from the perspective of Bahá’ís, “[D]ivine Revelation is infallible and proceeds from an all-encompassing knowledge of the Truth, but when individual Bahá’ís attempt to apply Sacred Texts to any specific problem or situation they do so using their own minds which are of limited understanding” (Universal House of Justice*, in *Research Department Scholarship*, 34). In other words, thinking again in systemic terms, not only can humans not understand the essence of truth because it exists as a metalanguage, but even human understanding of the object languages used to describe the qualities of truth is limited and prone to error.

What is a Bahá’í epistemology?

If there exists an objective truth, and humans have access to the knowledge of its qualities, then science could be considered the tool humans use to access that knowledge. Religious epistemologies, on the other hand, are considered by most people to be inherently

*The Universal House of Justice is the democratically-elected global governing body of the Bahá’í Faith.

unscientific. Many would agree that much of contemporary organized religion is a mindless exercise contrary to science, “a collection of certain dogmas and the practice of rites and ceremonies”, the differences in which among various denominations and sects have resulted in “discord, hatred, and disunion” in society (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 147-148). Many scientists, in particular, would argue that there is no place for religion in the exploration of truth.

But that does not exclude religion *a priori* from scientific inquiry. As a matter of fact, there are distinct disadvantages to the exclusion of religion from scientific investigation. Hatcher, who has written at length about science and the nature of Bahá’í scholarship, explains one such disadvantage:

For science, the main result of its conflict with religion has been science’s overnarrow concentration on the exhaustive study of certain material phenomena, coupled with an almost total indifference to the more global, universal questions asked by religion. . . . Even to ask religious questions or to seek knowledge about ultimate reality is often perceived as *per se* unscientific. In this way, the practice of science has become wedded to a dogmatic philosophical materialism, a materialism that is tacitly and erroneously considered to be inherent in science itself (Hatcher 1990, 40-41).

Other scholars, like Nasr and Laszlo, also decry the wholesale neglect of religious thought by contemporary science:

What is needed is a rediscovery of nature as sacred reality and the rebirth of man as the guardian of the sacred, which implies the death of the image of man and nature that has given birth to modernism and its subsequent developments. . . .It means most of all taking seriously the religious understanding of the order of nature as knowledge corresponding to a vital aspect of cosmic reality and not only subjective conjectures or historical constructs. There must be a radical restructuring of the intellectual landscape to enable us to take this type of knowledge of nature seriously, which means to accept the findings of modern science only within the confines of the limitations that our philosophical suppositions, epistemologies, and historical development have imposed upon it, while rejecting completely its totalitarian claims as *the* science of the natural order (Nasr, 287) (emphasis in original).

Laszlo adds: “Understanding. . . .can be gained in different ways [, including through both science and religion]. . . .But does [that] create a problem? Perhaps not. In the ideal case the two roads lead to the same destination; science and religion go hand in hand (Laszlo “Science and Prophecy”, 20).

Science is defined rather broadly in the Bahá’í Faith. It is the power of investigating and discovering the verities of the universe, the means by which man finds a pathway to God. . . .Through intellectual and intelligent inquiry

science is the discoverer of all things. It unites present and past, reveals the history of bygone nations and events, and confers upon man today the essence of all human knowledge and attainment throughout the ages. By intellectual processes and logical deductions of reason this superpower in man can penetrate the mysteries of the future and anticipate its happenings. . . .

[S]cience may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected ('Abdu'l-Bahá *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 49-50).

So in the Bahá'í Faith, religion and science are considered to be complementary means with which to discover the nature of objective truth; the unity of religion and science is a fundamental principle of the Bahá'í Faith. From that perspective, religion is "the enterprise of seeking knowledge about what is ultimate in invisible reality, especially what is ultimate in relationship to human life and experience. . . ."

(Hatcher 1990, 39). "Bahá'u'lláh considered education as one of the most fundamental factors of a true civilization. This education, however, in order to be adequate and fruitful, should be comprehensive in nature and should take into consideration not only the physical and the intellectual side of man but also his spiritual and

ethical aspects” (Shoghi Effendi*, in Research Department *Scholarship*,

3). The research department of the Universal House of Justice drives this point home:

The sundering of science and religion is but one example of the tendency of the human mind (which is necessarily limited in its capacity) to concentrate on one virtue, one aspect of truth, one goal, to the exclusion of others. This leads, in extreme cases, to fanaticism and the distortion of truth, and in all cases to some degree of imbalance and inaccuracy (in Khan, 17).

In other words, truth exists, and it should be investigated with whatever means possible, excluding neither religion nor science.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá summarizes the Bahá’í perspective on the unity of science and religion as follows:

Religion and science are the two wings upon which man’s intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism (*Paris*, 143).

*Shoghi Effendi was appointed by his grandfather, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in his will and testament as the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith. He was succeeded as head of the Faith, in turn, by the Universal House of Justice.

A Bahá'í epistemology, therefore, is broadly defined to include traditional scientific modes of inquiry as well as religious and spiritual ways of knowing. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, there are four methods of acquiring knowledge about the "realities of things", all of which are imperfect (*Questions*, 297-300). The first is the use of the senses (i.e., empirical study), which is the method most widely used in contemporary science. It is imperfect, however, because sensual perception (e.g., a mirage) can be misleading. The second is the method of reason, logical proofs, or understanding, "which was that of the ancient philosophers, the pillars of wisdom." It is also imperfect, however, "for the differences of the ancient philosophers, the want of stability and the variations of their opinions, prove this. For if it were perfect, all ought to be united in their ideas and agreed in their opinions." The third method of understanding is through the text of the Holy Scriptures, but this, too, is imperfect because the religious traditions are understood by the reason, which is imperfect. The fourth method of knowing is "the bounty of the Holy Spirit", "the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable." This

method of knowing is imperfect because humans have limited access to it. Hatcher summarizes a Bahá'í ontology and epistemology as follows:

[H]uman knowledge is the truth that is accessible to man, and this truth is relative because man, the knower, is relative, finite, and limited. There is an absolute reality underlying the multifaceted qualities and experiences accessible to man, but direct access to this reality, direct contact with it, or direct perception of it are forever beyond man's capabilities. His knowledge is therefore relative and limited only to the knowledge of various effects produced by this absolute reality (the Manifestations* being one of the most important of these effects). However, if man uses systematically all of the various modes of knowledge available to him, he is assured that his knowledge and understanding, such as it is on its level, will increase (Hatcher 1977, 34).

He calls this “a Platonic metaphysics combined with a pragmatic epistemology, the essential connection between the two being the Manifestation” (Hatcher 1977, 34). In other words, the unity of science and religion implies the use of all ways of knowing accessible to humans, including those normally designated as unscientific like sacred scripture and inspiration, in the search for understanding.

*Manifestations (of the Creative Spirit) refer to the prophets of the Creative Spirit, including Buddha, Moses, Abraham, Jesus, Zoroaster, Muhammad, and Bahá'u'lláh.

What is a Bahá'í methodology?

Hatcher also describes an appropriate methodology that is consistent with this ontology and epistemology. He argues that “The characteristic feature of science, and the basis of its unity, is scientific method”, which is the

systematic, organized, directed, and conscious use of our various mental faculties in an effort to arrive at a coherent model of whatever phenomenon is being investigated. Science is self-conscious common sense. Instead of relying on chance experiences, one systematically invokes certain types of experiences. This is experimentation (the conscious use of experience). Instead of relying on common-sense reasoning, one formalizes hypotheses explicitly and formalizes the reasoning leading from hypothesis to conclusion. This is mathematics and logic (the conscious use of reason). Instead of relying on occasional flashes of insight, one systematically meditates on problems. This is reflection (the conscious use of intuition).

The practice of this method is not linked to the study of any particular phenomenon. It can be applied to the study of unseen forces and mysterious phenomena as well as everyday, common occurrences. Failure to appreciate this universality of scientific method has led many people to feel that science is really only the study of matter and purely material phenomena. . . .

Bahá'u'lláh has referred to religion as the “science of the love of God.” Thus religion results when we turn scientific method to the study of the unseen creative force of the universe which we call God (Hatcher 1977, 19-20).

In response to critics who prefer to define science and the scientific method more narrowly, Hatcher replies:

Besides appealing to explicit conventions, formal logic, and the like, positivists have tried to discredit the application of scientific method in religion by insisting on public verifiability as an essential aspect of scientific method. However, a little reflection will easily show that this restriction is arbitrary and in no wise a criterion of scientific method. . . .

The fact is that the positivist will be constrained to admit that a great many people may be unable, through lack of intelligence or mental proclivity, ever, in theory, to validate the results [of much of scientific inquiry]. The fact is that the findings are not verifiable by the public at all. The findings can be verified only by individuals *capable of assuming and willing to assume the point of view of the researcher*. In most instances, this group is a very select one indeed, drawn from those who are members of a community of understanding and who participate in a certain framework of interpretation which is applied to all those subjective experiences which fall within a certain category” (Hatcher 1977, 35-36) (emphasis in original).

What are the data of Bahá’í scholarship?

Sacred scripture or tradition, it is noted above, is the standard datum of theological studies. For Bahá’ís, scripture and tradition are the product of periodic revelation and the teachings of Manifestations. Therefore, “For Bahá’ís the datum of religion is the phenomenon of



revelation. Religion is that branch of knowledge which takes this phenomenon as its special object of study” (Hatcher 1990, 111).

The Bahá’í Faith offers the scientific hypothesis that revelation is a periodic phenomenon for which the period (i.e., the average time interval between two successive occurrences of the phenomenon) is fairly long. The large number of generations intervening between two occurrences of revelation poses obvious problems for the study of this phenomenon. However, we cannot refuse to study something simply because the study is hard or because the data associated with it are in some instances accessible only with difficulty (Hatcher 1990, 111).

Each religious system has been founded on the faith in the reality of the phenomenon of revelation, and those people associated with the phenomenon felt fully justified in their faith. But as the influence of religion declined and the facts of revelation receded into history, the sense of conviction of the reality of phenomenon subsided, and this was only natural as we have seen. It is therefore important to realize that the Bahá’í Faith offers much more than new arguments about the old evidence for the phenomenon of revelation. It offers empirical evidence for the phenomenon and it is frank to base itself on this evidence and to apply the scientific method in understanding the evidence. So much is this so, that I would unhesitatingly say that the residue of subjectivity in the faith of a Bahá’í is no greater than the residue of subjectivity in the faith one has in any well-validated scientific theory. Just as in [any scientific investigation], the findings of a Bahá’í can be verified by anyone willing to assume and capable of assuming the point of view of a Bahá’í (Hatcher 1977, 41).

This is not to argue, of course, that everyone should become a Bahá’í.

Rather, it simply demonstrates that an investigation into Bahá'í sacred writings is a legitimate course of study for a Bahá'í.

The question remains, however, as to what constitutes “Bahá'í Revelation”, the datum of Bahá'í scholarship. Interestingly, the texts of the Bahá'í Faith vary in their levels of ‘sacredness’. The scriptures of the previous world religions are considered to have varying degrees of authenticity. The writings of the Báb*, Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice constitute the canon of Bahá'í literature. The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are considered Manifestations, so their writings are considered to be direct revelation from God. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi were interpreters of the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and the writings of the Universal House of Justice are neither revelation nor interpretation but rather legislation based on revelation or interpretation. According to Hatcher, “The Bahá'í Faith deals forthrightly with the problems of both higher (textual authenticity) and lower (textual interpretation)

*The Báb, which in Persian means ‘the gate’ or ‘door’, is the Manifestation who announced the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in much the same way that John the Baptist announced Jesus’ mission.

criticism. All published writings of Bahá'u'lláh are based on authentic original texts either written by Him or else dictated, signed, and sealed by Him” (Hatcher 1988, 39).

Is this study appropriate for a Bahá'í?

This study is appropriate for a Bahá'í because Bahá'ís are encouraged to acquire knowledge, independently investigate truth, and apply learning to current issues in order to better serve humanity. It is a fundamental duty for Bahá'ís to acquire knowledge and to independently investigate their Faith. Bahá'u'lláh wrote that “Knowledge is one of the wondrous gifts of God. It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it” (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 39) and “Knowledge is as wings to man’s life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone” (*Tablets*, 51-51). Shoghi Effendi wrote that “The Bahá'í Faith . . . enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth . . .” (in Research Department *Scholarship*, 23. There exists no priesthood or clergy to serve as intermediaries between Bahá'ís and their sacred texts or to provide leadership and

theological interpretation. Therefore, it is every Bahá'í's duty, regardless of her level of education, to undertake study. Moreover, Bahá'í scholarship is not limited to 'scholars':

[I]t is evident that Bahá'í scholarship is an endeavour accessible to all members of the Bahá'í community, without exception. All believers can aspire to the attributes described by the Guardian, and can strive to relate the Bahá'í teachings to the thinking and concerns of the non-Bahá'í population around them. You can perform a valuable service . . . to discourage any thought that Bahá'í scholarship is an activity open only to those who are highly educated or who are pursuing an academic career (Shoghi Effendi, in International Teaching Centre).

'Abdu'l-Bahá also noted the aggregate benefits of science, the pursuit of knowledge:

The development and progress of a nation is according to the measure and degree of that nation's scientific attainments. Through this means its greatness is continually increased, and day by day the welfare and prosperity of its people are assured. . . .

[Science] is the very foundation of all individual and national development. Without this basis of investigation, development is impossible. Therefore, seek with diligent endeavor the knowledge and attainment of all that lies within the power of this wonderful bestowal ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 49-50).

Not all knowledge is useful, however, and Bahá'ís are directed to acquire knowledge with the goal of service in mind, and not merely for

knowledge's sake: "The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words" (Bahá'u'lláh *Tablets*, 51-51). Similarly, "The learned of the day must direct the people to acquire those branches of knowledge which are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefit therefrom. Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth" (Bahá'u'lláh *Tablets*, 169), and "True learning is that which is conducive to the well-being of the world, not to pride and self-conceit, or to tyranny, violence and pillage" (Bahá'u'lláh, in Research Department *Scholarship*, 11).

In a similar vein, Bahá'ís are encouraged to relate Bahá'í teachings with current issues and scholarship. Shoghi Effendi noted that "What the Faith needs . . . is books that expound the true significance of its principles in the light of modern thought and social problems", and "The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people . . . who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world" (Shoghi Effendi, in Research Department

Scholarship, 5). The Universal House of Justice, however, notes that this should not be done in such a way as to compromise Bahá'í principles:

While it may often be part of wisdom to approach individuals or an audience from a standpoint of current knowledge, it should never be overlooked that the revelation of the Manifestation of God is the standard for all knowledge, and scientific statements and theories, no matter how close they may come to the eternal principle proclaiming God's Messenger, are in their very nature ephemeral and limited. Likewise, attempting to make the Bahá'í Faith relevant to modern society is to incur the grave risk of compromising the fundamental verities of our Faith in an effort to make it conform to current theories and practices (Universal House of Justice in Khan, 24-25).

The objective of this study is to assist humanity in its journey toward 'what could be' by developing a model of spiritually-inspired resource development. This is done by exploring Bahá'í resource development and comparing it to related literature. From the Bahá'í perspective, this is a very appropriate undertaking.

What is the role of the researcher in this type of study?

It is noted above that, in systemic inquiry, one of the elements of the system in question that requires identification is the system's

observer. Likewise, Bawden argues that participation is an implicit aspect of any systemic exploration:

[T]he process of participation is a fundamental systemic issue. As Skolimowski (1985) has it, “wholeness means that all parts belong together, and that means they partake in each other. Thus from the central idea that all is connected, that each is part of the whole, comes the idea that each participates in the whole. Thus participation is an implicit aspect of wholeness” (Bawden FSR/E, 12).

Theology, moreover, is one of the more participatory forms of inquiry *in* that the investigator is conducting research into a system of which *she* is a part. Lott and others stress that theological studies are never *value*-free, nor should students of religion expect themselves to be *totally* objective. “C. Davis (1981) contends that the attempt by *many* students of religion to keep personal religious beliefs distinct *from* the neutral study of religious phenomena, and to be unconcerned *about* questions of truth and value in relation to these phenomena, is ‘*hermeneutical and philosophical naivete*’” (Lott, 215).

This is particularly true in Bahá’í scholarship. Not only should a Bahá’í scholar be honest about her subjectivity, but she should also be *honest* about her faith, which implies a belief in the truth of what she

is studying. Noting examples of when Bahá'í scholars have “cast the Faith into a mould which is essentially foreign to its nature, taking no account of the spiritual forces which Bahá'ís see as its foundation” by attempting to achieve “academic objectivity”, the Universal House of Justice wrote

This approach, although understandable, is quite impossible for a Bahá'í, for it ignores the fact that our world-view includes the spiritual dimension as an indispensable component for consistency and coherence, and it does not beseem a Bahá'í to write . . . about his Faith as if he looked upon it from the norm of humanism or materialism (in Research Department *Scholarship*, 37).

In other words, Bahá'í scholarship is an exploration into a spiritual experience, the characteristics of which should not be lost in any attempt to be completely objective:

In scientific investigation, when searching after the facts of any matter, a Bahá'í must, of course, be entirely open-minded, but in his interpretation of the facts, and his evaluation of evidence we do not see by what logic he can ignore the truth of the Bahá'í Revelation which he has already accepted; to do so would, we feel, be both hypocritical and unscholarly (Universal House of Justice in Khan, 18).

As a Bahá'í, the investigator in this study is implicitly

Participating in the subject of his inquiry. He is not simply studying a

social system; he is studying what he considers to be the divine design of a process through which people can learn to more sustainably steward the environment and practice development. The author was originally motivated to undertake this study by his understanding of ‘what is’ and his frustration with the apparent lack of progress toward his understanding of the Bahá’í vision of ‘what could be’. He was particularly puzzled by the difficulties that people seem to have changing behavior they *know* is harmful to themselves, society, and the environment. Nowhere was this more puzzling than within his own spiritual community. It is his hope that what follows will assist himself and others to become the people who they would like to be and to create the world in which they would like to live.

This is only one perspective on this process, grounded in a particular belief system. Nevertheless, much can be learned by Bahá’ís and non-Bahá’ís alike from such an undertaking. The investigator has no expectation that the reader will accept this perspective, only that she will consider its potential contribution and reconcile it with her own perspective. It is inconsequential whether Bahá’í scripture is a

genuine source of truth or not; what is of consequence is that millions of people believe that Bahá'í scripture is divine revelation and are striving to translate its truth into practice. It is the investigator's hope that this study will assist them in that effort.

Finally, both the author and the reader should be reminded that this is nothing more than one fallible individual's attempt at shedding some light on a very complex process. Shoghi Effendi provides fitting words with which to launch such an endeavor:

To claim to have grasped all the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's prodigious scheme for world-wide human solidarity, or to have fathomed its import, would be presumptuous on the part of even the declared supporters of His Faith. To attempt to visualize it in all its possibilities, to estimate its future benefits, to picture its glory, would be premature at even so advanced a stage in the evolution of mankind (Shoghi Effendi *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 34).

The author hopes that what follows reflects the humility with which it has been written.

Summary of the Research Design: What was actually done? What data were collected? How?

The initial task of this study, which is the objective of Chapter 3, is to systemically describe Bahá'í resource development. The basic approach is theological, taking the literature of the Bahá'í canon as the source of primary data. Bahá'í literature is widely available and indexed both in written form and electronically via the internet or on CD-ROM. The works of other Bahá'í scholars are also drawn upon as sources of secondary data. The first step is to describe the 'what is', 'what could be', and 'process' of Bahá'í resource development. Next, the systemic nature of Bahá'í resource development is explored to develop a theoretical model of spiritually-inspired resource development in the Bahá'í Faith and to answer the question: 'What are the systemic characteristics and dynamics of Bahá'í resource development?' The final task of this exploration is to develop a framework for understanding spiritually-inspired resource development by considering that model in light of the literature of related fields. The nature of that task is explored in the next section.

Part III: How Were the Data Examined?: The Problem-Focused Literature Review

Conventionally, the problem-focused literature review directly follows an explanation of the methodology to be used. The rationale behind this approach is to situate the study within the literature of its field. If this study were the least bit conventional, that might be an appropriate approach. But it is not, nor is there a well-established body of related literature that specifically addresses the questions and issues of concern. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the exploration, it was unclear what exactly would be discovered in the course of the investigation of Bahá'í resource development. Part of the problem is that this study is very interdisciplinary and systemic in nature, and most scholars are disciplinary and reductionist in their research. Therefore, to answer the question: "How have other scholars, by examining similar models or elements thereof, explored the nature and extent of the relationship between theory, practice, and spirituality and between people and the environment, and how does their inquiry compare to Bahá'í resource development?", requires an exploration and integration of the literature in a wide variety of fields. Therefore,

the model developed in Chapter 3 was examined and interpreted in light of relevant literature in Chapter 4 only after it was well-articulated. In other words, the research findings drove the literature review, rather than literature driving the research. The rationale behind the literature selected for use in the literature review is grounded in the findings of Chapter 3 and is therefore explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

The final task of this study is to use the comparative examination described above to develop a more general, comprehensive spiritually-inspired resource development framework. Such a theoretical framework could be considered the 'what could be' of the 'process' that connects the 'what is' and the 'what could be' of environmental stewardship and developmentalism. From another perspective, the subject of this study is spiritually-inspired resource development, and one model of it, which is developed using the literature of the Bahá'í Faith, is used to ground the study in a real, albeit theoretical, example. The literature review is then used to reconnect the model with related literature in order to make more

general comments about the nature of spiritually-inspired resource development. Hopefully, this sheds some light on the ‘process’ that will help people get from ‘what is’ to ‘what could be’.

Part IV: What Are the Limitations of this Design?

Limitations with this design include but are not limited to:

- It is a new, untested application of systems theory and practice;
- It is based on a single spiritual system and therefore explores only one aspect of a relatively unexplored field;
- Relevant literature for the literature review may not come to the attention of the investigator;
- The study raises more questions than it answers.

None of these limitations render the study undoable.

CHAPTER 3: THE SYSTEMIC NATURE OF BAHÁ'Í RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The objective of this chapter is to develop a theoretical model of spiritually-inspired resource development in the Bahá'í Faith. As is noted above, this is part of a preliminary effort at examining spiritually-inspired resource development as one example of the 'process' that bridges the 'process gap' between 'what is' and 'what could be'. Because it is difficult to understand the 'process' without first understanding where it is moving from and toward, the first two sections of this chapter briefly outline the 'what is' and 'what could be' that Bahá'í resource development bridges. The third section is a description of the process of Bahá'í resource development (BRD). In the final section, the systemic nature of Bahá'í resource development is explored to develop a theoretical model of spiritually-inspired resource development in the Bahá'í Faith and to answer the question: 'What are *the* systemic characteristics and dynamics of Bahá'í resource *development?*'

Two points are worth emphasizing at this juncture. First, what

follows is simply an explanation of one particular perspective — a Bahá'í perspective — on the nature of reality, human possibilities, and a process for realizing those possibilities. This is exposition, not criticism, so great effort is made to explain, but no effort is made to critically analyze. Second, it is important to note that what follows is a (not *the*) interpretation of Bahá'í resource development. In other words, this is one individual Bahá'í's (the author's) understanding based on his interpretation of the Bahá'í canon.

Rather than quote extensively from Bahá'í literature, the author selects key words and phrases (denoted by 'single quotation marks') to paraphrase and to concisely summarize main points. Full quotes supporting the interpretation are included as endnotes.

'What is': The State of the World from a Bahá'í World View

The Universe is Unified and Interdependent

The universe is a closely integrated, unified entity. There is one 'divine system'¹, 'one universal law and divine organization'² — 'Every **P**art of the universe is connected with every other part'³ to create an

‘organic whole’⁴, ‘an essential oneness in all existing things’⁵. The essence of this divine system is spirit, ‘the divine breath which animates and pervades all things’ and ‘is manifested throughout creation in different degrees’⁶. Despite this unity, the diverse elements of the universe also possess ‘certain points of distinction’⁷. This diversity distinguishes unity from homogeneity or uniformity. These distinct parts of the universe ‘influence one another’⁸, creating an interdependent, unified system.

This ecological unity and interdependence also includes humanity; ‘all breath the same atmosphere’ and ‘live upon the same earth’⁹. Because people are ‘organic with the world’, and the human heart cannot be segregated from the environment, people’s inner lives both mold the environment and are ‘deeply affected by it’; ‘every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions’¹⁰ between people and the environment.

This universal interdependent unity is analogous to a human being with a body, mind, and soul¹¹. The body is like natural resources, the intellect or mind of the body is like humankind, and the

spiritual soul of the body is like 'divine civilization'¹², or the 'Kingdom of God'¹³. The earth (or the body) is the source of all prosperity, wealth, and advancement for humanity (the mind)¹⁴.

The connection and interchange of forces between the parts of existence are the 'cause of life of the world'¹⁵. Moreover, 'cooperation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness'. Clearly then, 'cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly'¹⁶. The strengths and weaknesses of each part affect the rest of the universe or body, so if 'these members lack coordination and harmony, we have . . . disease, dissolution, death'¹⁷.

The Universe was Created by and is Regulated by the Creative Spirit

The unity of the universe was created and is maintained by a transcendent, omnipotent, incomprehensible Creative Spirit*. This Spirit ‘encompasseth all, directing and regulating all the parts of this infinite creation’; without this Spirit ‘the universe would be flawed and deficient’. Within the interconnected universe, this Spirit ‘influenceth all, and yet is influenced by none, thus severing the chain’ of connection — it is distinct and apart from, and ‘immeasurably exalted above, all created things’¹⁸. Similarly, the entire universe reflects the glory and attributes of the Creative Spirit, yet the Spirit is independent of and transcends creation¹⁹ — this paradox is referred to as the divine unity in the Bahá’í Faith. Although ‘Nature is God’s Will and its expression in and through the contingent world’²⁰, and the influences and signs of the Creative Spirit ‘are clear and evident’, the ‘inner

*‘Creative Spirit’ is used interchangeably throughout this study with ‘the Creator’ and ‘God’. Use of the latter is avoided because, in contemporary western culture, ‘God’ is often associated with an identifiable entity (and in the worst extreme as a old, bearded, white male). The Creative Spirit is neither identifiable in time or space nor an entity with any characteristics that human minds can comprehend.

reality of that Being . . . is not known²¹ and is completely incomprehensible to humans²². Nevertheless, the Creative Spirit assists humankind and is able to deliver it ‘from its state of grievous abasement’ and to help people evolve spiritually²³. The Creative Spirit uses the Holy Spirit* as an intermediary to intervene in and assist with human development²⁴. Likewise, the Manifestations of God, which are knowable, are as the ‘root of the tree’ of life²⁵ because they reflect the attributes of the Creative Spirit and serve as intermediaries between humanity and the Creative Spirit. Their mission on earth is to respiritualize and reunify a materialistic and superficially divided humanity²⁶.

Humanity’s Primary Purpose is to Spiritually Develop Toward Knowing and Loving the Creative Spirit

People have three aspects — the body, mind, and soul — each of which are connected and interact with the others²⁷. The spirit, as the ‘animus of human life’, is the most important element²⁸, and the

*The ‘Holy Spirit’ is the spiritual essence of the Creative Spirit that intervenes directly in human affairs.

primary purpose of creation is spiritual²⁹. Material reality, in contrast, is nothing but a 'shadow' of the real, spiritual world — a mere 'fantasy'³⁰.

The Creative Spirit 'called creation into being' that it 'might be known'³¹. Therefore, the goal of spirituality is for people to know and to love the Creative Spirit³². Love of the Creative Spirit, or faith, is the 'spirit of life' and the source of all human love — 'All things are beneficial if joined with the love of God; and without His love all things are harmful'³³. Likewise, while in the knowledge of material reality 'there is material advantage, and through it outward civilization progresses', 'the knowledge of God is the cause of spiritual progress and attraction, and through it the perception of truth, the exaltation of humanity, divine civilization, rightness of morals and illumination are obtained'. The knowledge of the Creative Spirit is 'the cause of everlasting life, eternal honor, universal enlightenment, real salvation and prosperity'³⁴. Because the Creative Spirit itself is unknowable, such knowledge and love is possible only through the teachings of the **Its Manifestations**³⁵.

Social and Economic Development is Encouraged by the Creative Spirit

The “concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings” of the Bahá’í Faith (Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 20 October 1983 to the Bahá’ís of the world, in *Messages From the Universal House of Justice*, 602). Likewise, “The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 129-130)³⁶.

People have been ‘created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization’³⁷, to work toward the ‘rehabilitation of the world and the well-being of nations’³⁸, to ‘further civilization and the arts of living’³⁹, and to promote development⁴⁰. The ‘advancement and betterment of the world’ and the ‘development of countries’, moreover, is the duty of Bahá’í institutions (Constitution of the Universal House of Justice).

Love is the Glue of Creation and the Catalyst of Development

Love is the ‘the ground of all things’⁴¹, the ‘very cause of life’⁴². It is ‘that magnet which renders existence eternal’⁴³, the ‘vital bond

inherent . . . in the realities of things', and the 'unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world'.

Moreover, love 'ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next'; it is the light that 'assureth the progress of every illumined soul', that 'causeth every soul to go forward'⁴⁴, and the 'establisher of true civilization in this mortal world'⁴⁵. '[S]piritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity' among all people⁴⁶.

There are four kinds of love⁴⁷. The first is the 'love of God towards the identity of God', which in the Christian Gospel is expressed as 'God is Love'. The second is the love of the Creative Spirit for creation, the source of all love, through which the world receives life; this love is the 'Holy Spirit's eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul'⁴⁸. The third is the love that flows from people to the Creative Spirit, which is faith, receptivity to the assistance of the Creative Spirit, and the origin of all philanthropy. The fourth is human love for other humans, which 'is attained through the knowledge of God', so that people see in others 'the Beauty of God

reflected in the soul’.

All Humans are Equal

All humanity, regardless of gender, skin color, nationality, religion, age, or other distinctions, was created ‘from the same dust’ and is as ‘one soul’⁴⁹ — ‘The plurality of humanity may be likened to the waves, but the reality of humankind is like the sea itself’⁵⁰. All humanity “belong to the same family, to the same original race. . . .This signifies that racial assumption and distinction are nothing but superstition. . . .All of [the different nationalities] in the presence of God are equal; they are one race and creation” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation*, 299). Humanity is likened to a garden of flowers in which the differences of ethnicity and color are like the beauty of the diversity of flowers in a garden. If all of the flowers were of the same color and morphology, the garden would ‘be monotonous and wearing to the eye’⁵¹.

As regards gender differences, ‘the rational soul has no sex’^{52*},

*Unfortunately, many of statements of the Bahá’í International

‘women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God’⁵³, and ‘in the estimation of God there is no distinction of sex’⁵⁴. In short, women and men are as two wings of a bird⁵⁵. Nevertheless, ‘man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind’⁵⁶, which has had significant negative impacts — the outcomes of human endeavors in which women have not played an equal role have never been as successful as those in which women have actively participated⁵⁷. The progress of both sexes is predicated on women’s advancement⁵⁸.

Humans have a Distinguished Station

Humans are the ‘greatest’ members of the world of creation because they are ‘the sum of all existing perfections’⁵⁹ and are the only creatures that are not ‘captives of nature’ and are able to deviate from ‘obedience to natural law’⁶⁰. As the greatest members of the world of material creation, humans represent the ‘highest degree of materiality’

Community (BIC), whether on the internet or in printed form, do not have numbered pages. Therefore, page numbers are not provided in many of the citations from the BIC.

but are ‘at the beginning of spirituality’⁶¹. In other words, humans are unique because of their ability to transcend material reality with their spiritual and intellectual capacities⁶² — they have both a ‘spirit’, which ‘embraces all things’, is able to discover ‘the realities of things’, and gives humans the ‘powers of advancement toward spiritual and transcendental kingdoms’⁶³, and a mind, which is the ‘power’ of the spirit, the ‘light’ of the lamp of the spirit, and ‘fruit’ of the tree of spirit⁶⁴. In humans ‘are potentially revealed all the attributes of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed’⁶⁵.

This is not to deny, however, the essential unity and interdependence of creation. Superior capacity does not imply greater relative value or importance, nor does it encourage self-centered anthropocentrism. On the contrary, superior capacity implies greater responsibility to use those capacities for the good of all creation. Despite their potential, however, people often fail to live up to it by neglecting the virtues potentially derived from the ‘conscious spirit’ with which they are endowed⁶⁶; they have demonstrated their potential to progress materially but have yet to match material with spiritual

progress. This imbalance has significant negative consequences, as is explained in more detail below.

Genuine Religion is the Key to Balancing Material and Spiritual Development

Just as individuals are failing to live up to their potential, many contemporary world religions are failing to serve the needs of humanity, which leads to the ‘perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions’ and ‘in the end to chaos and confusion’⁶⁷. For many, religion has become largely ‘irrelevant to the major concerns of the modern world’ and has been replaced with ‘the hedonistic pursuit of material satisfactions’ or man-made ideologies that tend ‘to deify the state, to subordinate the rest of mankind to one nation, race or class, to attempt to suppress all discussion and interchange of ideas, or to callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind’⁶⁸.

But religion also ‘promotes the civilization and honor, the prosperity and prestige, the learning and advancement of a people once abject’⁶⁹, has been the ‘basis of all civilization and progress in the history of mankind’⁷⁰, has the potential to balance material and spiritual advancement⁷¹, and is ‘the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquility amongst its peoples’⁷². It is through religion that ‘masses of people in all ages and lands have developed the capacity to love’, ‘to make sacrifices for the common good’, to develop virtues, and ‘to use wealth and other resources in ways that serve the advancement of civilization’⁷³. Religion has exerted ‘preponderating influence . . . on the vital expressions of civilization’ and has proven indispensable in the establishment of social order through its ‘direct effect on laws and morality’⁷⁴.

From this perspective, religion is more than a mere ‘series of beliefs’ or ‘set of customs’; it is the teachings of the Creative Spirit that ‘constitute the very life of humankind’⁷⁵. As the etymological roots of religion (*religio*) imply, it is a *reconnection* of humans with the Creative

Spirit. For the purposes of this study, 'religion' is used in this sense — as those institutions and activities that foster the spiritual reconnection between people and the Creative Spirit — and does not necessarily refer to *organized* religions. Organized religions may certainly be religious in nature (that is, if they foster spiritual reconnections), but, as is noted above, many are failing to serve the needs of humanity and have become irrelevant to the major concerns of the modern world.

Institutions Provide the Structure of Religion

For religion to foster this reconnection between people and the Creative Spirit, it requires a certain degree of structure. In the Bahá'í Faith, this structure is provided by decentralized, democratically-elected, and structurally egalitarian administrative institutions. These institutions are designed to embody the truth, demonstrate the validity, and perpetuate the influence of the oneness of humankind⁷⁶. Each city or village where at least nine adult Bahá'ís reside elects its own Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA), and individuals vote for

delegates who elect the National Spiritual Assembly (NSA). Members of NSAs, in turn, elect the Universal House of Justice, which is the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith and sits in Haifa, Israel, at the Bahá'í World Center. Members of each of these institutions are elected democratically without nominations or electioneering. All Bahá'ís over the age of twenty-one are eligible to serve on Spiritual Assemblies, and election is considered a call to service, a religious duty. Members are not elected for individual positions; each has equal standing within the Assembly, although assemblies delegate specific responsibilities among their members. Elected members serve one year terms, with the exception of the Universal House of Justice, whose members serve five year terms.

Together, these administrative bodies make up the Administrative Order — the “organic”, “living and dynamic” system of organization and ‘instrument of the spirit’ — of the Bahá'í Faith (Shoghi Effendi *Lights of Divine Guidance Vol. I*, 181)⁷⁷. This Order is unique in the history of political and religious systems in that, because it was designed by a Manifestation before his death, it maintains unity

within the Faith:

Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word* and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances**. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 144-146)⁷⁸.

The primary role of assemblies is to provide guidance for the communities that they serve⁷⁹. They are to serve as “channels of divine guidance”, “developers of human resources”, and “builders of communities” while “fostering the spirit of service” within their communities (Universal House of Justice in a letter dated May 1996 to the Bahá'ís of the world). Decisions are made through consultation, and only in extreme cases by voting^{***}. No Assembly has the power of scriptural interpretation, and only the Universal House of Justice can legislate, and then only in cases in which none of the central figures of the Faith have already. Local affairs are administered locally with local

*Abdu'l-Bahá.

**The Universal House of Justice.

***Consultation is explained in more detail below.

funds, and local, national, and international affairs are supported with individual contributions; as only Bahá'ís are permitted to contribute to Bahá'í funds, non-Bahá'í financial support is not used to administer any affairs of the Faith.

The Covenant Maintains Religious Unity

To avoid disintegration and schism, the religious connection between the Creative Spirit and humankind is formalized in the form of a covenant. As with any covenant, both parties to the agreement pledge certain behavior. In this case, the Creative Spirit requires of people certain behavior in return for which it guarantees certain blessings. There is both the Greater Covenant, with which the Creative Spirit promises further guidance from future Manifestations, and the Lesser Covenant, which a particular Manifestation makes with His followers so that they will accept His appointed successor and maintain religious unity⁸⁰. The Greater Covenant is the source of the 'progressive revelation' of the Creative Spirit through successive Manifestations⁸¹. Progressive revelation, the most fundamental

principle of the Bahá'í Faith, implies

that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society (Shoghi Effendi *The Promised Day is Come*, preface page 5).

All the Manifestations, including but not limited to Zoroaster, Krishna, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Buddha, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh, came from the same Source and revealed the same essential message concerning the ethical development, spiritual progress, and social advancement of humankind. From this perspective, there is, in essence, only one religion. According to the capacity of humanity at the time and depending on the culture in which it was revealed, the message of each Manifestation differed, however, in its social teachings and in the intensity of the revelation⁸². A major goal, therefore, of the Bahá'í Faith is to instill 'into each of its adherents a new love for, and a genuine appreciation of the unity underlying, the various religions

represented within its pale⁸³.

The Current Materialistic World Order is Defective

‘[M]aterial achievements and the development of the physical world’ have the capacity to produce not only ‘prosperity’ but also ‘dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions’. ‘Progress and barbarism go hand in hand’ unless material civilization is guided spiritually⁸⁴. Because humanity has lost its faith in and neglected its covenant with the Creative Spirit, it has become for the most part overly concerned with material civilization and holds a deeply materialistic view of the purpose and fundamental nature of the individual, society, and development. As a result of this spiritual malaise, individuals are generally selfish, ‘submerged in the affairs of the world’, and driven by ‘desire and passion’, which ‘is the cause of the degradation of the world’⁸⁵. Because people are organic with the world, and their inner lives mold the environment, ‘the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is the lack of spirituality’⁸⁶. Examples of these ‘evils’ include the widespread lack of moral discipline, the

glorification of greed and material accumulation, the increasing breakdown of family and community, the rise of lawlessness and corruption, ‘the spread of tyranny’, the ascendancy of racism and bigotry, the priority given to national interests over the welfare of humanity, war⁸⁷, the ‘unrestrained exploitation of natural resources’, and ‘the contamination of the atmosphere of the earth’⁸⁸. The result of this materialism is the ‘violent derangement of the world’s equilibrium’, a ‘lamentably defective’ world order characterized by disunity, discord, injustice, chaos, confusion, and strife⁸⁹, and modes of developmentalism that have failed to provide for the well-being of the people all over the world. In other words, from the Bahá’í perspective, ‘what is’, as described in Chapter 1, is the result of materialism and aspirituality.

Humanity is Simultaneously Devolving and Evolving

Humanity “has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent

adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age” (Universal House of Justice *The Promise of World Peace*)⁹⁰. This process of maturation can be likened to ‘fermentation’. As in natural fermentation, the process that humanity is experiencing involves both disintegration and integration. The former is the process described above characterized by disorder and decline that ‘tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity’s progress towards its destined goal’⁹¹ — “The old order cannot be repaired; it is being rolled up before our eyes. The moral decay and disorder convulsing human society must run their course; we can neither arrest nor divert them” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 137). Ultimately, humankind will no longer be able to bear this process of disintegration, at which point people will ‘become aware that religion is the impregnable stronghold and the manifest light of the world’⁹². This awareness will, in turn, ultimately unify humankind⁹³. In other words, it has been necessary for humanity to evolve into and through this current defective world order, and out the present state of disorder will emerge a new society (see White, R.)⁹⁴.

The complementary process of integration, ‘as it steadily evolves, unfolds a System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing’. It is ‘associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, and is the harbinger of the New World Order* that Faith must ere long establish’⁹⁵. With Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, ‘the whole creation was revolutionized, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths’; ‘all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, entities of a new creation, and revealing’ the signs of the unity and oneness of the Creative Spirit⁹⁶. And this Revelation ‘can never permeate and exercise an abiding influence upon mankind unless and until it incarnates itself in a visible Order’⁹⁷, that of “the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh — a system which is at once the harbinger, the nucleus and pattern of His World Order” (Shoghi Effendi *God*

*It should be noted that Bahá’u’lláh introduced the term ‘New World Order’ over 100 years before President George Bush began using it to describe the post-Cold War world.

Passes By, preface page 15). Human-designed systems, however well-intentioned, or human leaders, however benevolent, cannot save humanity from the defective world order in which it is mired⁹⁸.

Summary of the Bahá'í 'What Is'

The universe is a unified, closely integrated, cooperative, coherent, and diverse yet interdependent organic whole. In particular, humanity, which holds a unique station because of the human spiritual and intellectual capacities, is one united soul, so individuals are equal regardless of gender, race, or other material distinctions. This unity in diversity was created and is maintained by an incomprehensible Creative Spirit that is part of yet independent of the universe. Love binds the universe together and is a catalyst of development. The primary purpose of creation is spiritual — for people to know and to love the Creative Spirit and thereby learn to understand the unity of the universe and to develop spiritually and materially. Religion, which is established through Manifestations from the Creative Spirit, is the means through which humans can learn to know and love the Creative

Spirit and the key to balancing material and spiritual development. In part due to the demise of religion, the spiritual malaise, and the materialism that pervades society, the current world order is defective, as evidenced by the gross human injustices and environmental tragedies that characterize the contemporary world. As if the world were experiencing adolescence, this process of disintegration is complemented by a simultaneous process of integration. Ultimately, a New World Order will develop out of these twin processes.

***‘What could be’:
A Bahá’í Vision of Human Possibilities in a New World Order***

Through its process of maturation, humanity has ‘gained the capacity to express the splendours of spiritual perfections and divine ideals and became capable of hearkening to the call of God’, it ‘acquireth the capacity to manifest spiritual and intellectual perfections’⁹⁹, it will ‘acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend’¹⁰⁰, and it will be ‘imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities’¹⁰¹. The

ultimate, inevitable result of this process of maturation will be the ‘emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture’¹⁰², ‘a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units’¹⁰³. The current world order will be ‘rolled up and a new one spread out in its stead’¹⁰⁴. This New World Order will be characterized by world-wide unity, peace, and justice¹⁰⁵. The task of this next section is to describe in more detail the characteristics of this New World Order, of the Bahá’í vision of ‘what could be’.

Material Characteristics of the New World Order

Global Governance

Politically, the New World Order will manifest as a global federal commonwealth consisting of a world legislature, executive, and tribunal. A system of collective security will be established to maintain peace¹⁰⁶, and nations will cooperate to devise and adopt ‘measures

designed to preserve the ecological balance this earth was given by its Creator'¹⁰⁷. A global communication system supplemented by a world language and script will facilitate communication. The international economic system will be organized for the best use of resources, to coordinate markets for the equitable distribution of goods, and to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth¹⁰⁸. Resources diverted from military expenses

will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 203-204).

Permeating Spirit of Justice

Moreover, these global structures of governance of the New World Order will all be infused with the principle of justice. Justice, 'that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish

truth from falsehood', 'is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected'. With justice as the guiding principle, the collective good will no longer be sacrificed for the good of a privileged few, and the commitment of the masses of humanity, upon whom implementation of development plans depends, will be actively engaged¹⁰⁹. Justice will eventually transform the face of the earth¹¹⁰.

Gender Equality

One way in which justice will manifest itself in the New World Order will be in the realization of gender equality¹¹¹. Equal access to education will be the tool used to establish gender equality¹¹²; as a matter of fact, priority will be accorded to the education of girls and women when resources are limited. The new age 'will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals . . . an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced' and in which the 'mental alertness, intuition, and the

spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong' will gain ascendancy¹¹³. Men will 'own the equality of women'¹¹⁴ so that women and men can work together as partners (Bahá'í International Community *Women and Development*). When women and men enjoy the same arena of activity and the same prerogatives, humanity will realize extraordinary attainment¹¹⁵, achieve the highest levels of social development and progress¹¹⁶, and abolish war¹¹⁷.

Moderation

Justice will also manifest itself as moderation in the new Order. In his analysis of the significant standing of agriculture in the Bahá'í scriptures (and the principles apply equally well in this context), Hanley stresses the importance of balance or moderation between all extremes, including unity and diversity, materialism and spirituality, interdependence and self-reliance, and globalism and decentralism. Each of these examples of balance have been addressed above or will be below in more detail. Of particular relevance to this discussion is the stress placed in the Bahá'í writings on the need for moderation in

the development of civilization. Civilization, if ‘allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation’, will ‘bring great evil upon men’ and ‘prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation’¹¹⁸. In a global society infused with the principle of justice and moderation, those in authority will avoid the ‘pernicious influence’ of things carried to excess ‘so that none among them may suffer want, or be pampered with luxuries’¹¹⁹.

Economic Reorganization

The Bahá’í Faith is not an economic system, so there are few technical teachings in the Bahá’í canon on economics: ‘The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists of the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system’¹²⁰. Global governance, justice, and moderation will transform contemporary economic systems so as to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth in the New World Order¹²¹:

The classical economic models of impersonal markets in which human beings act as autonomous makers of self-regarding choices will not serve the needs of a world

motivated by ideals of unity and justice. Society will find itself increasingly challenged to develop new economic models shaped by insights that arise from a sympathetic understanding of shared experience, from viewing human beings in relation to others, and from a recognition of the centrality to social well-being of the role of the family and the community (*Universal House of Justice Prosperity*).

This will be accomplished less by regulation and coercion than it will be voluntarily: ‘Hearts must be so cemented together, love must become so dominant that the rich shall most willingly extend assistance to the poor and take steps to establish these economic adjustments permanently’¹²². The participation of women in the process of transforming economic systems will prove particularly important¹²³.

Transformed Developmentalism and Environmental Stewardship

All of the changes outlined above will have tremendous implications for the environment in the New World Order. As people spiritually reframe their conceptions and reorient their actions, both their inward lives and the environment will be reshaped¹²⁴. For instance, animals will be treated with kindness and respect, and people

will gradually adopt vegetarian diets¹²⁵. The world will become an ‘earthly paradise, ‘a true abode of bliss, a place of manifold blessings and unending delights’¹²⁶. In more practical terms, this will require a certain level of deliberate environmental stewardship or ‘trusteeship’ on the part of humankind¹²⁷ — long-term ecological sustainability requires the preservation and regeneration of natural resources and of the ‘ecological balance of the world’¹²⁸. At the same time, great care and humility will be required because many of the workings of the natural world, some of which could ‘prove lethal’ if mishandled, will remain beyond human comprehension¹²⁹. As the ‘fundamental basis’ of community¹³⁰, agriculture will be the root of all development and the foundation of the social and economic life of communities.

Bahá’u’lláh wrote that “Special regard must be paid to agriculture” and that it is “conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world” (*Tablets*, 89-90).

Balanced Material and Spiritual Development

Because none of these material characteristics of the New World Order will develop strictly through material means, the New World Order will be characterized by a balanced, 'dynamic coherence' between material and spiritual development¹³¹. All human endeavors require material means¹³², but true progress 'is the expression of spirit in the world of matter'¹³³. 'No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness of mankind. Only when material and spiritual civilization are linked and coordinated will happiness be assured'¹³⁴. The operative words are 'balance' and 'coherence'. Neither extreme, material or spiritual, will prove beneficial. It is useful to think in terms of a continuum, with extreme materialism, which characterizes contemporary 'what is', on one end, and extreme spirituality, which is characterized by asceticism or fatalism, on the other*. Both extremes are equally unproductive and unhealthy.

*The author would like to credit Melanie Smith with developing the idea of a continuum.

Returning to the analogy in which material civilization is likened to a body, a ‘body not manifesting the spirit is dead’¹³⁵. Similarly, material development is like a lamp that requires the light of spiritual development to be useful¹³⁶. Another common analogy in the Bahá’í writings describing the material-spiritual balance is of a bird with two wings:

For man two wings are necessary. One wing is physical power and material civilization; the other is spiritual power and divine civilization. With one wing only, flight is impossible. Two wings are essential. Therefore, no matter how much material civilization advances, it cannot attain to perfection except through the uplift of spiritual civilization (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 12)¹³⁷.

Spiritual Characteristics of the New World Order

Transformed Individuals: Individual Spiritual Development and a New Way of Life

The most basic elements of society are individuals, in their hands lies the ‘fate of the entire community’¹³⁸, and they are the ‘agency’ through which nations and governments will be ‘guided’ and the ‘unity of mankind may be established and its prosperity and success realized’¹³⁹. ‘[A]ll the inhabitants of the planet’ are the ‘protagonists’

to whom the challenge of reshaping ‘fundamentally all the institutions of society’¹⁴⁰ has been given. If individuals are the cells of the body of humankind, ‘No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it’, and each has been endowed with ‘ability and talent’¹⁴¹. In particular, all Bahá’ís, ‘irrespective of circumstances or resources, are endowed with the capacity to respond in some measure [to the call from the Universal House of Justice to initiate social and economic development activities]’¹⁴². Each Bahá’í’s participation in community life ‘is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown’¹⁴³.

At the individual level in the New World Order, religion will transform the human heart so that people develop qualities that transcend narrow self-interest (Bahá’í International Community Office of the Environment). This process of spiritual development, which is the ‘fundamental purpose underlying creation’, is a product of the individual’s internalization of religious teachings and will manifest in the ‘appearance of trustworthiness and godliness, of sincerity and goodwill amongst mankind, for these qualities are the cause of peace,

security and tranquility'¹⁴⁴. This process will 'transform ignorance into wisdom, injustice into justice, error into knowledge, cruelty into affection and incapability into progress'¹⁴⁵ and create 'a new kind of people, people who are upright, kind, intelligent, truthful, and honest'¹⁴⁶. The New World Order will be a world in which people are 'united in counsel' and 'one in thought', where people's 'merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches', their speech is 'purged from idle fancies and worldly desires', their deeds 'cleansed from craftiness and suspicion', and they are 'generous in . . . days of plenty' and 'patient in the hour of loss'¹⁴⁷. The 'prosperity of the human world', therefore, will manifest as 'good attributes and virtues', including justice, equity, benevolence, courage, fortitude, humility, 'the respect for rights and the keeping of agreements and covenants', and 'the sacrifice of one's life for the good of all people'¹⁴⁸. Similarly, 'real happiness' will be grounded in self-respect, high resolve, noble purposes, integrity, moral quality, and immaculacy of mind'¹⁴⁹. All people have the potential to develop spiritually and to acquire these qualities¹⁵⁰, which are the 'gems that lie hidden within the mine

of their true and inmost selves'¹⁵¹.

From a complementary perspective, spiritual development can be understood as the development of a new way of life. The teachings of the Bahá'í Faith do “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 . . .” (Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 21 July 1968, in Hanley, 4). Therefore, there is no way of telling today how problems in the New World Order will be addressed, but individuals will lead lives that empower them — through the application of spiritual principles — to avoid problems or be better equipped to meet them when they arise.

Strong, Growing Communities

Individual transformation will, in turn, complement community-level growth in the New World Order. Communities will become more united, strengthened, ‘self-sufficient and self-reliant’¹⁵². They will be ‘serene and confident’, will ‘resonate with spiritual dynamism’,

will ‘exert irresistible influence’, and will ‘set a new course in social evolution’¹⁵³. Economic and social development initiatives, grounded in the ‘resourcefulness, flexibility and cohesiveness’ of healthy local communities, will be commonplace¹⁵⁴.

Ultimately, the centers of Bahá’í community life will be Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs, local Bahá’í houses of worship. Once individual hearts and minds are spiritually illumined, people begin applying spiritual principles to daily life, and communities grow stronger, material structures of a community will be constructed. In addition to providing houses of worship, the facilities established around the Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs will play key administrative, social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific roles; they will house ‘institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant’. In essence, these institutions will be living examples of the ‘dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth’¹⁵⁵ and will ‘provide the essentials of Bahá’í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world’¹⁵⁶.

Spiritualized Institutions and Organizations

At the institutional level, organizations in the New World Order will be ‘governed by principles that are in harmony with the evolving interests of a rapidly maturing human race’, including gaining the ‘confidence, respect, and genuine support of those whose actions they seek to govern’, consulting ‘openly and to the fullest extent possible with all whose interests are affected by decisions being arrived at’, assessing ‘in an objective manner both the real needs and the aspirations of the communities they serve’, and capitalizing on ‘scientific and moral advancement in order to make appropriate use of the community’s resources’¹⁵⁷. In other words, organizations will be truly representative of their constituencies and will make decisions in a collaborative and participatory manner.

The Bahá’í Administrative Order, which Shoghi Effendi refers to as a “living organism” (*World Order*, 23), will serve as an example of such institutions. The Bahá’í assemblies are the ‘potent sources of the progress of man’¹⁵⁸ ‘designed to benefit the entire human race’ by reforming the community life of humankind¹⁵⁹. As such, the

Administrative Order is ‘the ideal instrument to make spiritual laws function properly in the material affairs of the world’¹⁶⁰. It will be the ‘structural basis’, the ‘pattern’, and the ‘nucleus’ of the New World Order¹⁶¹, the instrument ‘wherein the embryonic World Order of Bahá’u’lláh can mature and develop’¹⁶², and the framework for the future world commonwealth¹⁶³.

The Essence of the New World Order: The Recognition and Internalization of Unity in Diversity

As individuals, communities, and institutions develop spiritually, people in the New World Order will grow to recognize and internalize the unity of the universe. According to the Universal House of Justice, the fundamental spiritual truth of our age and “the bedrock of a strategy that can engage the world’s population in assuming responsibility for its collective destiny must be the consciousness of the oneness of humankind” (*Prosperity*). The watchword of the Bahá’í Faith is ‘unity in diversity’¹⁶⁴. As long as prejudices persist, ‘the advancement of the world of humanity is not possible’¹⁶⁵. ‘Recognition

of [the oneness of humankind] requires abandonment of prejudice — prejudice of every kind — race, class, colour, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others¹⁶⁶, and this is possible only through the love of the Creative Spirit¹⁶⁷. This recognition will foster ‘harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations’, will ‘bind all the states and nations as members of one human family’, and will create an ‘organic change in the structure of present-day society’ that will represent the ‘consummation of human evolution’¹⁶⁸. “The stronger the ties of fellowship and solidarity amongst men, the greater will be the power of constructiveness and accomplishment in all the planes of human activity” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation*, 338) — ‘Nothing can be effected in the world, not even conceivably, without unity and agreement’¹⁶⁹. In particular, the key to success in development work will be ‘unity in spirit and action’¹⁷⁰ — ‘nothing can effectively oppose and hamper the forces of constructive development’ where a united will exists¹⁷¹.

Ultimately, humanity will be unified in spirit. Families, villages,

cities, nations — eventually the entire world — will be unified by bonds of love, and they will enjoy peace and prosperity¹⁷². When unity is established, it ‘will bring forth marvelous results, . . . reconcile all religions, make warring nations loving, cause hostile kings to become friendly and bring peace and happiness to the human world’, and lead to balanced and ‘constructive development’ of both material and spiritual resources¹⁷³. Systems of global governance and economic reorganization guided by the principles of justice, equity, and moderation will arise. Eventually, a world civilization will develop that ‘will in turn react on the character of the individual’, the end result of which will be universal salvation¹⁷⁴.

As the global process of spiritual development continues and humanity’s understanding of unity grows, the rest of creation will be affected in at least two ways. First, because people are organic with the world, the natural environment will grow and develop along with people. Returning to the analogy of the world as a human body, as the mind (humanity) develops, so will the body (nature). Second, as the process of spiritual development continues, people will grow to

understand the unity of all creation and their dependence on the health of the environment. This understanding will increase humanity's respect for, transform its interactions with, and improve its stewardship of nature. "So powerful is the light of unity," Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "that it can illuminate the whole Earth" (*Gleanings*, 288).

Summary of the Bahá'í 'What could be'

The New World Order will be characterized by a dynamic, balanced coherence between material and spiritual development. At the individual level, striking the material-spiritual balance will require creating a new way of life by transforming the human heart through spiritual development. Individual transformation will, in turn, complement community-level growth and the spiritualization of organizations and institutions, making them more representative, collaborative, and participatory. Both the governing principle and the supreme objective of this process will be unity in diversity. At the international level, unity in diversity will manifest as a global commonwealth of nations that secures the peace and ensures the

equitable development of the world. Affairs at the global as well as local level will be permeated with a spirit of justice, one of the greatest results of which will be the equality of women and men. Moderation, likewise, will be the watchword for all endeavors. Global governance, justice, and moderation will transform contemporary economic systems so as to eliminate — through voluntary action — extremes of poverty and wealth. And as spiritual principles are applied, in turn, to environmental stewardship, the world will become an earthly paradise.

***The ‘Process’:
Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development in the Bahá’í Faith***

As is explained above, resource development, in the general sense, is resources being developed by people. More specifically, it is a system, a complex whole with interrelated, interacting, and interdependent components. These components include tangibles, such as human and natural resources; intangibles, like attitudes, world views, and theories; and the linkages between them, like behavior and practice, which connect people’s attitudes, world views, and theories

with natural resources and other people. Moreover, it is a dynamic system, and this dynamism is captured in the word ‘development’, which is used in this context to mean ‘qualitative improvement’ of both human and natural resources. In short, resource development is the dynamic, systemic interaction between natural resources and human theory and practice. Resource development that is spiritually-inspired has the added dimension of being infused with spirit. In other words, it is resource development that includes spiritual components, such as faith and love and their linkages throughout the rest of the system. Spiritually-inspired resource development is therefore the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice.

From another perspective, spiritually-inspired resource development is an example of the process of getting from the ‘what is’ to the ‘what could be’ described in the previous two sections. In other words, building on ‘what is’ — a unified yet diverse universe and humanity; its Creator; the love that binds the universe together and with the Creative Spirit; the charge given to humans to develop

spiritually so as to learn to know and love the Creative Spirit and thereby understand the unity of the universe; spiritual development fueled by a religious reconnection between people and the Creative Spirit; the defective, materialistic contemporary world; and the unfolding of a New World Order — spiritually-inspired resource development is the ‘process’ through which humanity can move toward ‘what could be’ — the New World Order characterized by a dynamic, balanced coherence between material and spiritual development; individual spiritual growth and adoption of a new way of life; community growth and more representative, collaborative, and participatory institutions; the realization of unity in diversity; the emergence of a global commonwealth; affairs regulated by the principles of justice, equity, and moderation; efficient and equitable economic systems; and environmental stewardship that recreates an earthly paradise.

The 'Process' of Bahá'í Resource Development is Spiritual Development

The essence of Bahá'í resource development is the process of individual and community spiritual development. It is demonstrated above that, from the perspective of the Bahá'í Faith, the root of and the solution to the world's problems are spiritual, and the process of spiritual development is primarily a religious reconnection between people and the Creative Spirit. The Universal House of Justice explains this in the context of environmental problems:

[T]he best way in which you can help to save the wildlife and natural condition of the world is to exert every effort to bring the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the attention of your fellowmen and to win their allegiance to His Cause.

As the hearts of men are changed, and they begin to work in unity in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, they can begin to implement many practical improvements to the condition of the world. This is already beginning in the efforts at social and economic development in those areas where large Bahá'í communities have been founded. Of course, you can also assist those with whom you come into contact who have an interest in improving the environment, but the fundamental solution is the one that Bahá'u'lláh has brought (Universal House of Justice, in *Research Department Conservation*, 16).

In another letter, the Universal House of Justice notes that little

progress will be made toward the solution of environmental problems
'Until such time as the nations of the world understand and follow the
admonitions of Bahá'u'lláh to whole-heartedly work together in
looking after the best interests of all humankind'¹⁷⁵. Elsewhere, it adds
that despite all of the efforts worldwide to improve the lot of
humankind, 'most of these efforts are frustrated by the conflicts of
aims, by corruption of the morals of those involved, by mistrust, or by
fear'. The principal cause of the world's suffering is 'the corruption of
human morals and the prevalence of prejudice, suspicion, hatred,
untrustworthiness, selfishness and tyranny among men'¹⁷⁶. The
problem is not lack of material resources — it is people's ignorance
about the purpose of life and about how to become united in
constructive effort¹⁷⁷.

As they develop spiritually, people learn to know and love the
Creative Spirit and understand the unity of the universe. This
transformation at the individual, community, and institutional levels
will, in turn, enable people to strike the balance between material and
spiritual development. Ultimately, out of this balance will emerge the

New World Order, which will manifest as a global commonwealth regulated by the principles of justice, equity, and moderation and characterized by an efficient and equitable economic system and sustainable environmental stewardship.

But if the essence of Bahá'í resource development and the key to the emergence of the New World Order is the process of individual and community spiritual development, what is the nature of that process of spiritual development? Spiritual development is a religious process fueled by individual faith, love, and the internalization and application of the teachings and laws of the Creative Spirit and catalyzed by divine assistance, fellowship, and the institutions of the Administrative Order. Each of these aspects of spiritual development are explained in more detail immediately below.

Religion is the Catalyst of Bahá'í Resource Development

Religion (i.e., *religio*), whose role is to facilitate the reconnection and establish the covenant between people and the Creative Spirit, acts as a catalyst for that process of spiritual development: 'First comes

the illumination of hearts and minds by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and then the grass roots stirring of the believers wishing to apply these teachings to the daily life of their community'¹⁷⁸. This all begins with developing love for the Creative Spirit, which is the 'greatest power in the human world' and through which all of the world's diverse individuals 'may be brought under the influence of the unity of the world of humanity'¹⁷⁹. As Dahl explains, only religion can effect such a transformation:

The essence of all revealed religions is a belief in something beyond ourselves. . . .

This central concept — unknown and unknowable — is the key to human development, because religion teaches us to desire it, to love it, to worship it, to be full of positive feelings towards it. . . .

[I]t is love *for* the unknown that gives religious belief its revolutionary potential and its capacity to transform human motivation and development. Individually, love for the unknown potential in ourselves motivates us to discover what that potential is. Instead of being afraid to try something new or different, we see it as an opportunity to learn something more about ourselves, to acquire new qualities and capacities. Failure is then accepted as just part of the learning process, of discovering what we can or cannot do, of probing our limits. Socially, the result is the same. Instead of being repelled by others who are different, we are drawn to them, overcoming our prejudices in the desire to discover more of the richness of human

experience. . . .

Without this spiritual foundation of positive feelings for the unknown, we are handicapped in our development. . . .

Religion, as it is understood in the Bahá'í Faith, is thus, in essence, completely ecological. It leads to better adapted human beings (Dahl, 63-64).

Religion, therefore, can 'effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions'¹⁸⁰. To have such an impact in people's lives, religion's challenge is to "free itself from the obsessions of the past: contentment is not fatalism; morality has nothing in common with the life-denying puritanism that has so often presumed to speak in its name; and a genuine devotion to duty brings feelings not of self-righteousness but of self-worth" (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*).

The Manifestations and Teachings of the Creative Spirit Fuel Spiritual Growth and Unify Humanity

The Manifestations of the Creative Spirit, along with the teachings and laws from the Creative Spirit that they have delivered to

humanity, are the centerpieces of religion that facilitate the human-Creative Spirit connection. Spiritual power is released primarily through the Word of God, or the teachings of the Creative Spirit. The Word of God is a transformative power that can ‘instil new life into every human frame’¹⁸¹ and ‘cause human souls to become angels of the Kingdom’¹⁸². As the source of all human virtues, values, and principles, the Word of God can provide solutions to every social problem¹⁸³. Ultimately, it can be the source of development. It can be the ‘remedy for the ailing body of the world’¹⁸⁴, the ‘supreme animating power for the advancement of the world and the exaltation of its peoples’¹⁸⁵. As the ‘key for unlocking the doors of science, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth’¹⁸⁶, it can prove ‘conducive to the glory, the advancement and education of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth’¹⁸⁷.

Likewise, the Laws and Ordinances of God ‘constitute the mightiest stronghold for the protection of the world and the safeguarding of its peoples’¹⁸⁸, ‘the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples’¹⁸⁹, and the

supreme agency for ‘securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race’¹⁹⁰. These Laws, along with the Administrative Order, can serve as ‘a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world’¹⁹¹.

In a somewhat counterintuitive sense, at least from a Western perspective, true liberty comes from submission and obedience to these Laws, servitude to the Creative Spirit¹⁹², and contentment with the its will and pleasure¹⁹³. This liberty creates a ‘new kind of people’, free from selfish attachments to material reality¹⁹⁴. Examples of these laws in the Bahá’í Faith include: daily reading of and meditation on the Word of God; daily prayer; contributing to the local Bahá’í fund; abstaining from the use of alcohol and drugs; fasting during a nineteen-day period each year; participating in community events; and being of service in one’s community.

Ultimately, the teachings and laws from the Creative Spirit that the Manifestations have delivered to humanity can unify humanity. These teachings will serve as a ‘collective center which unites various

peoples, native lands, tongues and opinions', which serves as a counterbalance to the diversity of humankind. Nothing but this 'spiritual power' can unify such a diverse people¹⁹⁵. The Word of God is the 'center of unity for all mankind', the 'cause of accord and communion of hearts, the sign of the solidarity of the human race'¹⁹⁶. As the 'penetrating power of all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity', it can harmonize humanity's 'divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions'¹⁹⁷. Just as the human soul unites various limbs and organs of the human body, the Word of God can unite humanity, so that 'difference reinforceth harmony, diversity strengtheneth love, and multiplicity is the greatest factor for coordination'¹⁹⁸. Therefore, religion, whose core is the Manifestations and the Word of God that they share with humanity, can fuel the emergence of the New World Order by unifying humanity:

It is certain that the greatest of instrumentalities for achieving the advancement and the glory of man, the supreme agency for the enlightenment and the redemption of the world, is love and fellowship and unity among all the members of the human race. Nothing can be effected in

the world, not even conceivably, without unity and agreement, and the perfect means for engendering fellowship and union is true religion. ‘Hadst Thou spent all the riches of the earth, Thou couldst not have united their hearts; but God hath united them . . .’ (Qur’án 8:64) (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Secret*, 73-74).

The Process of Spiritual Development Begins with Faith

Faith is required, however, to be able to draw on the spiritual resources of religion. In other words, faith is the human obligation in the Covenant with the Creative Spirit — the Creative Spirit provides guidance through the Manifestations and its Word in exchange for people’s faith and effort: “What is required of the peoples of the world is a measure of faith and resolve to match the enormous energies with which the Creator of all things has endowed this spiritual springtime of the race” (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*). People can only develop spiritually with faith¹⁰⁹, and faith increases one’s capacity to serve: “As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *An Early Pilgrimage*, 40, in Bahá’í Publishing Trust (Malaysia), 116). As a matter of fact, it is ‘impossible for a human being to turn aside from his own selfish advantages and sacrifice his

own good for the good of the community except through true religious faith²⁰⁰. Although faith begins with ‘conscious knowledge’, it manifests itself as ‘the practice of good deeds’²⁰¹.

Divine Assistance Facilitates Spiritual Development

Both the personal transformation described above and larger-scale development toward the New World Order that it facilitates are impossible without assistance from the Creative Spirit, its teachings, and the Holy Spirit²⁰². As a matter of fact, spiritual development is impossible without the interdiction of the Holy Spirit²⁰³. The more people look beyond their own limited capacities and rely on the Creative Spirit’s power, the more profound the change²⁰⁴; in other words, faith ‘draws the confirmation of the Merciful One’²⁰⁵. Moreover, by gathering with others in fellowship to worship or to read the Teachings of the Creative Spirit, souls are endowed with steadfastness, and hearts are filled with radiant joy²⁰⁶. Such gatherings can ‘unleash the bestowals of Heaven’ and ‘exert an influence over all the earth’²⁰⁷. Similarly, Assemblies are assured that, as they strive to

serve the needs of their communities, ‘the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that Assembly shall become the center of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit’²⁰⁸. Ultimately, it will be Divine assistance and ‘the power of the Holy Spirit’ that unifies humanity and introduces the New World Order²⁰⁹.

Love Catalyzes the Process of Spiritual Development

The catalyst for this entire process of spiritual development is love. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “[W]hen the love of God is established, everything else will be realized” (*Promulgation*, 239), and until ‘love takes possession of the heart, no other divine bounty can be revealed in it’²¹⁰. There is no greater power than the power of the love of the Creative Spirit²¹¹. Love is a ‘divine power’ that transports people to a ‘divine station’, a power ‘through which is attained all the progress in the world’. Love manifests itself as ‘relationships that nothing can shake’, assemblies ‘that nothing can break up’, and minds that ‘never

cease acquiring riches that nothing can destroy'²¹². And as already noted, love 'ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next'; it is the light that 'assureth the progress of every illumined soul', that 'causeth every soul to go forward'²¹³, and the 'establisher of true civilization in this mortal world'²¹⁴. '[S]piritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity' among all people²¹⁵.

Fellowship Links Individual and Community Spiritual Growth

Love and amity among people develop through time spent together in fellowship: "It is incumbent on thee to assemble continuously with the beloved of God and to meet with those whose faces are illumined with the light of the love of God" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Bahá'í World Faith*, 361). As the vital point of connection between individuals and community, fellowship serves to build community by strengthening ties of love between individuals, to 'ensure a fuller outpouring of [the Creative Spirit's] grace and a greater measure of His divine assistance'²¹⁶, and to encourage individual spiritual growth.

Spiritual community can become a 'living organism', a 'laboratory' where individuals 'can translate into living and constructive action, the principles which [they] imbibe from the teachings' and within which they 'can catch the real spirit' of the spiritual life²¹⁷. Through the 'application of spiritual principles', 'rectitude of conduct', and consensual decision-making, communities can become more united, strengthened, 'self-sufficient and self-reliant'²¹⁸.

Every nineteen days, Bahá'ís 'gather together and associate most lovingly and spiritually and happily with one another' in a spiritual Feast²¹⁹. The objective of this "Nineteen Day Feast" is to 'foster comradeship and love, to call God to mind and supplicate Him with contrite hearts, and to encourage benevolent pursuits' 'that through this fellowship hearts may become perfectly united, and reciprocity and mutual helpfulness be established'²²⁰. It is 'of the utmost importance' because it 'attracts confirmation of God like a magnet', 'diffuseth the oneness of mankind', 'bringeth bliss and unity and love to the lovers of God', and is 'a bringer of joy', 'the groundwork of agreement and unity', 'the cause of the enlightenment of hearts', and 'the key to

affection and fellowship'²²¹. Feasts have three parts: devotional, administrative, and social. During the devotional portion of Feast, prayers and sacred writings are shared. During the administrative portion, community affairs are discussed, and individuals may raise issues for consultation with the community. This administrative portion of the Feast serves in part to better train individuals and communities 'in the principles and methods of Bahá'í Administration'²²².

The Administrative Order Facilitates the Process of Individual and Community Spiritual Development

As noted above, the primary role of the institutions of the Administrative Order is to provide guidance for the communities that they serve as “developers of human resources, builders of communities”. By properly applying spiritual teachings so as to make decisions in a collaborative and participatory manner, the institutions of the Administrative Order can facilitate individual spiritual growth, strengthen community life, and serve as the pattern and nucleus of the

New World Order.

To summarize, the process of Bahá'í resource development is essentially a religious phenomenon — a way of life or process of spiritual development leading to a better material-spiritual balance whose end product is a New World Order characterized by more sustainable developmentalism and environmental stewardship. The process is one of structural change — an evolutionary, spiritually-inspired change in attitudes and behavior that will, in turn, transform systems of governance, production, development, distribution, and environmental stewardship. By providing inspiration, guidance, and structure through the Covenant, the Manifestations, the Word of God, the Laws of the Creative Spirit, and the Administrative Order, religion has the power to move humanity toward 'what could be' by connecting it with the Creative Spirit through unity and love. The process begins with individual faith — people consciously deciding to accept their half of the Creative Spirit's Covenant, which initiates the process of individual spiritual growth. Developing faith, regardless of one's belief

system, is a uniquely individual process; no one can do it for anyone else: “Ultimately all the battle of life is within the individual” (Shoghi Effendi, in *Universal House of Justice Living the Life*, 20)²²³. Drawing on the Word and Laws of God for guidance, individuals then begin to spiritually mature by ‘applying more systematically the principles of the Faith to upraising the quality of human life’²²⁴. This individual process is complemented by maturation at the community level as people come together in fellowship to build the Administrative Order and experiment with ways in which to improve their communities by applying spiritual ‘teachings to the daily life of their community’²²⁵. To the extent that effort is exerted on the individual and community level, Divine assistance is provided to facilitate the process. Ultimately, new modes of individual and community life — characterized by love, justice, equality, moderation, and the celebration of unity in diversity — will emerge to introduce the New World Order.

The question remains, however, of how to cultivate love, spark individual faith, and encourage individual and community spiritual

growth — those are the keys to engaging in Bahá'í resource development. This next section is an attempt at finding some clues.

Guiding Principles for Realizing ‘What could be’: Knowledge, Volition, and Action

The attainment of any objective, all execution and accomplishment ‘is conditioned upon knowledge, volition, and action’²²⁶. Individual material and spiritual development, for instance, requires studying spiritual principles (increasing knowledge) and trying to live in accordance with them (action)²²⁷. Likewise, social and economic development requires the ‘application of spiritual principles’, ‘rectitude of conduct’, and ‘the practice of the art of consultation’²²⁸, all of which represent knowledge translated into action and can be realized only as a result of people’s own volition²²⁹. Similarly, community goals can be realized only to the extent that individuals take initiative and maintain activity ‘regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism’²³⁰. Yet the question remains, what motivates individuals

and communities to learn, develop a will for action, and then act? The answer lies within the dynamics of the mutually-reinforcing interactions among knowledge, volition, and action, which, for the purposes of this study, are labeled the ‘cycle of growth’.

Knowledge

The first condition for realizing ‘what could be’ is knowledge. The keys to developing spiritual knowledge are education, individual study of the Word of God, meditation, prayer, and consultation.

Universal Education

Bahá’u’lláh established universal education as a universal law because ‘ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind’²³¹, the ‘principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice’²³², and a ‘primary cause of oppression and injustice, of unrighteousness, irregularity and disorder’²³³. People are like mines ‘rich in gems of inestimable value’, and only education can reveal the treasures latent inside each soul²³⁴

and ‘can bring forth from the individual whatever perfections and capacities are deposited within him’²³⁵. It is each Bahá’í’s duty, therefore, to ‘promote knowledge’²³⁶.

Education is of three kinds: material, human, and spiritual — material education, which is common to animals and humans, is concerned with the progress and development of the body; human education leads to material civilization and progress; and spiritual education, the ‘true education’, consists of acquiring divine perfections²³⁷. The greatest education and the ‘goal of humanity’ is the education of the spirit. Through spiritual education, one acquires virtues, comprehends the ‘divine realities and universal mysteries that lie within the spiritual world’, and receives benefits of the Holy Spirit²³⁸. There is also ‘Satanic’ knowledge. It is ‘but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts’, is grounded in the ‘whisperings of selfish desire’, and yields ‘arrogance, vainglory and conceit’²³⁹.

Similarly, education bears fruit only to the extent that the knowledge required for addressing the issues of the day is being generated and shared. Contemporary science has largely served the

interests of enriched elites who represent a small minority of the world's population: "Indeed, if most of humankind continue to be regarded mainly as users of products of science and technology created elsewhere, then programs ostensibly designed to serve their needs cannot properly be termed 'development'" (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*). Future Mashriq'u'l-Adhkárs are designed to become "centers of learning . . . , institutions that will enhance the capability of the world's peoples to participate in the generation and application of knowledge" (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*). Development and progress are impossible without proper education²⁴⁰.

Individual Investigation

The simple act of reading the Word of God can 'kindle' one's soul and move others' hearts²⁴¹. Because people have been endowed with the ability to 'see and recognize truth' and to discover things for themselves, they are 'not intended to see through the eyes of another, hear through another's ears nor comprehend with another's brain'. All have the 'individual endowment, power and responsibility' to

investigate spiritual reality on their own²⁴². Individual investigation is closely related to justice, as justice requires that people see with their own eyes and not with the eyes of others²⁴³. As a matter of fact, the ‘greatest cause of bereavement and disheartening in the world of humanity is ignorance based upon blind imitation’²⁴⁴. Bahá’ís are encouraged to study sacred scriptures daily.

Prayer

Accepting and learning about the teachings of the Creative Spirit is not enough. Prayer is required to develop a sense of spirituality, to acquire spiritual virtues and powers. Prayer is ‘spiritual nourishment’ and is ‘absolutely indispensable’ for ‘inner spiritual development’. As a matter of fact, religious laws and institutions are ‘dead’ if the ‘inner spiritual life’ of individuals has not been ‘transformed’ through prayer²⁴⁵. Prayer is communication, association, connection, and communion with the Creative Spirit²⁴⁶. While in prayer, one should humbly supplicate the Creative Spirit, thereby bringing ‘light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and

exaltation to his being'. This cheers the heart, delights the soul 'by the spirit of the love of God', and increases one's ability and capacity.

Supplication through prayer enables the Creative Spirit to 'rend asunder the veils' that obscure one's vision and purifies the heart 'from the dross of ignorance'²⁴⁷. In short, prayer prompts spiritual growth²⁴⁸.

In addition to voluntary prayers, Bahá'í choose from one of three 'obligatory' prayers to be offered daily.

Meditation

Meditation is 'speaking with your own spirit' — 'you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed'. Through meditation, people's spirits are 'informed and strengthened', things of which they knew nothing are unfolded before their view, and they receive 'Divine inspiration', 'heavenly food', and 'the breath of the Holy Spirit — the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation'. Like a mirror, meditation produces what is placed before it — if one is 'contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these. But if you turn the mirror

of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained'²⁴⁹. Meditation can increase one's faith and facilitate the translation of the Word of God into action²⁵⁰.

*Consultation**

Consultation is the source of knowledge that connects individual and community education. It is a collective method of investigation and decision-making distinctly different from other popular contemporary systems. Its object, first of all, is 'the investigation of truth'²⁵¹. This contrasts starkly with other modes of collective decision-making in which the object of each participant is to have the group reach a decision in his or her favor. The Universal House of Justice clarifies this point:

The standard of truth seeking [consultation]
demands is far beyond the patterns of negotiation and

*The concept of consultation is explained only superficially here. For a more complete exploration of consultation, see Kolstoe. For a discussion of the transformational role consultation can play in the context of development, see Vick.

compromise that tend to characterize the present-day discussion of human affairs. It cannot be achieved — indeed, its attainment is severely handicapped — by the culture of protest that is another widely prevailing feature of contemporary society. Debate, propaganda, the adversarial method, the entire apparatus of partisanship that have long been such familiar features of collective action are all fundamentally harmful to its purpose: that is, arriving at a consensus about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment.

What Bahá'u'lláh is calling for is a consultative process in which the individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of a body with its own interests and goals. In such an atmosphere, characterized by both candor and courtesy, ideas belong not to the individual to whom they occur during the discussion but to the group as a whole to take up, discard, or revise as seems to best serve the goal pursued. Consultation succeeds to the extent that all participants support the decisions arrived at, regardless of the individual opinions with which they entered the discussion. Under such circumstances an earlier decision can be readily reconsidered if experience exposes any shortcomings. . . .[A] consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected. In such a climate the perennial tendencies toward manipulation and partisanship are far less likely to deflect the decision-making process (*Prosperity*).

Bahá'u'lláh said that “In all things it is necessary to consult” and that “No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through

consultation” (in Research Department *Consultation*, 3). Moreover, it is ‘one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquility and felicity of the people’²⁵². Arbab points out, while the essentials of the Bahá’í Faith were elaborated upon by the central figures of the Faith, many theoretical and practical tasks in the Faith are left to growing Bahá’í communities to address. Therefore, as conditions change over time, “social concepts, institutions, and practices are organically growing from unified efforts of diverse peoples” through consultation rather than being based on the conditions during which the central figures were living (Arbab, 11).

Volition: Bridging the Knowledge-Action Gap

Regardless of how well educated one is, how often one prays and meditates, or how well one consults, nothing guarantees that the knowledge developed in those processes will be translated into action. In other words, regardless of how familiar one is with the teachings of the Manifestations or the Word of God, they may never affect one’s character without the resolve to translate that knowledge into action.

Volition, or the expression of free will, is required to bridge that gap²⁵³. Repeatedly, the Bahá'í writings urge people to 'strive', 'exert' themselves, 'be ready', have strong 'will' and 'determination', etc. Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "Success or failure, gain or loss, must . . . depend upon man's own exertions. The more he striveth, the greater will be his progress" (Bahá'u'lláh *Gleanings*, 81-82). People must 'strive to attain the shores' of the ocean of the Word of God so that, in proportion to the eagerness of their search, they may partake of the benefits of the knowledge of the Creative Spirit²⁵⁴. They are encouraged to 'strive . . . with heart and soul . . . to follow the precepts' of Bahá'u'lláh²⁵⁵ and to strive with all their might to perform benevolent deeds so that they may bring forth that which will truly profit themselves²⁵⁶. 'Abdu'l-Bahá encourages people to 'strive to increase the love-power of reality, to make your hearts greater centers of attraction and to create new ideals and relationships' and to 'be ready to sacrifice your lives for one another, to prefer the general well-being to your personal well-being'²⁵⁷. He compares the will to struggle and determination with the soul, without which the 'body

does not move'²⁵⁸, but “through the restoring waters of pure intention and unselfish effort, the earth of human potentialities will blossom with its own latent excellence” (*Abdu'l-Bahá Secret*, 4). Ultimately, the degree to which people strive to improve their character, the greater will be the results²⁵⁹.

Volition is also required for people to have access to the assistance that the Creative Spirit offers through the Holy Spirit. Paradoxically, however, in this case volition is necessary to free oneself from one's desires. In other words, a strong will is required to tame one's will — people are encouraged to ‘resolve to gain the victory over’ themselves²⁶⁰. This state of freedom or liberty from selfish desires and greater access to divine assistance is referred to as “detachment” in the Bahá'í writings. Detachment is not synonymous with apathy, ambivalence, or despair, which can lead to idleness or the acceptance of oppression; rather, it is the state of selflessness that empowers people to experience the liberty and freedom associated with better alignment with the Creative Spirit's will, which advances their spiritual development (*Arbab*, 11). The ‘highest and most laudable of all acts’

is 'resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, . . . and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him'²⁶¹. "In a word, nearness to God necessitates sacrifice of self, severance and the giving up of all to Him. Nearness is likeness" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 148). "The master-key to self-mastery is self-forgetfulness" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Star of the West* Vol. XI, 18 in Blumenthal, 67).

In reference to detachment, Bahá'u'lláh defines the 'world' as 'unawareness' of or 'absorption' in aught but the Creative Spirit, as that which deters people from loving the Creative Spirit²⁶². People are admonished to 'resolve to gain victory' over themselves

that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies — gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of their wretched worshipers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection. We cherish the hope that the Hand of divine power may lend its assistance to mankind and deliver it from its state of grievous abasement" (Bahá'u'lláh *Tablets*, 86).

Elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh writes that one's spiritual understanding is dependent upon one's 'freedom of spirit', and not on 'human

learning'²⁶³. 'Abdu'l-Bahá provides the following encouragement in **this** regard:

If thou wouldst hearken to my words, release thyself from the fetters of whatsoever cometh to pass. Nay rather, under all conditions thank thou thy loving Lord, and yield up thine affairs unto His Will that worketh as He pleaseth. This verily is better for thee than all else, in either world ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Selections*, 178).

At least three things can help one to develop the volition **needed**. The first is the power of the spiritual principles themselves. It **can** induce 'an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which **facilitate** the discovery and implementation of practical measures'²⁶⁴. **The** second and third are the 'laboratory' of community life and the **Holy** Spirit, both of which, as explained above, facilitate the process of **spiritual** development.

Action

Complementing knowledge and volition, the third key element **of** change is action. As noted above, religious faith is more than just **belief** in and love of the Creative Spirit; it is love and knowledge

translated into action: “The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 156)²⁶⁵. This is a consistent theme in the Bahá’í canon²⁶⁶. It is also worth noting that to acquire knowledge, whether it be through education, individual study of the Word of God, meditation, prayer, or consultation, is essentially a form of action.

‘Let deeds, not words, be your adorning,’²⁶⁷ Bahá’u’lláh urges people. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi expand further:

What profit is there in agreeing that universal friendship is good, and talking of the solidarity of the human race as a grand ideal? Unless these thoughts are translated into the world of action, they are useless.

The wrong in the world continues to exist just because people talk only of their ideals, and do not strive to put them into practice. If actions took the place of words, the world’s misery would very soon be changed into comfort.

A man who does great good, and talks not of it, is on the way to perfection.

The man who has accomplished a small good and magnifies it in his speech is worth very little (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 2-3).

The foundation-stone of a life lived in the way of God is the pursuit of moral excellence and the acquisition of a character endowed with qualities that are well-pleasing in His sight. . . . People have grown weary and impatient of

rhetoric and discourse, of preaching and sermonizing. In this day, the one thing that can deliver the world from its travail and attract the hearts of its peoples is deeds, not words; example, not precept; saintly virtues, not statements and charters issued by governments and nations on socio-political affairs. In all matters, great or small, word must be the complement of deed, and deed the companion of word: each must supplement, support and reinforce the other (Shoghi Effendi, in *Universal House of Justice A Chaste and Holy Life*, 62).

In describing the Bahá'í path of spiritualization, Arbab argues that this path “should not be confused with one that defines goodness passively and produces a human being whose greatest virtue is to not harm anyone; it is a path to create social activists and agents of change” (Arbab, 11). Action begins with the systematic application of ‘the principles of the Faith to upraising the quality of human life’²⁶⁸.

Living the Bahá'í Life: Application of Spiritual Principles and Rectitude of Conduct

When all is said and done, ‘what could be’ can best be realized through the virtuous action of individuals: “The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct” (Bahá'u'lláh, in Shoghi Effendi

Advent of Divine Justice, 23). Moreover, ‘pure and holy deeds [and] a virtuous life and goodly behavior’ can ‘rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind’²⁶⁹, and the ‘upliftment of the world’ depends on good character²⁷⁰. Spiritual virtues are ‘among the highest and most laudable of all acts’²⁷¹. People who ‘follow earnestly the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh’ will become lights of the ‘soul for the body of the world, the comfort and help for humanity, and the source of salvation for the whole universe’²⁷².

More specifically, trustworthiness ‘is the chief means of attracting confirmation and prosperity’²⁷³, the ‘greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people’²⁷⁴. The more people are able to do what they say they will do, the better off they will be. Moreover, the acquisition of other virtues begins with trustworthiness and truthfulness. Trustworthiness is the ‘bedrock of His Faith and the foundation of all virtues and perfections’²⁷⁵, and truthfulness “is the foundation of all the virtues of the world of humanity. Without truthfulness, progress and success in all of the worlds of God are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man,

all the divine qualities will also become realized” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Bahá’í World Faith*, 384). As already alluded to above, those divine virtues include justice, equity, benevolence, courage, fortitude, humility, sacrifice, integrity, and kindness. If people are genuinely interested in improving the world, they must be reliable and honest with themselves and with others.

Serving as Examples

Large scale change will require the efforts of a growing number of people. The more people that are actively engaged in the process of spiritual development, the more quickly the processes of global change will take place. One way in which to engage others is by example. To the extent to which people are able to apply ‘more systematically the principles of the Faith to upraising the quality of human life’²⁷⁶, their lives will change, and this change will be noticed by others²⁷⁷. These examples will serve as the ‘lump that must leaven the peoples of the world’ and ‘show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character, that all mankind may profit by

their example'²⁷⁸. People must 'live the life' so that others 'cannot fail to see a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance' in their lives that will distinguish them from others'²⁷⁹. A major thrust of action should be devoted to illuminating others hearts and minds'²⁸⁰, and the primary responsibility lies with individuals'²⁸¹.

Work and Service as Worship

The 'good deed' that faith requires takes the form of service. While faith 'draws the confirmation of the Merciful One', service 'attracts the heavenly strength'²⁸². People are encouraged to go so far as to lay down their lives in the service of humankind'²⁸³ — 'service to humanity is service to God'²⁸⁴. People are encouraged to direct their entire "effort toward the happiness of those who are despondent, bestow food upon the hungry, clothe the needy, and glorify the humble" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Paris*, 38). There is no greater blessing than to become the 'cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor' of others'²⁸⁵, and the 'honor and distinction of the individual' consists in becoming 'a source of social good'²⁸⁶.

As a matter of fact, ‘all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity’²⁸⁷, and ‘work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship’²⁸⁸. In contrast, worship that is passive or limited to ‘contemplations’ and is not translated into ‘dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity’ ‘cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshiper himself, much less to humanity in general’²⁸⁹. As a matter of fact, asceticism and mendicancy are forbidden in the Bahá’í Faith²⁹⁰ (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 26). Wealth, on the other hand, especially if acquired by those who ‘dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples’, is ‘commendable and praiseworthy’²⁹¹.

Sacrifice

Regardless of the form of work or service that one chooses, it requires some level of sacrifice. People must become selfless and ‘arise to the station of sacrifice’²⁹². Examples of sacrifice for the good of

others and community include the voluntary distribution of one's own wealth, other forms of philanthropy, volunteer work, service on administrative bodies, etc. To administer the affairs of religion, financial means are necessary, so another form of sacrifice is to sacrifice material means with contributions to the religious community²⁹³.

Diverse Grassroots Initiative

There is not one Bahá'í 'model' of resource development that can be applied. The process is dynamic, organic, and adaptable and manifests in different forms in different places. The form of action taken, for instance, depends on the needs of the community. The progress of social and economic development activities 'will depend largely on natural stirrings at the grassroots, and it should receive its driving forces from those sources rather than from an imposition of plans and programmes from the top'²⁹⁴. The objective is to avoid the developmentalism mistakes of the past:

Future generations . . . will find almost incomprehensible the circumstance that, in an age paying tribute to an egalitarian philosophy and related democratic principles,

development planning should view the masses of humanity as essentially recipients of benefits from aid and training. Despite acknowledgment of participation as a principle, the scope of the decision making left to most of the world's population is at best secondary, limited to a range of choices formulated by agencies inaccessible to them and determined by goals that are often irreconcilable with their perceptions of reality (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*).

This is not to say, however, that communities should work in isolation. Assistance from outside the communities in the planning, design, and implementation of development projects is encouraged²⁹⁵.

An important aspect of grassroots initiative is planning and management²⁹⁶. Bahá'u'lláh gives the following advice: “[A]t the outset of every endeavor, it is incumbent to look to the end of it” (*Tablets*, 168). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also notes the importance of focused thoughts and energy: “So long as the thoughts of an individual are scattered he will achieve no results, but if his thinking be concentrated on a single point wonderful will be the fruits thereof” (*Selections*, 110-111). Plans should also be ‘within the constraints of existing circumstances and available resources’²⁹⁷.

Formal development projects should evolve gradually along with

the capacities and maturity of communities²⁹⁸: ‘the growth and development of all beings is gradual; this is the universal divine organization and the natural system. The seed does not at once become a tree; the embryo does not at once become a man; the mineral does not suddenly become a stone. No, they grow and develop gradually’²⁹⁹.

Synthesis: The Process of Bahá’í Resource Development

Even after having explored in detail knowledge, volition, and action, the answer to the question “What motivates individuals and communities to learn, develop a will for action, and then act?” still remains unanswered. Where does it all start? What are the motivations underlying the motivations for action? As it turns out, there are no simple answers.

Bahá’í resource development is actually a number of simultaneous, mutually-reinforcing religious processes, the components and dynamics of which are described above. One way in which to bring all of the different components and dynamics of this process of

resource development together is to place it into the context of the individual-community interdynamic. The entire process is initiated at the individual level as people develop faith, the knowledge of and love for the Creative Spirit. Faith can arise in a number of ways — through the recognition of the station of the Manifestations, through an understanding of the teachings of the Creative Spirit that these Manifestations share with humanity, or through the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit. Each is grounded in the knowledge developed through education, individual investigation, prayer, meditation, or consultation. Individual faith formalizes the covenant of love with the Creative Spirit, which opens individuals to the bounties the Creative Spirit has reserved for humankind, including the assistance of the Holy Spirit. This connection is by definition a religious phenomenon that marks the beginning of individual spiritual growth. As individuals with a common faith come together in fellowship and love, they form a spiritual community. The community is organized along the lines of the Administrative Order outlined by the Creative Spirit's Manifestations and guided by the institutions of that Order.

At both the individual and community level, the ‘cycle of growth’ fuels the process of spiritual development. The cycle of growth has three primary interdependent components — knowledge, volition, and action — and is fueled by faith, love, divine assistance, and fellowship. Individual faith begins with knowledge and is strengthened as individuals increase their knowledge and love through the study of spiritual principles, meditation, and prayer. Likewise, communities are strengthened and grow in collective knowledge and love as individuals come together in fellowship to learn more about the Creative Spirit, pray, and consult. While learning and prayer are both individual and communal activities, meditation is a uniquely individual activity, and consultation is a uniquely communal activity.

Paradoxically, each of the means of acquiring knowledge — education, meditation, prayer, and consultation — are both means of acquiring knowledge and forms of action. Other action required to fuel the cycle of growth includes the application of spiritual principles to daily life, rectitude of conduct, work, service, sacrifice, and grassroots initiative. The entire cycle of growth is lovingly nurtured by

the institutions of the Administrative Order — the organic, unifying system of organization that guides individuals and communities through the cycle.

Naturally, no action will be taken by individuals or communities without volition, which is why this process is a cycle. Like the kickstarter on a motorcycle, faith initiates the process. It is the source of volition that motivates people to learn through meditation, prayer, and consultation. New knowledge acquired then creates more volition that motivates people to learn more and also take other action to apply spiritual principles to their lives, conduct themselves according to those principles, and engage in worship in the form of work, service, sacrifice, and grassroots initiative. All of these activities, in turn, strengthen individual faith and community bonds of love, which create even more volition that motivates more action, and the cycle continues.

As the number of individuals and communities engaged in the cycle grows, the scale of the impacts of the cycle increases, and the world moves collectively closer to ‘what could be’ or the New World

Order. At the individual level, people's lives begin to change as they align their goals and priorities with those of the Creative Spirit. They become more loving, trustworthy, self-less, benevolent, humble, kind, and honest and focus their energies on education, service, and promoting justice and equity. It is only through this "acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers" that the chief goal of the Bahá'í Faith, "the development of the individual and society," can be achieved. "Laws and institutions, . . . can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed" (Shoghi Effendi, in *Universal House of Justice Bahá'í Youth*, 10). In this way, individual transformations will effect similar change at the community level. Spiritual communities will be more united and self-reliant until they eventually acquire the capacity to serve the wider community and influence the workings of institutions and governments. The Universal House of Justice characterizes such a community:

A Bahá'í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and

eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by Bahá'í institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism (Universal House of Justice in a letter to a National Spiritual Assembly in May 1984, in Office of Social and Economic Development, 34).

Arbab and the Universal House of Justice also capture the essence of these interdynamics of scale:

[Bahá'ís] tend to see 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. . . . Individuals, whose behavior is highly influenced by society do possess a spiritual dimension, which can be illumined by divine teachings and free them from the bounds of oppressive social forces. . . . This path of spiritual growth, however, is not one of individual salvation; it exactly implies constant efforts to create and strengthen new social institutions. . . . The vision, then, is one of an iterative process, which unfolds within a few generations, is propelled by forces inherent in the very purpose of the creation of the universe, and in turn generates forces that continuously accelerate the processes of change, leading finally to what Shoghi Effendi has called an "organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced" (Arbab, 9-10).

As social organization has increased, the scope for the expression of the capacities latent in each human being has

correspondingly expanded. Because the relationship between the individual and society is a reciprocal one, the transformation now required must occur simultaneously within human consciousness and the structure of social institutions. It is in the opportunities afforded by this twofold process of change that a strategy of global development will find its purpose. At this crucial stage of history, that purpose must be to establish enduring foundations on which planetary civilization can gradually take shape (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*).

Eventually, the principles of justice, equity, and moderation and the internalization of the concept of unity in diversity will permeate entire societies until a system of global governance is established, economic systems are transformed, and a New World Order arrives. At all levels — individual, community, institutional, governmental, and international — the cycle of growth will transform developmentalism and environmental stewardship. The key to this process will be striking the balanced, dynamic coherence between material and spiritual development. The natural outcome of that balance is sustainable developmentalism and environmental stewardship.

Bahá'í Resource Development as a System

The next task is to reframe the process of Bahá'í resource development as articulated above using the systems language introduced in Chapter 2. As Mingers suggests, systems language in this section is used metaphorically to describe Bahá'í resource development — the author recognizes that Bahá'í resource development is not really a system but that one's understanding of it can be improved by thinking of it as a system. Moreover, it should be noted that what is presented below is the author's subjective, sometimes arbitrary definition of Bahá'í resource development and its subsystems as systems.

The Pattern of Organization of Bahá'í Resource Development

The model of spiritually-inspired resource development (SIRD) of interest in this exploration is Bahá'í resource development, a religious system designed to facilitate the spiritual development of individuals and communities. As an example of spiritually-inspired resource development, it should share SIRD's pattern of organization.

The pattern of organization of a system is the qualitative description of its network pattern of interrelated components and processes of production that determines the system's essential characteristics and identity and characterizes the system as belonging to a particular class. The qualities of a living system's pattern of organization are embodied in its structure, which changes through self-generation, structural coupling, and bifurcation. Capra calls this process of embodiment 'cognition', or the process of life. A system's pattern of organization (or essential identity), however, does not change during this process of structural change. All examples of spiritually-inspired resource development, for instance — including Bahá'í resource development — should share a similar pattern of organization: qualitatively, they are the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice. Different examples of SIRD may exhibit different structure, but they should always share a pattern of organization. Building on what follows in Chapters 3 and 4, a more detailed description of the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development is developed in Chapter 5.

The Basic Structure of Bahá'í Resource Development

The structure of a system describes the way in which the elements of the system are related to one another and determines the system's behavior; it is the linkages, connections, and relationships within the system. A system's structure should be the physical embodiment of its pattern of organization, so the structure of BRD should embody the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired systems of resource development.

BRD is an extremely open (i.e., it exchanges material, information, and energy with the environment) and soft (i.e., it is flexibly structured, with human beings as its principal components) system. As a matter of fact, since a basic element of BRD is spirit, it is relatively meaningless to talk about a boundary that defines BRD in time and space. The concept of holarchy (i.e., a three-dimensional hierarchy of whole/parts), however, is a particularly useful tool in exploring the structure of BRD because the most basic premise of Bahá'í resource development is the organic, spiritual unity of all creation. Combining the components of spiritually-inspired resource

development identified in Chapter 1 with those identified in this chapter, the *tangible* BRD holarchy may be understood as follows: The largest holon of interest is the planet, although it is actually within an even larger holon, the universe. Maintaining a holistic perspective, the planet will be equated with the environment. Within the environment, of course, are infinite numbers of natural holons, including ecosystems and ecological communities, populations, individual organisms, and the holons of which they are composed. In this exploration, the largest holon of interest within the environment is the world order. Since BRD is rooted in 'what is', the initial world order holon of interest is the *old* world order. Holons within the world order include governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations that regulate other holons like nations, economies, and religion. Within these interconnected holons are the holons of particular interest in this exploration: Manifestations, the Word and laws of the Creative Spirit, communities, individuals, the institutions of the Administrative Order, and other holons. Individuals are perhaps the most important holons of the holarchy. They are

composed of three interdependent and interconnected holons: body, mind, and spirit.

Of particular importance to spiritually-inspired systems of resource development, however, are *intangible* religious holons. The largest holon of interest, naturally, is the Creative Spirit, which transcends creation but whose attributes are reflected in all of creation. The Creative Spirit, in turn, acts through other intangible holons like the Holy Spirit — in the form of divine assistance — as well as through tangible holons like the Manifestations and their teachings. Following Jones and Flood and Carson, the Creative Spirit can be thought of as a metasystem that monitors the system of interest and brings some factors under its influence (Flood and Carson, 59-60). Flood and Carson depict this concept three-dimensionally as a sombrero.

At the various levels of its holarchy, BRD has emergent properties. These properties share certain characteristics, yet each one is also unique. The principal emergent property of BRD — the characteristic of the system that is unique to the system, cannot be

explained as the sum of the parts of the system, and is lost when the system breaks down to its components — is ‘what could be’, or the New World Order. At the level of the global and national holons, the New World Order will manifest as a globally unified yet diverse commonwealth regulated by the principles of justice, equity, and moderation and characterized by a dynamic, balanced coherence between material and spiritual development; an efficient and equitable economic system; and sustainable environmental stewardship. Likewise, at the local level, the New World Order will emerge as spiritually mature individual, community, and institutional holons. In essence then, the unifying principle or emergent property of BRD is a new state of spiritually-inspired transformation, development, growth, and evolution at every level of the system. In other words, the evolutionary processes of BRD create the emergent properties of the New World Order.

From a complementary perspective, the structure of BRD is defined primarily by the integrative influence of the Covenant, the

Administrative Order, and the cycle of growth as well as the process of disintegration. They define the interrelationships and interdynamics within and between the holons of BRD from which will emerge the New World Order.

As noted above, BRD is essentially a religious phenomenon with the Covenant and Administrative Order at its core. The powers that bind all of the components and processes of BRD together are unity and love. Love emanates from the Creative Spirit through the Manifestations and the Holy Spirit and connects each holon with the others in spiritual unity. The Covenant formalizes and strengthens these linkages, connections, and relationships between the Creative Spirit and humanity. At the individual level, in return for faith, love, and obedience developed from recognition of the Manifestations and an understanding of the teachings they shared with humanity, the Creative Spirit provides the transformative power of its teachings and laws through the Manifestations and divine assistance through the Holy Spirit. Faith increases the individual capacity to love, which further catalyzes the process of spiritual development and strengthens

the bonds of love and unity. These relationships define, in essence, the Greater Covenant.

The Lesser Covenant — the Covenant Bahá'u'lláh made with humanity that obligates it to preserve unity through obedience to the institutions of the Administrative Order — complements the Greater Covenant. As individuals grow, communities grow, and as communities grow, individuals grow. A primary catalyst for these mutually-reinforcing processes is fellowship, and the primary guides are the institutions of the Administrative Order. Fellowship strengthens both individuals and the bonds between them, which together strengthen communities, while administrative institutions facilitate this process by creating opportunities to learn more about the teachings of the Creative Spirit, arrange community meetings, and otherwise support community life. At the local, national, and global level, the Administrative Order maintains these linkages, connections, and relationships between individuals and communities in order to nurture the integration and evolution of the New World Order. It serves as the structural basis for the maturation and development of

the New World Order.

The third sub-structure of BRD is the cycle of growth.

Potentially, none of the dynamics described above are set in motion if individuals and communities do not initiate and sustain that cycle.

Unlike the Covenant and the Administrative Order, its structure is far less tangible. Its primary relationships are between knowledge, volition, and action. More specifically, the cycle of growth includes all of the mutually-reinforcing linkages and connections between education, individual investigation, prayer, meditation, consultation, the application of spiritual principles, rectitude of conduct, service, sacrifice, grassroots initiative, and the volition required to engage in each of these activities. This cycle fuels individual spiritual growth, which fosters community growth, and both strengthen institutions.

Because many individuals ignore the Greater and Lesser Covenants and therefore never initiate the cycle of growth, within the world order holon are the simultaneous processes of disintegration and integration. The Greater and Lesser Covenants and the cycle of growth nurture the process of integration as outlined in the previous

paragraphs. Simultaneously occurring is the process of disintegration, which is fueled by materialism, selfishness, disunity, and other dominant characteristics of the old world order. Both integration and disintegration are fundamental processes of BRD.

Together, the Covenant, the Administrative Order, the cycle of growth, and the process of disintegration determine the behavior of BRD. Out of development at each of these sub-structures will emerge the New World Order.

Bahá'í Resource Development as a Living System: Dissipative Structure

According to Capra, living systems are characterized by the *cognitive embodiment of an autopoietic pattern of organization in the system's dissipative structure*. Although it is unclear whether BRD can be accurately characterized as a living system, the characteristics of living systems are useful metaphors for understanding the dynamics of BRD.

Interestingly, living systems are commonly used as metaphors in the Bahá'í canon. Of relevance to this exploration, for instance, are

references to the organic, dynamic nature and development of individuals, communities, and institutions engaged in BRD. The Universal House of Justice also writes that “The Cause of God is organic, growing and developing like a living being” (Universal House of Justice, in Hornby, 313). The Universal House of Justice also refers to the worldwide community of adherents to the Covenant as an ‘organic, divinely guided, blessed, and illumined body’ that is ‘united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source’ and thereby ‘growing like a healthy new body, [developing] new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity’³⁰⁰.

Capra identifies dissipative structure as the structure of living systems. Its stability in the midst of disequilibrium comes from the system’s flow processes that are interlinked through multiple catalytic feedback loops. As Capra suggests, the characteristics of dissipative structures match closely those of social systems — both are structurally very open, they exist in states of dynamic equilibrium, and yet they provide a certain level of structure to maintain the system’s integrity.

The social system of interest in this exploration, BRD, may also be conceptualized as a dissipative structure. On the one hand, it is stable because of the nature of the structural unity maintained by the Covenant and the Administrative Order. In the Bahá'í writings, the Administrative Order is referred to as a living and dynamic organism with organic institutions, so it is not surprising that it exhibits characteristics of living systems. On the other hand, it is in a perpetual state of disequilibrium due to both the dynamic nature of the cycle of growth and the countervailing process of disintegration. The cycle of growth can be conceptualized as a set of diverse self-amplifying feedback loops that are fueled by the constant flow of energy in the form of love and divine assistance and build the New World Order. Likewise, the process of disintegration can be thought of as a set of self-amplifying feedback loops fueled by materialism and selfishness that are gradually undermining the structural foundations of the old world order. Rather than heat, which is typically dissipated by dissipative structures, the cycle of growth dissipates love and unity into the wider environment, while disintegration dissipates disunity and

selfishness.

When slight fluctuations in dissipative structures are amplified by repeated positive feedback or catalytic loops, instabilities are generated. Bifurcation points are critical points of instability at which new forms of order may emerge spontaneously, resulting in development and evolution. At these bifurcation points, the system may jump to new structures of ever-increasing complexity. Behavior at these points is a function of the history of the system yet totally unpredictable.

Continuing with the dissipative structure metaphor, one would expect bifurcation points to develop as a result of both the cycle of growth and the process of disintegration in BRD. Bifurcation points in the process of disintegration may be marked by events like financial crises, wars, famine, and the like. The Bahá'í writings state that humanity's development will largely be a function of its growing disillusionment with the inefficacy of the old world order, which will be marked by an increasing number and severity of crises. In the cycle of growth, individuals, as a result of the self-amplifying effects of growing

knowledge, enduring volition, and constant action, may arrive at new levels of spiritual development. Similarly, entire communities, as a result of the positive mutual-reinforcement of strong education programs, prayerful worship, effective consultation, community service, and grassroots initiative, evolve spiritually and may develop new structures. When a community grows to include at least nine members, for instance, it may form a Local Spiritual Assembly, the local branch of the Administrative Order. Large growing communities, likewise, may develop increasingly complex administrative structures to support diverse community initiatives. Bifurcation points in the structure of the Greater Covenant are marked by the new revelations of each successive Manifestation. They correspond with new stages of evolution in the gradual maturation of the human race³⁰¹. With each successive revelation, the level and intensity of the love and divine intervention increase.

The concepts of complexity and chaos can also be used to describe these dynamics within dissipative structures. The dynamic interactions between the processes of integration and disintegration

that characterize the dissipative structure of BRD resemble the 'tensions of difference' that Bawden describe as characterizing the state of pre-chaotic systems. These tensions are what Waldrop refers to as complexity, the complicated and unpredictable state between order and chaos. When a system is in a state of complexity, it may eventually reach a bifurcation point where it destabilizes into chaos and then restabilizes in a new, more complex yet unpredictable form. This is exactly what the dissipative structure of BRD will do: it will pass through this current state of destabilization characterized by simultaneous processes of disintegration and integration, reach a bifurcation point and fall into a state of chaos, and then restabilize as the New World Order. Thus, bifurcation points in the complex dissipative structure of BRD is the one source of transformation and evolution in BRD from which will emerge the New World Order.

Bahá'í Resource Development as a Living System: Autopoietic Vitalism

Living systems with autopoietic patterns of organization literally make themselves by reproducing their own structure; that is, they are a

network pattern of processes of production of components in which the function of each component is to participate in the production or transformation of other components in the network while maintaining the integrity of the network. To be autopoietic, a living system must be self-bounded, self-generating, self-perpetuating, and self-organizing. It is unclear whether the pattern of organization of BRD can be considered autopoietic, even metaphorically. First of all, as already noted in the discussion of social systems above, it is difficult to define the boundary of BRD, let alone argue that BRD produces its own boundary, as it would do if it were self-bounded. Secondly, although one could argue that processes within the network produce all of the system's components (i.e., BRD begets BRD), entities outside of the system — most notably the Creative Spirit and the Holy Spirit — play such a significant role in processes of production, it would prove difficult to argue that BRD is organizationally-closed and self-generating. Similarly, even though BRD's production processes continue over time, it does not continually replace all its own components with its *own* processes of transformation, as do truly self-

perpetuating systems. In other words, it would be difficult to argue that BRD is an autonomous system, as are autopoietic organisms. Nevertheless, BRD does appear to be self-organizing in that it regulates itself through feedback networks of communication, it is very open and very far from equilibrium due to a constant influx of energy, and new structures and new modes of behavior are created through development, learning, and evolution (out of which the New World Order will emerge).

In short, when deciding whether or not BRD qualifies as an autopoietic system, it comes down to where one establishes the system's boundaries (i.e., if the Creative Spirit is included or not) and, if the Creative Spirit is not considered to be part of the system, whether or not its continual intervention precludes the system from being uniquely *self-making*. Of course, one could raise similar questions about any living system (particularly human systems), as has been done throughout history in the ongoing debate between mechanists, vitalists, and organicists (Capra 1996, 25). Mechanists argue that the laws of chemistry and physics are sufficient to

understand the phenomena of life, while vitalists and organicists argue that life is greater than the sum of its parts. Vitalists assert that some non-physical entity or force (e.g., the Creative Spirit) adds the additional necessary ingredient to create and support life. Organicists, in contrast, maintain that the additional ingredient is organization itself, the patterns of relationships of living organisms; in other words, life is an emergent property of organization. Maturana and Varela, who developed the concept of autopoiesis, are organicists, yet even they cannot agree about whether social systems can be autopoietic (Capra 1996, 97-98, 210). Clearly, given the central role of the Creative Spirit in its processes of production, BRD could be metaphorically understood as an example of *autopoietic vitalism*. Autopoietic vitalism, therefore, describes the pattern of organization of BRD and can be considered the second source of transformation and evolution in BRD — after bifurcation points in the dissipative structure of BRD — from which will emerge the New World Order.

Bahá'í Resource Development as a Living System: Cognition

According to Capra, the qualities of a living system's autopoietic pattern of organization are embodied in its structure, which changes through three inextricably linked activities: autopoietic self-generation, the evolution of dissipative structures through bifurcation points, and structural coupling with the environment. Capra calls this process of embodiment 'cognition', or the process of life. The autopoietic pattern of organization and dissipative structure of BRD are described immediately above. The final component of the cognitive processes of BRD — structural coupling — is explained below.

As noted in Chapter 2, however, human systems are somewhat unique. Structural coupling in human systems manifests as communication, language, and love. Communication is the coherent, harmonized coordination of behavior among living organisms. Language is communication about communication, the coordination of coordinations of behavior, or meta-communication. Through language, humanity 'brings forth a world' together. But because no

individual exists in isolation, love — or self-transcendence — bonds individuals together into community to make communication and language possible. In short, cognition in human systems involves three inextricably linked forms of structural coupling: love, communication, and the bringing forth of a world through language.

These three activities also describe the process of cognition in BRD. Formal education and individual investigation of the teachings and laws of the Creative Spirit are the primary forms of communication in BRD, which serve to structurally couple individuals with the Creative Spirit and the natural environment. Similarly, prayer, meditation, and consultation — all of which are the backbone of BRD's metasystems (the Covenant and the Administrative Order) — serve as the language of BRD. Both communication and language are most effective if combined with love — both the love from the Creative Spirit, which is the source of spiritual teachings, the Covenant, and the efficacy of prayer and mediation, and love among individuals, which makes consultation possible and maintains the unified structure of the Administrative Order. Through

communication, language, and love — which structurally couple people with the natural environment, one another, and the Creative Spirit — BRD brings forth a world, namely the New World Order. Structural coupling, therefore, can be considered the third source of transformation and evolution in BRD — after bifurcation points in the dissipative structure of BRD and autopoietic vitalism — from which will emerge the New World Order.

With the concept of structural coupling, this exploration comes full circle to the point with which it started: universal unity. Because people are organic with the world, every component, holon, and process of BRD is directly linked with its wider environment. This includes natural holons, like ecosystems and ecological communities, populations, individual organisms, and the holons of which they are composed, as well as holons like institutions and organizations that regulate larger holons like nations, economies, and religion. The dynamics of these connections and interchanges, which from the Bahá'í perspective are the 'cause of life' (see endnote 15), may be described as structural coupling.

Structural coupling triggers change in both the holons of BRD and the holons of natural systems, creating a two-way process of cognition or learning. In the midst of the old world order, it is easy today to see examples of how this structural coupling has triggered changes in natural systems; humankind's unsustainable developmentalism has dramatically altered the natural environment for the worse. People, especially during this century, seem to have learned very little, however, from their coupling with the environment. Perhaps another emergent property of BRD and a characteristic of the New World Order will be a process of cognition through which humans bring forth a new world by respecting their connections with the wider network of life. This is what Capra envisions will happen when people begin to think systemically and learn to reconnect (*religio*) with the wider environment, other people, and the Creative Spirit — with the entire web of life (Capra 1996, 295-296).

Conclusion: Transformed Developmentalism and Environmental Stewardship as Emergent Properties of Bahá'í Resource Development and Characteristics of the New World Order

The objective of this exploration is to address the questions:

What does the spiritually-inspired 'process' of getting from a state of worldwide ecological degradation fueled by unsustainable developmentalism to a different state characterized by an ecological paradigm that could inspire more sustainable environmental stewardship and developmentalism look like? In other words, how can spirituality facilitate the process of humans becoming better stewards of the world's natural resources? Towards that end, the systemic characteristics of Bahá'í resource development are explored above.

Bahá'í resource development exhibits the *pattern of organization* of spiritually-inspired resource development, which, qualitatively, is the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice. More specifically, the pattern of organization of BRD can be described as *autopoietic vitalism*. As a self-bounded, self-generating, self-perpetuating, and self-organizing system (assuming its boundaries are expanded to include the

Incomprehensible, which, in effect, makes the concept of boundaries meaningless), BRD is a religious process that creates new structures and new modes of behavior through spiritual development, learning, and evolution (out of which the New World Order will emerge).

Most simply, the *structure* of BRD can be conceptualized as a holarchy whose emergent properties are new states of spiritually-inspired transformation, development, growth, and evolution at every holarchic level. In other words, the *evolutionary processes* of BRD gradually create the *emergent properties* of the New World Order, a primary component of which is an ecological paradigm that inspires more sustainable environmental stewardship and developmentalism. More specifically, the *Covenant*, the *Administrative Order*, the *cycle of growth*, and the *process of disintegration* define the interrelationships and interdynamics of love and unity (or lack thereof) within and between the holons of BRD from which will emerge the New World Order. This network of integrating and disintegrating relationships has the characteristics of a *dissipative structure* that may experience periodic destabilizing bifurcation points at which it falls into a state of chaos

and restabilizes in a more complex form of BRD (or a precursor of the New World Order).

According to Capra, the life process consists of all activities involved in the continual embodiment of the system's autopoietic pattern of organization in a physical dissipative structure. BRD *cognition* (the descriptor Capra uses to describe the life process, or the bringing forth of a world) synthesizes autopoietic vitalism and dissipative structure through *communication, language, and love*, all of which are forms of *structural coupling*. Because of the organic unity of all creation, structural coupling triggers change in both the holons of BRD and the holons of natural systems, creating a two-way process of cognition or learning out of which the properties of the New World Order will emerge. This religious reconnection between humankind and the wider network of life may prove to be the key to improved developmentalism and environmental stewardship in systems of spiritually-inspired resource development.

Again: "What does the spiritually-inspired 'process' of getting from a state of worldwide ecological degradation fueled by

unsustainable development to a different state characterized by an ecological paradigm that could inspire more sustainable environmental stewardship and developmentalism look like? In other words, how can spirituality facilitate the process of humans becoming better stewards of the world's natural resources?" Addressing the latter question first, Bahá'í resource development can be understood as a spiritual process that facilitates the development of better stewards of the world's natural resources. But better environmental stewardship is just one aspect of the New World Order that will emerge out of BRD. Other characteristics of the New World Order include (but are not necessarily limited to) individual spiritual growth and adoption of a new way of life; community growth and more representative, collaborative, and participatory institutions; the realization of unity in diversity; a dynamic, balanced coherence between material and spiritual development; the emergence of a global commonwealth; affairs regulated by the principles of justice, equity, and moderation; and efficient and equitable economic systems. Moreover, the New World Order is not a static state that will serve as an alternative to the

current state of worldwide ecological degradation fueled by unsustainable developmentalism. Certainly, its properties will gradually emerge, but the New World Order will also be in a constant state of evolution and development. As a matter of fact, as is noted above, many of the specific characteristics of the New World Order — including, for instance, the nature of the economic system, developmentalism, or environmental stewardship — are completely unpredictable. The New World Order will not comprise a set of specific answers to current problems. Rather, it will manifest as an entirely new way of life in which today's problems will either not arise, or if they arise, will be easily resolved. Therefore, there is no way of telling today how problems in the New World Order will be addressed, but individuals, communities, and institutions will be empowered to avoid problems or are better equipped to meet them when they arise.

The key, therefore, for anyone interested in improving developmentalism and environmental stewardship through spiritually-inspired resource development, at least from a Bahá'í perspective, is to further the process of Bahá'í resource development. As Senge

suggests, this involves identifying ‘points of leverage’ within the structure of the system from which improvements in the system’s performance can be made. Such points of leverage within Bahá’í resource development, on which individuals and communities could focus their energies in order to reinforce and strengthen the system’s key components and processes include the Administrative Order and its institutions, community fellowship, and each component of the cycle of growth, including education, individual investigation, prayer, meditation, consultation, the application of spiritual principles, rectitude of conduct, work, service, sacrifice, and grassroots initiative.

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TRANSFORMING DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE
AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP:
A SYSTEMIC EXPLORATION OF SPIRITUALLY-INSPIRED
DEVELOPMENT IN THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

VOLUME II

By

Ronald James Whitmore, Jr.

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CHAPTER 4: PROBLEM-FOCUSED LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted in Chapter 3, all examples of spiritually-inspired resource development should share a similar pattern of organization — an abstract description of the configuration of relationships among the system's components and processes of production that determines the system's essential characteristics and characterizes the system as belonging to a particular class. The qualities of a system's pattern of organization are embodied in its structure, which changes through evolutionary and developmental processes. Capra calls this process of embodiment in living systems 'cognition', or the process of life. A system's pattern of organization (or essential identity), however, does not change during this process of structural change. Therefore, different examples of SIRD may exhibit different structure, but they should always share a pattern of organization.

The qualitative characteristics of SIRD, which can be considered its pattern of organization, were identified in Chapter 1 and elaborated upon in Chapter 3: qualitatively, SIRD is the dynamic, systemic

interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice. It is an example of the ‘process’ between ‘what is’ and ‘what could be’ in the context of environmental stewardship and developmentalism. Therefore, to address the questions of this chapter, “How does Bahá’í resource development compare and contrast to the literature of related fields? Specifically, how have other scholars, by examining similar models or elements thereof, explored the nature and extent of the relationship between theory, practice, and spirituality and between people and the environment, and how does their inquiry compare to the model developed for Bahá’í resource development?”, Bahá’í resource development should be compared with other models that exhibit the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development.

Potentially, such a comparison could be done with a large body of literature that addresses different dimensions of spiritually-inspired resource development. However, as is noted above in Chapter 1, spiritually-inspired resource development is not commonly studied as a whole, systemic process. Many questions therefore remain unanswered

about the systemic nature of the relationships between theory, practice, and spirituality in the context of the interaction among people, their development activities, and the environment. Many authors have explored particular holons or processes of spiritually-inspired resource development. But few integrate theory, practice, and spirituality at the convergence of the environment and developmentalism to gain a better understanding of the entire system or process of spiritually-inspired resource development.

For practical reasons, it is necessary to limit the comparison in this exploration to a reasonable number. Therefore, only those models that *best* match the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development are used. Specifically, the models of spiritually-inspired resource development must have the most, if not all, of the following characteristics of SIRD:

- be systemic or holistic in their exploration;
- explicitly consider the role of spirituality;
- integrate theory and practice;
- address the interface between people and the environment in the context of developmentalism; and
- describe dynamic developmental, transformational, or evolutionary processes.

The author discovered three models of spiritually-inspired resource development that share most of these characteristics: 1) the process of 'knowing as we are known' as articulated by Parker Palmer; 2) the systemic development of integrated critical learning systems, as developed by Richard Bawden and his colleagues at the Centre for Systemic Development at the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury; and 3) Ken Wilber's integral vision of evolution.

Immediately below, each of these three models is summarized, validated as an appropriate example of spiritually-inspired resource development, and then compared and contrasted to Bahá'í resource development. In the next and final chapter, the four models are synthesized to develop a more comprehensive definition of the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development.

Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development as the Process of 'Knowing as We are Known'

To Know as We are Known

Parker Palmer is concerned with four basic dimensions of learning: the nature of reality (ontology), how people know reality (epistemology), how people teach and learn (pedagogy), and how people apply what they know (ethics) (Palmer, xiii). He outlines a model of learning that integrates a holistic, organic ontology, the epistemology of love, and a communal pedagogy to develop an ethics that embraces rather than excludes and destroys the animate and inanimate world.

According to Palmer, reality is “*an organic, interrelated, mutually responsive community of being*”, which includes the material world, plants, animals, humanity, and the Creative Spirit (Palmer, 53) (emphasis added). His primary criticism of conventional, objectivist education, therefore, is that it separates the learner from the community of being, or the ‘knower’ from the ‘known’. Drawing on the Christian religious tradition, he suggests that objectivist

epistemologies are rooted in the story of Adam and Eve. Palmer argues that Adam and Eve's real sin was not their hunger for knowledge but the *kind* of knowledge for which they yearned — the kind of objective knowledge that distrusted and excluded the Creative Spirit. In other words, Adam and Eve made an epistemological error:

Their drive to know arose not from love but from curiosity and control, for the desire to possess powers belonging to God alone. They failed to honor the fact that God knew them first, knew them in their limits as well as their potentials. In their refusal to know as they were known, they reached for a kind of knowledge that always leads to death (Palmer, 25).

Similarly, in the quest to objectively know 'truth', modern science and educational systems have "broken the knower loose from the web of life itself. The modern divorce of the knower and the known has led to the collapse of community and accountability between the knowing self and the known world" (Palmer, 26).

Palmer argues that objectivist learning is rooted in curiosity and control (Palmer, 7) but that a third kind of knowledge, which is rooted in spiritual rather than intellectual traditions, is love or compassion (Palmer, 8). In the *epistemology of love*,

the act of knowing is an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. . . .

[T]he origin of knowledge is love. The deepest wellspring of our desire to know is the passion to recreate the organic community in which the world was first created.

The minds we have used to divide and conquer creation were given to us for another purpose: to raise to awareness the communal nature of reality, to overcome separateness and alienation by a knowing that is loving, to reach out with intelligence to acknowledge and renew the bonds of life. The failure of modern knowledge is not primarily a failure of our ethics, in the application of what we know. Rather, it is the failure of our knowing itself to recognize and reach for its deeper source and passion, to allow love to inform the relations that our knowledge creates — with ourselves, with each other, with the whole animate and inanimate world. . . .

Curiosity and control create a knowledge that distances us from each other and the world, allowing us to use what we know as a plaything and to play the game by our own self-serving rules. But a knowledge that springs from love will implicate us in the web of life; it will wrap the knower and the known in compassion, in a bond of awesome responsibility as well as transforming joy; it will call us to involvement, mutuality, accountability (Palmer, 9) (emphases in original).

In short, knowledge is love, so learning is an act of transcending self, embracing the wider community of life, and allowing that community to embrace the learner — it is knowing as we are known, thereby reunifying

the organic community of life.

For Palmer, this *communal act of participation in the network of relationships is called “truth”* (Palmer, 57):

Relationships — not facts and reasons — are the key to reality; as we enter those relationships, knowledge of reality is unlocked. Human beings are not the only participants in that community, but we alone are capable of participating in self-aware and articulate ways. As our capacity for conscious and reflective relationship increases, so does our knowledge. The deepest calling in our quest for knowledge is not to observe and analyze and alter things. Instead, it is personal participation in the organic community of human and nonhuman being, participation in the network of caring and accountability called truth (Palmer, 53-54).

It therefore follows that “Nothing could possibly be known by the solitary self, since the self is inherently communal in nature.” And for Palmer, community includes not only the teacher and other learners, but also that which is being learned: “We now see that to know something is to have a living relationship with it — influencing and being influenced by the object known” (Palmer, xv). Truth, therefore, is neither objective nor uniquely subjective and personal. *Truth is both internal and external:* “Truth is between us, in relationship, to be found in the dialogue of knowers and knowns who are understood as

independent but accountable selves” (Palmer, 55-56).

Palmer notes that ‘truth’ shares its Germanic roots with ‘troth’, as in a pledge, covenant, or relationship. In other words, “[T]ruth *involves entering a relationship with someone or something genuinely other than us, but with whom we are intimately bound.* Truth contains the image we are seeking — the image of community in which we were first created, the image of relatedness between knower and known that certain philosophies of science now affirm” (Palmer, 31) (emphasis added). Palmer stresses that educating toward truth implies neither the abandonment of objective reality nor the embrace of purely subjective knowledge; rather, it requires nurturing loving relationships with reality. In short,

In truthful knowing we neither infuse the world with our subjectivity (as premodern knowing did) nor hold it at arm’s length, manipulating it to suit our needs (as is the modern style). In truthful knowing the knower becomes co-participant in a community of faithful relationships with other persons and creatures and things, with whatever our knowledge makes known. We find truth by pledging our troth, and knowing becomes a reunion of separated beings whose primary bond is not of logic but of love (Palmer, 31-32).

We will find truth not in the fine points of our theologies or in our organizational allegiances but in the quality of our relationships — with each other and with the whole created world (Palmer, 48-51).

Prayer is one of the primary means by which people foster communal relationships in truth. *Prayer is the discipline of silence and solitude and the practice of relatedness, of acknowledging the spiritual bonds that tie the world together, of 'knowing as we are known'* (Palmer, 11, 124):

Prayer is the way of paradox — a way of entering into silence so deeply that we can hear the whole world's speech, a way of entering into solitude so deeply that we can feel the whole world's connections. In prayer we touch that transcendent Spirit from whom all things arise and to whom all things return, who makes all things kindred as they go (Palmer, 124).

Through prayer, people can take their places in community “by knowing the transcendent center that connects it all” (Palmer, 11). By reaching out to that center, people find that the center also reaches for them. From Palmer's perspective:

On the other side, prayer means opening myself to the fact that as I reach for that connecting center, the center is reaching for me. As I move toward the heart of reality,

reality is moving toward my heart. As I recollect the unity of life, life is recollecting me in my original wholeness. In prayer, I not only address the love at the core of all things; I listen as that love addresses me, calling me out of isolation and self-centeredness into community and compassion. In prayer, I begin to realize that I not only know but am known (Palmer, 11).

Palmer contrasts prayer with traditional objective education, where people distance themselves from the world and the Creative Spirit and try to create reality for themselves by projection using their own limited capacity to know. The result is the fragmented, disunified world of disciplines (Palmer, 13).

From Palmer's perspective, objective education is thereby being disobedient to truth. To truly know truth, Palmer argues, is to enter into personal relationship with it and follow it in practice, thereby creating a *relationship of obedience between the knower and the known*. Palmer is careful to stress that by obedience he does not mean slavish, uncritical adherence. He notes that 'obedience' comes from the Latin root *audire*, which means 'to listen from below', so "Obedience requires the discerning ear, the ear that listens for the reality of the situation, a listening that allows the hearer to respond to that reality, whatever it

may be” (Palmer, 43). Unlike objectivism, which “tells the world what it is rather than listening to what it says about itself”, and subjectivism, which “is the decision to listen to no one except ourselves”, obedience to truth “requires listening in obedience to each other, responding to what we hear, acknowledging and recreating bonds of the community of truth” and “submitting ourselves to something larger than any one of us, something on which we all depend” (Palmer, 67).

To summarize Palmer’s perspective, therefore, learning is ‘knowing as we are known’ — the communal process of prayerful obedience to truth, of strengthening loving relationships among individuals and between individuals and the rest of the organic world. Palmer concludes *To know as we are known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* with practical suggestions for how to do this. He highlights three spiritual traditions for “maintaining contact with love’s reality in the midst of misleading appearances: the *study of sacred texts**, the *practice of prayer and contemplation*, and the *gathered life of the*

*Palmer does not specify what he considers to be ‘sacred texts’. The author assumes that Palmer’s definition includes the sacred texts (written, oral, or otherwise) of all belief systems.

community itself" (Palmer, 17). In the latter, he suggests that learning is best done by *consensus*, the communal process of creating a communal ethic through the practice of obedience and truth (Palmer, 95). Because people learn to relate obediently to each other and to the world, consensus both affirms and corrects individual truth. In consensus, the "truth that emerges through listening and responding to each other and the subject at hand is more likely to transcend collective opinion than fall prey to it" (Palmer, 97).

Similarly, Palmer suggests that formal education could be improved by acknowledging spiritual epistemologies, which "open us to truth — whatever truth may be, wherever truth may take us" (Palmer, xi). He advocates three ways in which education could be improved. First, learners should learn by interacting with the world rather than treating it as if it were something apart from themselves: "The distinction between "out there" and "in here" would disappear; students would discover that we are in the world and the world is within us; that truth is not a statement about reality but a living relationship between ourselves and the world" (Palmer, 35). Second,

the inner reality of teachers and students should be engaged in the learning process rather than just their minds and bodies:

Students and subject would meet in ways that allow our passions to be tempered by facts and the facts to be warmed up, made fit for human habitation, by passions. In this kind of education, we would not merely know the world. We ourselves, our inner secrets, would become known; we would be brought into the community of mutual knowing called truth (Palmer, 36).

Third, communal learning experiences should be created rather than rewarding individualism and competition. Palmer suggests that if each of these three changes are made, learners would act as participants and co-creators of the world rather than as manipulators: “If our knowledge drew us close to the world in reverence and respect, if it made us realize that we are in the world and world is in us, we would not wish to manipulate the world but live in harmony with it and thus ourselves” (Palmer, 37-38).

Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development as the Process of 'Knowing as We are Known'

To reiterate, spiritually-inspired resource development is the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice. It is an example of the 'process' between 'what is' and 'what could be' in the context of environmental stewardship and developmentalism. Does the process of 'knowing as we are known' fit the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development? For the most part, yes. 'Knowing as we are known' — the development of obedient relationships within the organic web of life — could easily be described as a 'dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and humans'. More specifically, spirituality and the dynamic process of learning are both central to 'knowing as we are known', which ultimately connects 'what is' with 'what could be'. Moreover, theoretical learning and practical application are mutually-reinforcing in the process of 'knowing as we are known'. And finally, although developmentalism and environmental stewardship are not explicitly addressed by Palmer, it is

implied that they will become more sustainable as people become better learners. In sum, the process of ‘knowing as we are known’ includes elements of each of the defining characteristics of the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development: it is systemic or holistic in its perspective; it explicitly considers the role of spirituality; it integrates theory and practice; it assumes the unity of people with the environment, thereby linking their mutual development; and it describes a dynamic, developmental process.

‘Knowing as we are known’ is the communal learning process of prayerful obedience to truth, of strengthening loving relationships among individuals and between individuals and the rest of the organic world. Therefore, if spiritually-inspired resource development can be thought of as the process of ‘knowing as we are known’, those whose goal is to promote SIRD ought to encourage and foster fellowship, prayer, the study of sacred texts, consensual decision-making, interactive and communal education, and the integration of all — especially intellectual with emotional and spiritual — ways of knowing.

Bahá'í Resource Development as 'Knowing as We are Known'

If both Bahá'í resource development and the process of 'knowing as we are known' fit the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development, then considerable insight into the nature of spiritually-inspired resource development should be gained by comparing and contrasting the two examples. The two models share the following similarities:

Holistic, organic ontology: Central to both BRD and the process of 'knowing as we are known' is the ontological assumption that the world is a single, united, interdependent entity.

The Covenant fuels holarchic evolution: For Palmer, truth is more than the simple fact that reality is one. Truth is the growth of relationships between the physical, living, and spiritual parts of the whole. To know truth, a relationship of obedience — of listening and responding to, strengthening bonds with, and submitting to the larger whole (i.e., the Creative Spirit) — must be nurtured. For Palmer, truth emerges from obedient relationship. This closely resembles the way in which the New World Order emerges out holarchic evolution

in Bahá'í resource development. The holarchy of BRD, whose properties emerge out of a process of spiritually-inspired transformation, is the set of relationships between physical, living, and spiritual parts and wholes that Palmer defines as 'truth'. Moreover, just as Palmer suggests that listening and responding to, strengthening bonds with, and submitting to the larger whole is required to know truth, individuals must remain true to the Covenant to further the process of BRD. That is, they must continue to 'listen' to the Word of the Creative Spirit through study and meditation, strengthen their love for the Creative Spirit, and observe the Laws of the Creative Spirit. Moreover, the way in which Palmer suggests that individuals develop relationships with other parts of the whole resembles structural coupling in BRD, especially coupling between humans and nature.

Epistemology of love: In both the process of 'knowing as we are known' and BRD, the knower and the known — whether the known is the Creative Spirit or the rest of the organic web of life — are unified by love. For Palmer, knowing is loving — transcending self and embracing the reality of the other and allowing the other to enter and

embrace the knower. Similarly, the process of BRD is initiated by faith, which is the love for and knowledge of the Creative Spirit, and love is the glue that binds the universe together and the catalyst that facilitates the entire process of BRD.

Knowing in fellowship: For Palmer, knowing is a communal act of participation in the network of relationships called truth, so nothing can be known by the solitary self. Learning, therefore, is best done by consensus, the process of creating a communal ethic through the practice of obedience and truth. Fostering networks of relationships through fellowship is also an important part of the process of BRD. Moreover, consultation, which is communal learning in BRD, resembles Palmer's practice of consensus in that they are both forms of investigation that transcend individual and collective opinion.

Knowing in prayer: For Palmer, prayer is the practice of acknowledging the spiritual bonds that tie the world together, of fostering communal relationships in truth, of both addressing and listening to the love at the core of things, of 'knowing as we are known'. Likewise, prayer in BRD is communication, association,

connection, and communion with the Creative Spirit. Prayer is indispensable to both processes.

Knowing through the study of sacred texts: Finally, both processes — ‘knowing as we are known’ and BRD — look to sacred texts for insight and knowledge.

Despite these many similarities, there are also a few differences between the two processes:

Administrative Order: In BRD, the more organic processes of development are balanced with the structure of the Administrative Order. Palmer does not address administrative or organizational practicalities.

Volition and action in the cycle of growth: Knowledge is central to both BRD and ‘knowing as we are known’. In BRD, however, growth and development are also a function of individual volition and individual and collective action. Specifically, work, service, sacrifice, and grassroots initiative are explicit aspects of the process of BRD. Palmer, in contrast, does not stress the role of volition and action.

Dissipative structure: Palmer describes what is essentially a process of integration and development. In contrast, BRD, while it too stresses the integrative dimensions of development, includes both integration and disintegration as complementary processes of a single process of evolution.

Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development as Systemic Development

The Systemic Development of Integrated Critical Learning Systems

Based largely on their experience with students at the Centre for Systemic Development, Richard Bawden, Roger Packam, and their colleagues have modeled the systemic development of integrated critical learning systems. They define *systemic development* as the “*praxis involved in bringing abstract ‘systems ideas’ to bear to help inform actions to deal with events which are being experienced in the concrete world*” (Bawden 1997, 1) (emphasis added). To practice systemic development, “we need to facilitate the transformation of communities into learning systems which are sufficiently self-referential that they will be able to learn about their own learning” (Bawden 1997, 4). In

other words, the

quest for systemic development is essentially a learning process, which appreciates and accommodates its own complexity, in addition to that of the main problematical matters (of development) to hand. The central figure of the approach is therefore the design, establishment, maintenance and development of self-referential, or critical, learning systems (Bawden 1997, 4).

Critical, in this sense, means “being consciously open to questioning everything” (Bawden “Systemic Development”, 4).

A prerequisite for systemic action by critical learning systems is the creation of *meaning*, which Bawden calls “a property which is emergent in both individuals and communities, through the interactions of different ‘ways of knowing’”. Meaning emerges from the interactions between the experiential and inspirational learning subsystems of the integrated critical learning system (Bawden 1997, 4-5). These two subsystems and their interactions are explained immediately below.

Bawden adapts Kolb’s learning cycle, which is based on the interactions of experience, observation, abstraction, and experimentation, to create the *experiential learning subsystem* (Bawden

1997, 6) (Figure 8). The keys to criticality, however, according to

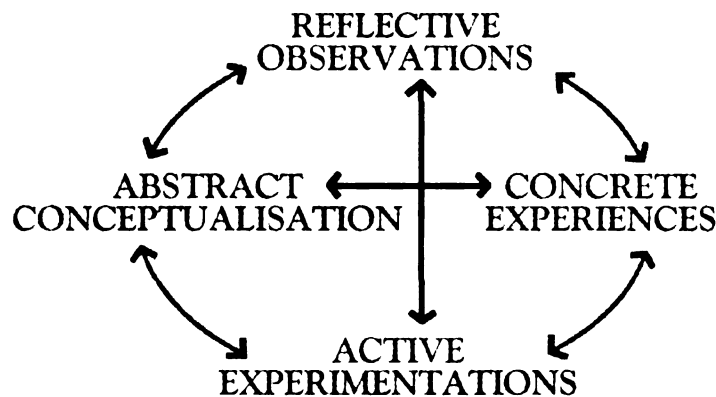


Figure 8: The Experiential Learning Subsystem
(adapted from Bawden 1997, 6).

Bawden, are first facilitating consciousness of the process of learning, which is learning to learn about learning, or *meta-learning*, and then “learning about the worldviews which contextualise what is being learned”, which is *epistemic learning* (Bawden 1997, 7-8). Bawden also refers to these three learning holons as cognition (of content), meta-cognition (of methods), and epistemic cognition (of world views) (Bawden “Systemic Development”, 28-30). Cognition and meta-cognition correspond with what Argyris and Schön refer to as single- and double-loop learning, respectively. Epistemic cognition is the domain of ethics, of aesthetics, of logic, and of values (Bawden

“Systemic Development”, 28) (Figure 9).

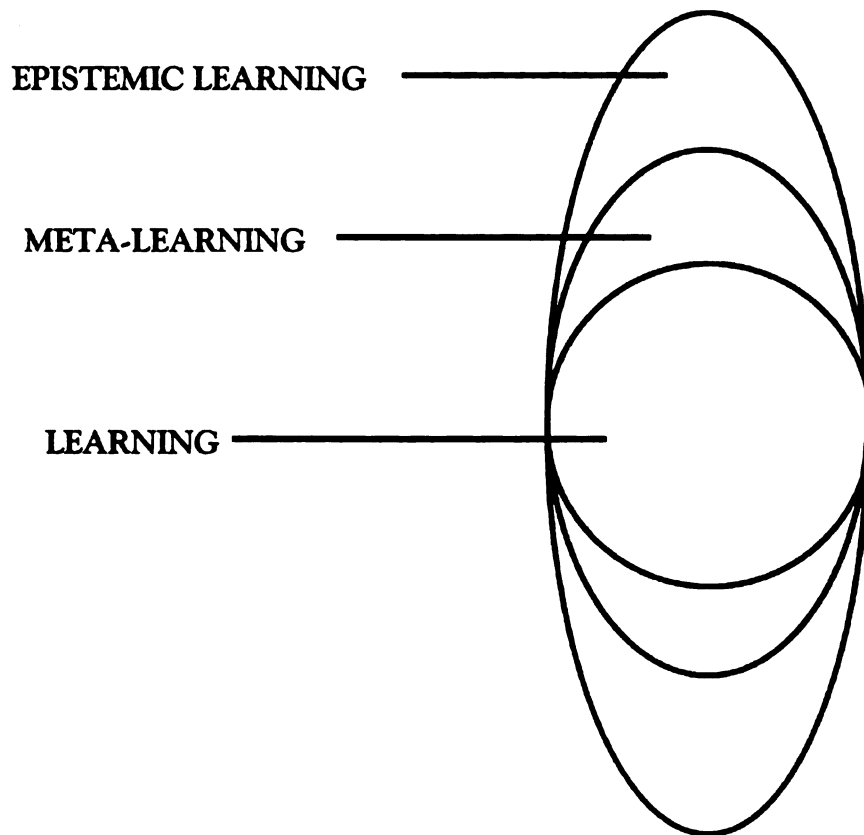


Figure 9: A systems hierarchy of three levels of learning (adapted from Bawden 1997, 8).

Because epistemic learning is the level at which people question their prevailing world view, the ability to learn epistemically is a prerequisite for the emergence of meaning from any learning system (Bawden 1997, 10). It

demands *a priori* that (a) we accept that we each “use”

particular paradigms* to make sense of the world around us; (b) we are able to recognise the nature of those preferred paradigms; (c) that we can recognise and embrace other paradigms in addition to our preferred ones; and (d) that we are especially able to embrace a systemic paradigm so that we can make sense of (and make use of) the learning systems metaphor to guide the processes of community development (Bawden “Systemic Development”, 27).

Bawden and Packam have developed a world view matrix with an ontological dimension (with holism and reductionism at opposite poles) and epistemological dimension (with objectivism and relativism at opposite poles) (Figure 10). The four world views that are defined by this matrix are technocentric, egocentric, ecocentric, and holonocentric. Technocentrism, defined by a reductionist ontology and objectivist epistemology, characterizes the prevailing modernization paradigm of science and development. Egocentrism, defined by the reductionist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, stresses the role and development of the individual. Ecocentrism, defined by a holistic ontology and objectivist epistemology, is the belief

*Bawden tends to use ‘paradigm’ and ‘world view’ interchangeably.

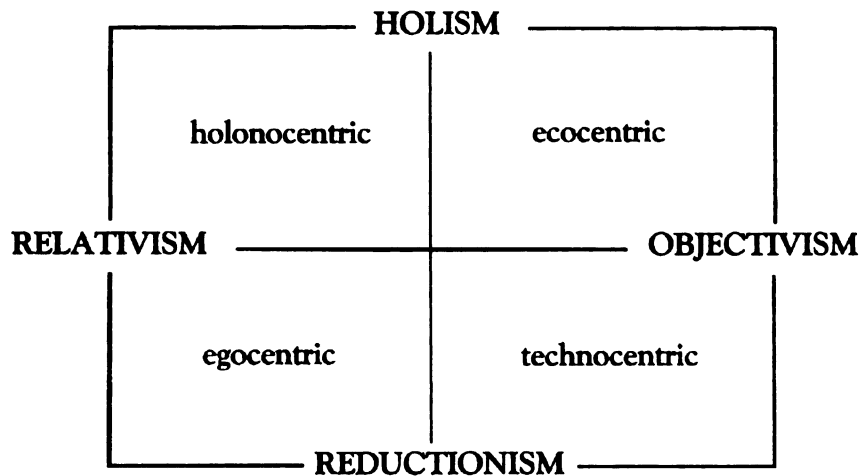


Figure 10: Four world views as functions of differing ontological and epistemological positions (adapted from Bawden 1997, 9).

that systems can be ‘fixed’ to solve problems. Holonocentrism, defined by the holistic ontology and subjectivist epistemology, is the concern with the ability of the components of a system to think systemically (Bawden “Systemic Development”, 31-43). Again, as already noted above in the discussion of the Hawkesbury Spiral, although it requires a holonocentric perspective to learn epistemically and to thereby choose the most appropriate world view for a particular question at hand, a systemic paradigm may not necessarily be the paradigm of choice for addressing that question.

Bawden and Packam are still developing their understanding of

the *inspirational learning subsystem*. Like the experiential learning system, it involves the interaction of four different dimensions of learning: disengagement from abstract conceptualizations to embrace reflective contemplations, focusing to develop spiritual insights, acceptance of those insights, and application of those insights in the experiential learning system through abstract conceptualization.

Unlike the experiential subsystem, these interactions are 'spiritual', or internal to individuals (Bawden 1997, 10-11). When the experiential and inspirational subsystems are united, "meaning emerges from the 'systemic' interaction of insights gained through inspirational learning with abstract concepts learned through experiential learning", which creates the lemniscate-like 'integrated critical learning system'

(Bawden 1997, 11-12) (Figure 11). The *systemic development* of (i.e., the development of an integrated critical learning system within)

communities and organizations involves individuals communicating the meanings that emerge from their own learning in a critical,

collaborative effort "to reach a common understanding in order to find agreement about what needs to be done in their shared everyday

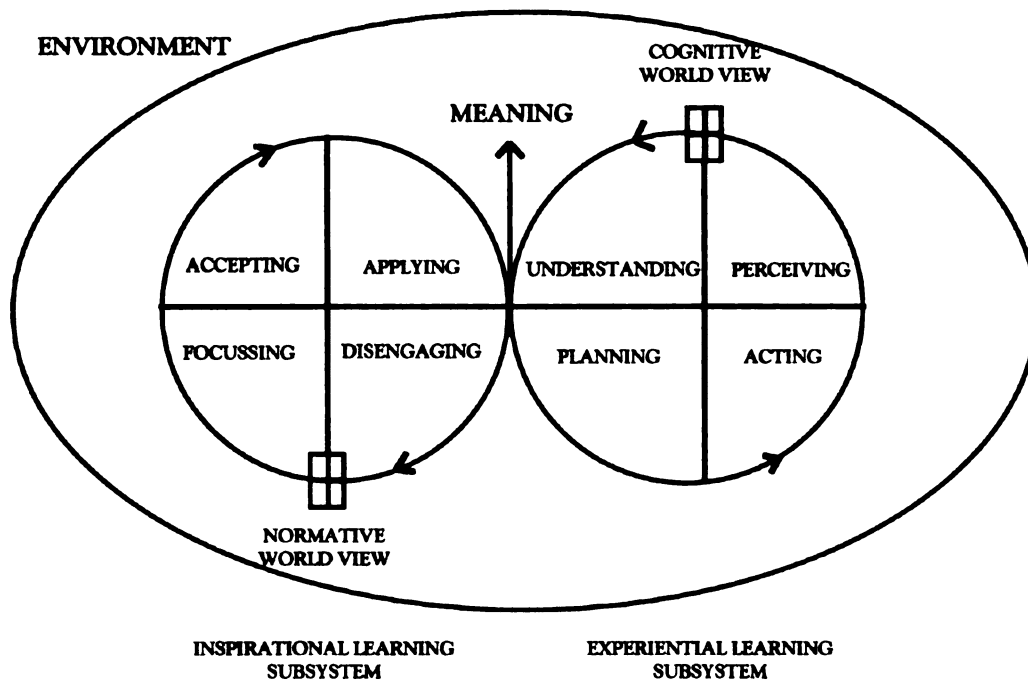


Figure 11: The Integrated Critical Learning System (adapted from Bawden 1997, 12).

worlds of events and ideas” (Bawden “Systemic Development”, 51).

Because of the differences in meaning among individuals,

dynamic critical learning systems are characterized by what might be referred to as *coherence through difference*.

Communities or organizations facing problematic situations will only retain their coherence if they are conscious of, and competent at dealing with, the differences between the individuals that comprise the group with respect to the host of issues surrounding the situation (Bawden “Systemic Development”, 51) (emphasis added).

Bawden describes and has considerable experience with facilitating

such conversations (Bawden “Systemic Development”, 53ff). They require establishing a rich picture of the situation at hand, agreeing upon a root definition of the situation, conceptually modeling the human activities that are linked within the situation, and debating feasible and desirable change (Bawden 1996). The key to success seems to be the ability to help the learning system as a whole develop critical, epistemic, holonocentric cognition. This is only possible if the system’s learning agents are structurally coupled and have the desire to remain so in a process of change. If successful, *emergent properties* (which, as in the development of any living thing, is unpredictable and often surprising) develop out of the conversations that result in an improvement in the problem at hand as well as an improvement in the epistemic competence of the community members. The emphasis of systemic development, therefore, is on the process rather than the product:

The essence of the process, is the “transformation” of groups of people into teams of learners who are as conscious of their learning about learning, as they are about the “development” issues to hand. And who are as enthusiastic to explore the significance of new ways of

knowing (meta-knowing), and new ways of contextualising their knowing (epistemic-knowing), as they are about deciding (a) what constitutes an improvement in the name of responsible development of their present circumstances, and (b) how to achieve such improvements through collaboration with others (Bawden “Systemic Development”, 61).

If the process is successful, a truly integrated critical learning system develops, which has the following characteristics:

- Has achieved a sense of its own coherence and integrity;
- Contains a requisite level of variety and diverse tensions of difference which are essential for its own dynamic;
- Is clear about its purpose and the influence of this on the boundary of its concerns and indeed its structure;
- Combines both experiential and inspirational learning processes in its quest for meaning for responsible action;
- Is conscious of meta and epistemic cognition, and of the influence of both cognitive and normative world views as frameworks for the way meaning is created;
- Is critically aware of its own emotional ambience, and competent at the intelligent management of those emotions;
- Is aware of the emergence of properties unique to different levels of its own systemic organization, just as it is to the dynamics of chaotic change and the potential of property emergence following reorganization;
- Appreciates the nature of the environments (suprasystems) in which it operates, and is conscious of both constraining and driving ‘forces’ in that environment;
- Is critically conscious of its own power relationships and those which exist between it and the environment about it, and knows what influence this has as a potential distorter of communication;

- Is self-referential, critical of its own processes and dynamics, and capable of self-organization in the face of continual challenge from its environment;
- Exhibits leadership as well as meaning as an emergent property (Bawden 1997, 13).

More concisely, an integrated critical learning system is an

- Organized and coherent group of people
- Collaborating purposefully together to achieve high quality transformations and transactions
- With a deep appreciation of their own integrity
- A keen sense of emergence
- And an acute consciousness of their shared processes, levels and states of learning
- As they design and create new and responsible futures together (Bawden “Systemic Development”, Appendix 3).

Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development as Systemic Development

Systemic development, as the praxis involved in using abstract ideas and spiritual inspiration to inform actions to deal with events in the concrete world, fits the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development: the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice.

‘Praxis’ is the integration of theory (‘abstract ideas’), spiritual inspiration, and practice (‘actions’), and ‘events in the concrete world’

describes developmentalism. While not explicitly a part of systemic development, natural resources easily qualify as part of the 'concrete world' and can therefore be considered part of systemic development. In sum, systemic development has each of the defining characteristics of spiritually-inspired resource development: it is systemic or holistic in its exploration; it explicitly considers the role of spirituality; it integrates theory and practice; it addresses the interface between people and the environment in the context of developmentalism; and it describes a dynamic developmental and transformational process.

The praxis of systemic development is a process of learning, meta-learning, and epistemic learning, out of which meaning emerges. It is best practiced by integrated critical learning systems that are sufficiently self-referential so as to be able to learn about their own learning and appreciate and accommodate their own complexity and that of the issues of development at hand by utilizing multiple world views from the perspective of the holonocentric world view. Systemic development, therefore, requires the design, establishment, maintenance, and development of integrated critical learning systems.

Meaning emerges from the systemic interactions between the process of the experiential subsystem (in which abstract concepts are learned) and the process of the inspirational subsystem (in which insights are gained) of the integrated critical learning system.

If spiritually-inspired resource development is systemic development, the transformation that SIRD inspires is a process of learning, meta-learning, and epistemic learning. Facilitating more sustainable resource development, therefore, requires designing, establishing, maintaining, and developing integrated critical learning systems. The meaning that will emerge from the learning system will improve both the participants understanding and practice of resource development.

Bahá'í Resource Development as Systemic Development

If both Bahá'í resource development and systemic development fit the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development, then considerable insight into the nature of spiritually-inspired resource development should be gained by comparing the two

examples. The two models share the following similarities:

Holarchy: BRD is a material and spiritual holarchy consisting of the Creative Spirit, the universe, the planet, nations, organizations, religion, communities, individuals, etc. Likewise, systemic development can be thought of as a holarchy of interdependent integrated critical learning systems, each of which has an appreciation for its relationship to the other holons in the holarchy.

Praxis: The integration of theory, practice, and spirituality as ‘praxis’ is central to both BRD and systemic development.

Experiential learning: The BRD cycle of growth clearly resembles the experiential subsystem of the integrated critical learning system. The three components of the cycle of growth — knowledge, volition, and action — correspond with the four interacting components of the experiential subsystem — experience, observation, abstraction, and experimentation. Experience, observation, abstraction, and experimentation describe the twin processes of knowledge being generated out of action and action being motivated by knowledge. Volition fuels these two complementary processes and the experiential

learning cycle, although Bawden (following Kolb) does not include volition in the cycle.

Spiritual learning: Inspirational, or spiritual, learning is central to both BRD and the integrated critical learning system. Moreover, the four components of the inspirational subsystem of the integrated critical learning system — disengagement, focusing, acceptance, and application — correspond well with components of spiritual development in BRD. Both processes begin with faith, or the conscious knowledge of a Spirit or center of inspiration greater than oneself. The reflective contemplation of ‘disengagement’ in systemic development resembles the process of looking to the Word and Laws of the Creative Spirit for guidance and spiritual power. Likewise, ‘focusing’ is an important aspect of meditation and prayer in BRD, out of which develop spiritual insights; ‘acceptance’ resembles detachment in BRD; and ‘application’, which relinks the inspirational to the experiential learning system, is analogous to the link between knowledge and action required in the cycle of growth of BRD. This reconnection to the experiential learning system also highlights an

important difference between the integrated critical learning system and BRD, which is explained in the next section below.

Unity in diversity: Central to both BRD and systemic development is the idea of unity in diversity. Two keys to BRD are first recognizing the unity of the diverse creation and then learning to foster and maintain unity within diverse communities. In the language of systemic development, this is expressed as ‘coherence through difference’. An integrated critical learning system is an “organized and coherent group of people” with a “deep appreciation of their own integrity” who are “collaborating purposefully together to achieve high quality transformations and transactions”. The group is “clear about its purpose” yet “contains a requisite level of variety and diverse tensions of difference which are essential for its own dynamic”. To retain this coherence through difference, the members of the system must first “desire to remain structurally coupled during the process of change” and then be “conscious of, and competent at dealing with, the differences between the individuals that comprise the group with respect to the host of issues surrounding the situation” at hand.

Consultative Decision-Making: In BRD, consultation is a collective method of consensual decision-making about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment. The key to consultation is the ability of the individuals involved to transcend their respective points of view, to speak with candor and courtesy, to dispassionately weigh the evidence and options presented, to detach themselves from their comments and give them to the group to consider, and to wholeheartedly support the final decision of the group. There is no room for debate, protest, adversarial partisanship, or manipulation in consultation. The steps of consultation include: 1) understand the matter to be decided; 2) ascertain and agree on all the facts of the matter; 3) identify the spiritual and administrative principles that relate to the issue; 4) make a clear statement of the provisional conclusion; 5) make a decision by consensus; 6) record the decision; and 7) carry-out the decision (Kolstoe).

Likewise, in systemic development, individuals communicate the meanings that emerge from their own learning in a critical,

collaborative effort to find agreement about what needs to be done as regards the question at hand. The steps in this process, which correspond with the steps of consultation, include: 1) establish a rich picture of the situation at hand (steps 1 and 2 of consultation), 2) agree upon a root definition of the situation (step 2 of consultation), 3) conceptually model the human activities that are linked within the situation (step 2 of consultation), and 4) debate feasible and desirable change (steps 4 through 5 of consultation). Again, although consultation and the collective decision-making of systemic development share much in common, there are also some clear differences between the two, which are elaborated upon in the next section below.

Dissipative Structure: Dissipative structures exist in a state between order and chaos. Both integrated critical learning systems and BRD can be considered dissipative structures. Integrated critical learning systems evolve through a process of systemic reorganization driven by chaotic change and bifurcation — that is, from stability, to instability, and to a new state of stability, to a new state of instability,

and so on. Likewise, the network of integrating and disintegrating relationships of BRD, as defined by the Covenant, the Administrative Order, the cycle of growth, and the process of disintegration, has the characteristics of a dissipative structure that may experience periodic destabilizing bifurcation points at which it falls into a state of chaos and restabilizes in a more complex form of BRD. Again, this is a process of moving from stability, to instability, and to a new state of stability, to a new state of instability, and so on.

Emergent properties: In both systemic development and BRD, emergent properties evolve out of this iterative process. The primary product of systemic development, for instance, is meaning as an emergent property of the interaction between inspirational and experiential ways of knowing. This unpredictable and often surprising emergent meaning develops out of the consultative conversations described above. This new meaning improves both the problem at hand as well as the epistemic competence of the community members, both of which also contribute to the learning, development, and transformation of the individuals and communities that make-up the

integrated critical learning system.

Similarly, BRD creates new structures and new modes of behavior at every holarchic level through spiritually-inspired development, learning, and evolution, out of which the properties of the New World Order will emerge. The New World Order is not a static state; its properties will gradually emerge through a continual process of evolution and development. As a result, many of the specific characteristics of the New World Order are completely unpredictable. The New World Order will emerge as an entirely new way of life in which today's problems will either not arise, or if they arise, will be easily resolved — individuals, communities, and institutions will be empowered to avoid problems or are better equipped to meet them when they arise.

There are also some important differences between Bahá'í resource development and systemic development:

Integrated learning: As noted above, the connection between the inspirational and experiential learning subsystems highlights an

important difference between the integrated critical learning system and BRD. In the former, the experiential and inspiration subsystems are distinct processes. In the latter, there is no dualistic distinction drawn between learning from material and spiritual experience — both are critical aspects of the cycle of growth.

The role of community and the Creative Spirit in spiritual learning:

Another important difference is that the integrated critical learning system does not incorporate dimensions of spiritual learning that are central to BRD, namely love and assistance from the Source of inspiration (i.e., the Creative Spirit) and from community. In the integrated critical learning system, the individual is alone during most of her process of spiritual development. There is no mention of what the object of reflective contemplation and focusing might be or what the Source of that object might be. More importantly, there is no indication that the Source assists the individual through the process or that love (i.e., self-transcendence) might have anything to do with why the individual initiates the process or is assisted with it. Similarly, although community is clearly an important dimension of systemic

development, it is not an explicit component of the integrated critical learning system model that unites the inspirational and experiential learning systems. In sum, there seems to be a dichotomy between the individual and community in systemic development, as there is between material and spiritual development.

Collective decision-making: Although consultation and the collective decision-making of systemic development share much in common, there are also some clear differences between the two. In consultation, for instance, the emphasis is on the individuals' ability to conduct themselves with detachment, candor, and courtesy, while traditional 'debate' is encouraged in systemic development. Moreover, participants in consultation rely not only on their understanding of the facts at hand but also on the spiritual principles that relate to the matter (step 3), while participants in systemic development rely uniquely on the former but devote more time and energy to understanding the matter at hand (steps 1 through 3 in systemic development correspond with steps 1 and 2 in consultation). Finally, the importance of coming to a clear decision and following through on

that decision is stressed more in consultation (steps 6 and 7) than in systemic development.

The structure of BRD is pre-defined: The Covenant, the Administrative Order, the cycle of growth, and the process of disintegration clearly define the structure of BRD. In contrast, while the lemniscate of the integrated critical learning system is clearly defined in systemic development, the relationships among individuals that define the structure of communities and organizations is relatively undefined. This is most likely due to the fact that each organization or community has its own distinct organizational structure, which it retains during at least the initial stages of its systemic development.

Criticality: One of the most important characteristics of a successful integrated critical learning system is the ability of the individuals who comprise it to think and act critically. In other words, the individuals and their communities must be able to be self-referential, critical of their own processes and dynamics, conscious of their own power relationships and those which exist between them and their environment, and aware of the influence these power

relationships have as potential distorters of communication. In contrast, criticality in BRD is far less explicit. It is implied, however, in both individual investigation and consultation. As there are no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, individuals have the responsibility to investigate truth on their own, i.e., critically. Moreover, in consultation, ideas are assessed critically by the group in the process of decision making.

Meta, epistemic, and holonocentric cognition: Similarly, there is no explicit mechanism in BRD for facilitating consciousness of the process of learning (i.e., meta-cognition) or for learning about the world views which contextualize what is being learned (i.e., epistemic cognition). In contrast, both meta and epistemic cognition are essential for developing the critical awareness required for systemic development. Epistemic cognition, in turn, enables individuals to develop holonocentric world views through which they may embrace other world views that may be more appropriate for the situation at hand.

Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development as the Integral Vision

The Integral Vision of Evolution

Ken Wilber, transpersonal psychologist, philosopher, and student of integral studies, has developed what he calls the *integral vision* of evolution and development. He began by looking for *orienting generalizations* — broad, general themes that emerge in the various fields of human knowledge, about which there is very little disagreement — and then strung them together to “arrive at some astonishing and often profound conclusions, conclusions that, as extraordinary as they might be, nonetheless embody nothing more than our already-agreed-upon knowledge” (Wilber 1996, 17-18). His assumption is that no one is capable of 100 percent error, “So instead of asking which approach is right and which is wrong, we assume each approach is true but partial, and then try to figure out how to fit these partial truths together, how to integrate them — not how to pick one and get rid of the others” (Wilber 1998, x). Many of the ideas that follow resemble those already outlined in Chapter 2 because Wilber draws on the work of many of the authors cited in that chapter,

including Laszlo, Jantsch, Capra, Prigogine, Maturana, Varela, etc.

The way in which Wilber integrates them is unique, however, which is why his work is of particular interest in this exploration. What follows is a summary of his integration of these orienting generalizations, which is the integral vision of evolution (from Wilber 1996, 24-42).

According to Wilber, there are four domains of the *Kosmos*: the *cosmos* (the domain of matter), the *biosphere* (the domain of life), the *noosphere* (the domain of mind), and the *theosphere* (the domain of the divine). Moreover, there are twenty tenets or patterns of evolution in the *Kosmos*, the most important elements of which are briefly summarized as follows:

Reality is composed of *holons*. All holons share certain characteristics, the central 'drives' of which are to maintain both its 'wholeness' and 'partness'. In other words, each holon possesses the 'horizontal' capacities of both *agency* and *communion* as well as the 'vertical' capacities of *evolution* (self-transcendence) and *devolution* (self-dissolution). These capacities may also be thought of as different 'pulls' toward greater wholeness and partness within a network of

holons.

Because they possess the capacity for self-transcendent creativity, holons also *emerge*. The Kosmos, therefore, evolves and “unfolds in quantum leaps of creative emergence” (Wilber 1996, 24).

In contrast to the traditional Darwinian view, Wilber suggests that

[S]omething more than chance is pushing the universe. . . .Chance is not what explains the universe; in fact, chance is what the universe is laboring mightily to overcome. Chance is exactly what the self-transcending drive of the Kosmos overcomes. . . .There is a formative drive, a telos, to the Kosmos. It has a direction. It is going somewhere. . . .[I]ts drive is the organization of Form into increasingly coherent holons (Wilber 1996, 26-27).

This emergence occurs *holarchically*. That is, each emergent holon *transcends but includes* its predecessors. It enfolds the properties of its predecessors yet transcends them by unfolding “certain emergent or novel or creative properties that are not merely the sum of its components” (Wilber 1996, 31). Figure 12 illustrates how emergent holons transcend yet include their predecessors. Two important points follow from this idea of holarchic emergence. First, when humans harm the biosphere, they are actually hurting their own being, and

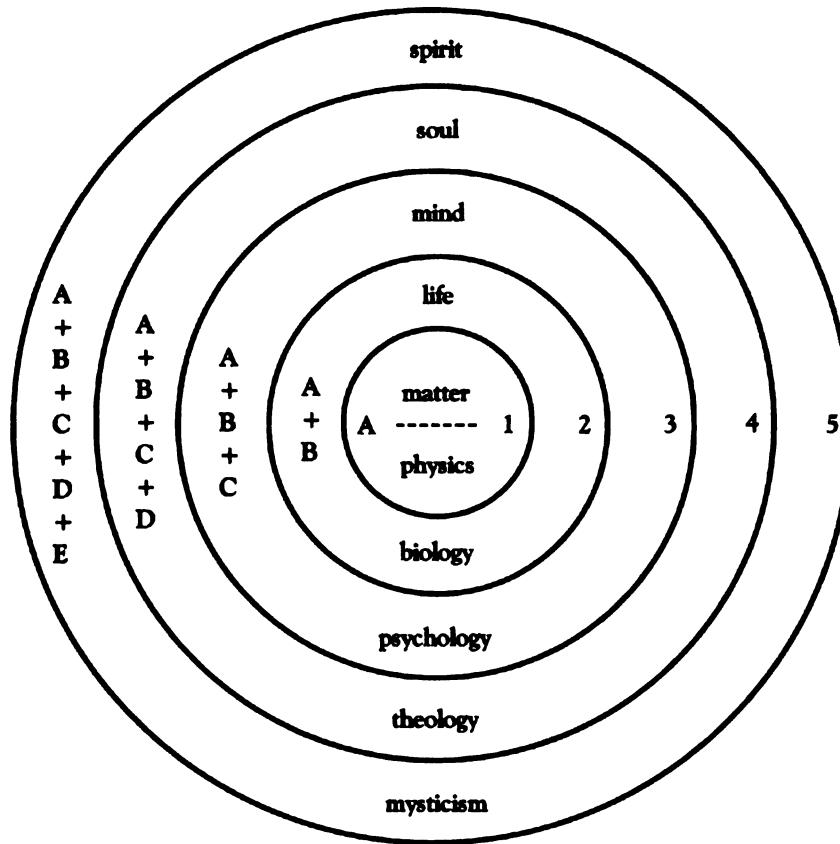


Figure 12: As holons unfold (i.e., emerge), they enfold (i.e., transcend and include) their predecessors (Wilber 1996, 36).

second, spirit includes all holons because it transcends all (Wilber 1996, 38). Moreover, because holons emerge holarchically, there is *greater depth and less span* at succeeding holarchic levels. Depth refers to the levels of any holarchy, while span refers to the number of holons at any given level. Figure 13 illustrates how there are fewer holons (i.e., less span) at higher levels of holarchic emergence (i.e., greater

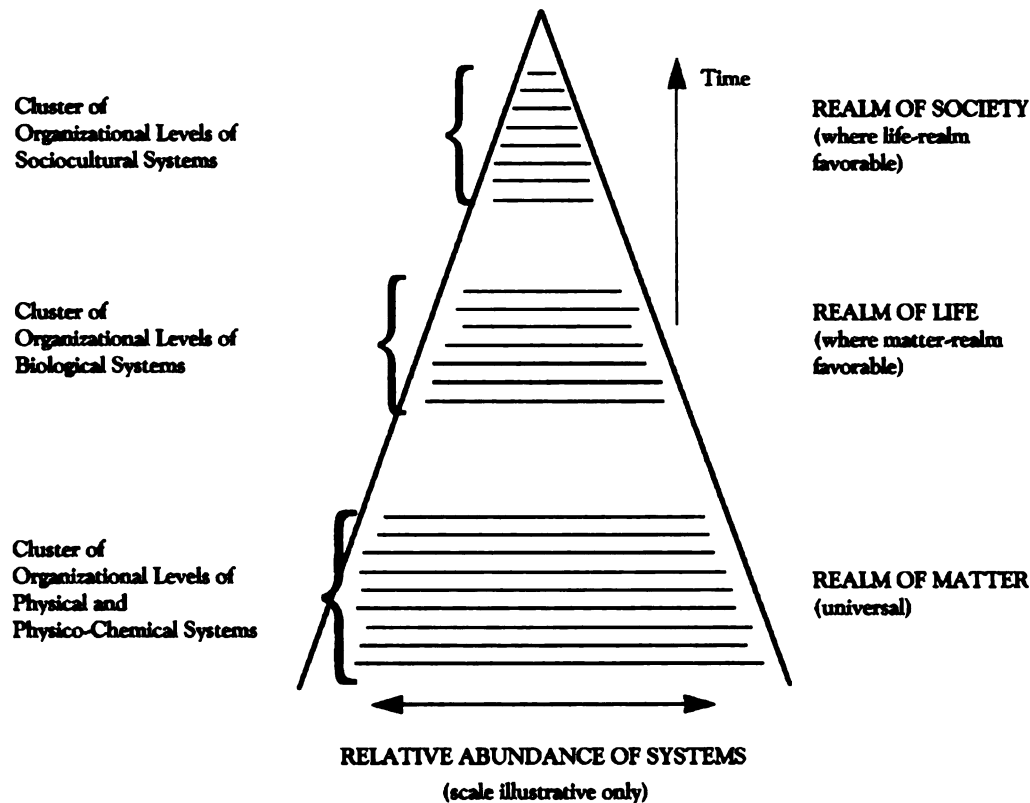


Figure 13: Greater depth, less span (Laszlo “Science and Prophecy”, 23).

depth). Because with greater depth (i.e., higher levels of evolution) comes less span (i.e., fewer holons at that level), Wilber is not surprised that few people develop high levels of spirituality.

Evolution, therefore, has a *drive towards greater self-transcendence*, depth, and consciousness, which can also be thought of as a principle of order out of chaos. The general tendency of evolution is to move in the direction of increasing complexity, increasing differentiation,

increasing integration, increasing organization and structuration, and increasing relative autonomy. Therefore, all beings and particularly humans, are part of this process of *Spirit-in-action*. And Spirit, or God,

is immanent in the process itself, woven into every fabric of the Kosmos; but it everywhere transcends its own productions, and brings forth anew in every moment. . . .And we are invited, I believe, to awaken as this process. The very Spirit in us is invited to become self-conscious, or even, as some would say, superconscious. Depth increases from subconscious to self-conscious to superconscious, on the way to its own shocking recognition, utterly one with the radiant All, and we awaken as that oneness (Wilber 1996, 42).

And with that thought, Wilber completes his synopsis of the twenty tenets of evolution.

He goes on to flesh out more of the details of evolution, however. Evolution, he argues, is characterized by a *dialectic of progress*; that is, every stage of evolution eventually runs into its own inherent limitations, which trigger the self-transcending or self-dissolution drives:

The inherent limitations create a type of turmoil, even chaos, and the system either breaks down (self-dissolution) or escapes this chaos by evolving to a higher degree of order (self-transcendence) — so called order out of

chaos. . . .No epoch is finally privileged. We are all tomorrow's food. The process continues (Wilber 1996, 49-50).

This concept resembles the idea of bifurcation points.

Wilber identifies these different epochs of self-dissolution and self-transcendence in human history. They are characterized by both a stage of technological/economic development and its corresponding predominant world view. Specifically, as human economies evolved from foraging to horticultural to agrarian to industrial to informational, the dominant world views shifted from archaic to magic to mythic to rational to existential (Wilber 1996, 44). Wilber emphasizes that “it’s not that there is a single, pre-given world, and we simply look at it differently. Rather, as the Kosmos comes to know itself more fully, *different worlds* emerge” (Wilber 1996, 57) (emphasis in original). In other words, humanity and its view of the world co-evolve.

But that is only half of the picture — the communal half.

During his search for orienting generalizations, Wilber discovered that reality can be conceptualized as four quadrants defined by a simple two-dimensional grid (Wilber 1996, 71-83) (Figure 14). On the

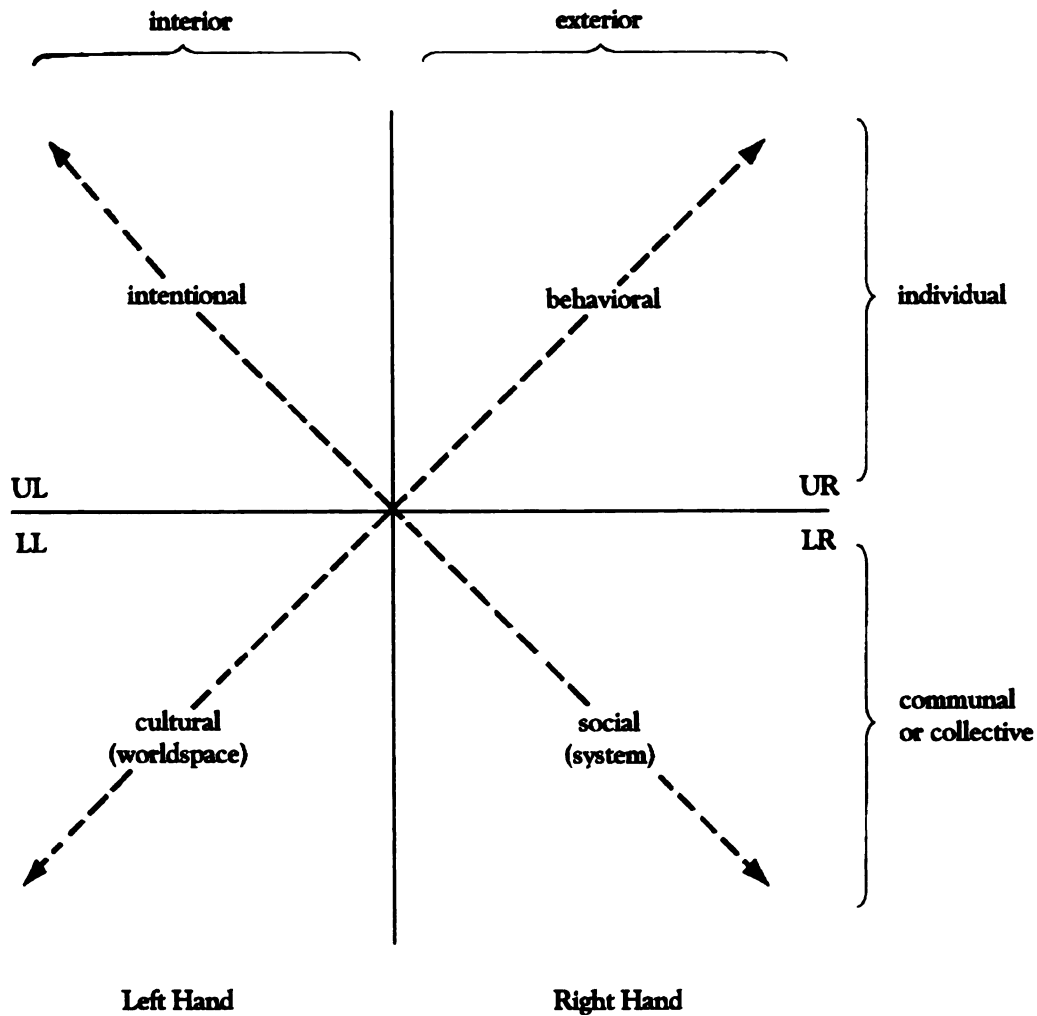


Figure 14: Wilber's Four Quadrants (Wilber 1996, 71).

horizontal axis are the interior and exterior, and on the vertical axis are the individual and the collective. This creates *four quadrants*: the upper left or *intentional* quadrant, which is the interior of the individual; the upper right or *behavioral* quadrant, which is the exterior of the individual; the lower left or *cultural* quadrant, which is the

interior of the collective and the home of the dominant cultural world view; and the lower right or *social* quadrant, which is the exterior of the collective and the home of the material base of that world view.

Spirit, moreover, manifests itself in all four quadrants:

Spirit isn't just a higher Self (behavioral quadrant), or just Gaia (cultural quadrant), or just awareness (intentional quadrant), or just the web of life (social quadrant), or just the sum total of all objective phenomena, or just transcendental consciousness. Rather, Spirit exists in and as all four quadrants, the four compass points, as it were, of the known Kosmos, all of which are needed to accurately navigate. . . . (Wilber 1996, 82) (parenthetical comments added).

More important than the four quadrants, however, is the fact that they are all interwoven and mutually-determining: "They all cause, and are caused by, the other quadrants" (Wilber 1996, 81). Therefore, proper interpretation of evolutionary processes and emergent properties requires that one first not confuse the four quadrants and then realize that all meaning is context-bound: "In other words, we want to make sure that we have checked our interpretation against *all four quadrants*. We want an "all-quadrants" view, an interpretation from the context of the Kosmos in all its

dimensions” (Wilber 1996, 102) (emphases in original). But in a world dominated by greater and greater specialization within more and more disciplines, an all-quadrants view is rarely taken. Wilber suggests that, because evolution must occur in each quadrant simultaneously, if people fail to take an all-quadrants view, transformation and emergence will either not take place or will continue without them (Wilber 1996, 82-83).

Wilber also identifies a *validity claim* for each of the four quadrants (Wilber 1998, 13). A validity claim is simply a test of whether or not an interpretation or perception corresponds with reality (Wilber 1996, 105). The validity claim in the upper right (individual exterior) is the *propositional truth* of objective, empirical science. In the upper left (individual interior), it is *truthfulness and trustworthiness*. In the lower left (collective interior), the validity claim is *justness*: “The aim here is *mutual understanding*. Not that we necessarily agree with each other, but can we at least *understand* each other. . . ? So the aim here is not so much the mapping of objective truth, and not simply being truthful, but reaching mutual understanding” (Wilber 1996, 112-

113) (emphases in original). The validity claim in the lower right (collective exterior) is *functional fit*, or how various holons fit together in the overall objective system. From another perspective,

these four truths are simply the four faces of Spirit as it shines in the manifest world. The validity claims are the ways that we connect to Spirit itself, ways that we attune ourselves to the Kosmos. . . .

And so, following these paths to truth, we fit with the flow of the Kosmos, we are delivered into currents that take us outside of ourselves, beyond ourselves, and force us to curb our self-serving ways, as we fit into ever deeper and wider circles of truth (Wilber 1996, 119).

Wilber simplifies the four quadrants in two ways. First, he distinguishes the Left and Right Hand paths (Wilber 1996, 86ff). The Left Hand is the interior, intersubjective dimension that can only be understood through dialogue. The Right Hand is the exterior, interobjective dimension commonly studied objectively, empirically, and monologically. Next, he identifies the languages of “I”, “We”, and “It” (Wilber 1996, 120-123). It, or the Right Hand path, uses an objective, neutral, empirical, analytical, monological language. The language of I, or the upper left quadrant, is presence, consciousness, subjective awareness, self, and self-expression. And the language of

We, or the lower left quadrant, is cultural and intersubjective — the language of ethics, morals, and world views.

Borrowing from the Buddhist tradition, Wilber identifies the spiritual correlates of I, It, and We as Buddha (the spiritual realizer), Dharma (the truth to be realized), and Sangha (the community attempting the realization), respectively (Wilber 1996, 131). In other words,

When you are ultimately *truthful* with yourself, you will eventually realize and *confess* that “I am Buddha,” I am Spirit. . . . The deepest recesses of your consciousness directly intersect Spirit itself, in the supreme identity. . . .

And the ultimate cultural fit or justness is, “We are all members of the Community of Spirit.” All sentient beings — all holons in fact — contain Buddha-nature — contain depth, consciousness, intrinsic value, Spirit — and thus we are all members of the council of beings, the mystical church, the ultimate We. Which is ultimate ethics, the ultimate Good.

And the ultimate objective truth is that all beings are perfect manifestations of Spirit or Emptiness — we are all manifestations of the ultimate It, or Dharma. Which is the ultimate Truth. . . .

The point is that, precisely because Spirit manifests equally in all four quadrants, . . . then we can describe Spirit *subjectively* as one’s own Buddha-mind — the “I” of Spirit, the Beauty. And we can describe Spirit *objectively* as Dharma — the “It” of Spirit, the ultimate Truth. And we can describe Spirit *culturally* as Sangha — the “We” of

Spirit, the ultimate Good” (Wilber 1996, 132-134)
(emphases in original).

It also follows that Spirit is therefore not a thing or level of consciousness to achieve but the process of evolution itself that is becoming more and more manifest:

[E]volution is best thought of as Spirit-in-action, God-in-the-making, where Spirit unfolds itself at every stage of development, thus manifesting more of itself, and realizing more of itself, at every unfolding. Spirit is not some particular stage, or some favorite ideology, or some pet god or goddess, but rather the entire process of unfolding itself, an infinite process that is completely present at every finite stage, but becomes more available to itself with every evolutionary opening. . . (Wilber 1996, 10).

This represents the perspective of what Wilber calls the *Nondual* spiritual traditions. He classifies human attempts at understanding Spirit into three camps: Ascending, Descending, and Nondual traditions. The Ascending path is purely transcendental and otherworldly and is typically puritanical, ascetic, or yogic. It devalues material reality, including the body, senses, sexuality, and the Earth. Salvation, to Ascenders, is not of this world, which is evil or illusory. The Descending path, in contrast, is this-worldly to the core. It

celebrates the Earth, the body, the senses, and often sexuality. It identifies Spirit with the material world and despises anything transcendental. Wilber argues that the current, modern world is strictly Descending, so Spirit has been reduced to strictly sensory, empirical, and material reality, or *flatland*, as Wilber labels it (Wilber 1996, 10-11; see also pp. 249ff). In other words, the Left Hand (interior) dimensions have been reduced to their Right Hand (exterior) correlates, which is considered the only knowledge worth knowing (Wilber 1996, 248). The Nondual traditions — those that see Spirit as both process and product — attempt to integrate the Ascending and Descending paths (Wilber 1996, 12-13).

From there, Wilber focuses almost exclusively on the evolution of consciousness of “I”. He simplifies this evolution into the Ladder (a nested holarchy of consciousness consisting of concentric circles or levels of growth), the Climber (the self), and the View (the changing view of self and others at each stage, which includes different self-identity, self-needs, and moral sense) (Wilber 1996, 139-146).

Fulcrums, or each step in the climb, describes the process of

differentiation and integration as it occurs at each stage in human development (Wilber 1996, 144). Each fulcrum has a 1-2-3 process of fusion, differentiation, and integration, and things often go wrong at the fulcrums, which prevents or slows development (Wilber 1996, 148, 162). Wilber explores the climb up the Ladder and through the fulcrums in considerable detail — more than is required in this context.

His conclusion is of particular relevance to this exploration, however. He reiterates that a truly “global perspective is a rare, elite, extraordinary perspective of great depth, and there are relatively few individuals who actually make it to that depth (greater depth, less span)” (Wilber 1996, 157). Moreover, “These higher stages are very rare, very elite, very difficult accomplishments. . . .These deeper or higher states have *never* been anything near an average or collective mode of awareness. . .” (Wilber 1996, 246). But a new paradigm characterized by a global perspective is precisely what many environmental ethicists and ecophilosophers advocate. Yet, as Wilber points out, they fail to understand or explain how a global

consciousness evolves and emerges so that new paradigms can actually be implemented, which is the most important issue. The crucial issue is Left Hand development: “how to get individuals to develop up to the point where they can actually inhabit a global awareness in the first place” (Wilber 1996, 157-158). The problem with the deep ecologists, ecofeminists, and other new paradigm environmentalists, Wilber suggests, is that they are uniquely Right Hand (Wilber 1996, 205-206):

Anybody can say that they are thinking “globally,” but very few can actually take a worldcentric or postconventional perspective. As we saw, to *actually* live from a worldcentric or universal perspective requires five or six major interior stages of transformation and transcendence.

But if the entire Left Hand is ignored and devalued — if we ignore interiors and just rivet our eyes on an objective “global” map of Gaia or systems nature — we will ignore the actual path of getting people to that global or worldcentric stance. We will have a goal with no path. And we will have a map that denies and condemns transcendence, which is the actual path itself! (Wilber 1996, 273).

One final quote from Wilber reiterates this important point and provides a fitting conclusion to this section:

Gaia’s main problems are *not* industrialization, ozone depletion, overpopulation, or resource depletion. Gaia’s main problem is *the lack of mutual understanding and mutual*

agreement in the noosphere about how to proceed with those problems. We cannot reign in industry if we cannot reach mutual understanding and mutual agreement based on a worldcentric moral perspective concerning the global commons. And we reach that worldcentric moral perspective through a difficult and laborious process of interior growth and transcendence. A global map won't do it. A systems map will not do it. An ecological map will not do it.

But the Descended grid rejects transcendence altogether. And therefore it despises Gaia's only source of genuine salvation. This *hatred of transcendence* is the cunning of the Descended grid. This is how the Descended grid perpetuates its love affair with flatland. This is how it perpetuates the colonization of the I and the we by the empirical domain. . . .

And so the horrifying truth of the modern condition slowly dawns: The hatred of transcendence is the way the flatland grid reproduces itself in the consciousness of those it is destroying (Wilber 1996, 311) (emphases in original).

Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development as the Integral Vision of Evolution

Once again, spiritually-inspired resource development is the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice. It is an example of the 'process' between 'what is' and 'what could be' in the context of environmental stewardship and developmentalism. Does the integral vision of

evolution fit that pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development? Yes. People and their spirituality are at the core of the integral vision, and natural resources are considered one of the sub-holons of the primary holons of concern in the integral vision.

Similarly, theory, which in this case are world views in the domain of the lower quadrants of Wilber's model, and practice, which fuels evolution, are also part of the integral vision. As an evolutionary process, the integral vision certainly qualifies as a 'dynamic' process, and the path of evolution is from 'what is' to 'what could be'. The entire vision is also framed in the context of the role evolution (or, more specifically, emergence from the mutual, interactive transformation of the system's components) can play in transforming environmental stewardship practices and developmentalism. In sum, the integral vision of evolution has each of the defining characteristics of spiritually-inspired resource development: it is systemic or holistic in its exploration; it explicitly considers the role of spirituality; it integrates theory and practice; it addresses the interface between people and the environment in the context of developmentalism; and

it describes a dynamic, evolutionary process.

Evolution in the integral vision is the all-quadrant drive towards greater self-transcendence, depth, and consciousness. The key to evolution is holarchic emergence. Spirit is the process of evolution that manifests itself more in each emergent holon. Evolution — or the manifestation of Spirit — is driven primarily by individual progress on the ladder of nondual spiritual development. Therefore, if spiritually-inspired resource development can be thought of as evolution as described by the integral vision, the task at hand is to encourage and foster individual spiritual development. This should fuel evolution and the eventual emergence of ‘what could be’.

Bahá’í Resource Development as the Integral Vision of Evolution

If both Bahá’í resource development and the integral vision of evolution fit the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development, then considerable insight into the nature of spiritually-inspired resource development should be gained by comparing the two examples. The two models share the following similarities:

The integration of orienting generalizations: Wilber developed the integral vision by integrating what he calls orienting generalizations, or broad, general themes that emerge in the various fields of human knowledge, about which there is very little disagreement. A similar approach is taken in this exploration to develop a model of Bahá'í resource development. Science is broadly defined as the investigation of the verities of the universe by whatever means possible and necessary. Implicit in this definition is the concept of the unity of religion and science — the relevance of all fields of human knowledge — so systems tools are used to develop a model of Bahá'í resource development with theological data. Both the integral vision and BRD, therefore, are developed under the assumption that the best understanding comes from integrating knowledge from a wide range of fields.

Scholarship as consultation: Wilber's underlying assumption while he integrated orienting generalizations was that no one is capable of 100 percent error, so each approach or theory is true but partial. In Bahá'í scholarship, this approach might be called “monological

consultation”. It is similar to consultation in that it is assumed that no one has a monopoly on truth, so the greatest understanding comes from the integration of a variety of different perspectives. It is different from consultation, however, in that it is monological (borrowing the term from Wilber himself), or one person have a dialogue with her or himself. The integral vision was developed by one person in ‘conversation’ with hundreds of orienting generalizations.

Consultation, in contrast, requires that a group of people actually come together in their mutual search for truth. Naturally, this would be impossible, which is why scholars place so much emphasis on publishing, so that they need not actually get together to pursue their investigation of the truth.

The nature of the Kosmos: Wilber identifies four domains of the Kosmos: the cosmos (the domain of matter), the biosphere (the domain of life), the noosphere (the domain of mind), and the theosphere (the domain of the divine). A similar distinction is drawn in the Bahá’í Faith between the four degrees or kingdoms: mineral (which possesses the power of cohesion — the defining characteristic

of matter), vegetable (which possesses the power of growth — the defining characteristic of life), animal (which possesses the power of the senses — which are the primary tools used by the mind to make sense of the Kosmos), and humans (which possesses spiritual powers — and thereby have access to the domain of the divine) ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 258, 268).

Inherent tensions within holons: According to Wilber, reality is composed of holons that share the conflicting characteristics of agency-communion and evolution-devolution (or self-transcendence–self-dissolution). BRD is also described above as a material and spiritual holarchy with the characteristics of a dissipative structure — a network of integrating and disintegrating relationships that may experience periodic destabilizing bifurcation points at which it falls into a state of chaos and restabilizes in a more complex form. The dissipative structures of BRD embody both agency-communion tensions — between, for instance, unity and diversity or individuals and community — and self-transcendence–self-dissolution tensions — between evolution and devolution at the macro-level or the cycle of

growth and the process of disintegration at the individual level.

Holarchic evolution drives emergence: In the integral vision, the self-transcendent creativity of holons causes them to emerge or unfold, which is the drive behind evolution. This drive gives evolution a direction that is not a product of chance. ‘Self-transcendent creativity’ resembles the autopoietic vitalism of BRD through which new structures and new modes of behavior emerge through development, learning, and evolution. Similarly, the idea of ‘evolution with a direction’ mirrors the Bahá’í vision of the gradual evolution of humanity (analogous to the development of a human being) — guided by the Creative Spirit — toward the emergence of the New World Order. Evolution in the integral vision, moreover, is headed toward a world that shares many of the characteristics of the New World Order of BRD, including new levels of individual and community spiritual development, the internalization by individuals of the unity of creation, more sustainable environmental stewardship and developmentalism, and a global commonwealth.

Dialectic of progress: Even though evolution has a direction, the

path it follows is not always smooth. The ‘bumps in the road’, as it were, are the inherent limitations of each epoch of evolution that become more and more prominent as the epoch becomes more and more obsolete with time. This dialectic of progress causes the epoch to either break down (self-dissolution) or evolve (self-transcendence). It is the macro-level manifestation of the tensions inherent in all holons that are described two paragraphs above.

Unfold and enfold: According to Wilber, each emergent holon transcends but includes its predecessors. This same idea is expressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when he explains the distinctions between minerals, vegetables, animals, and humans (see the citation two paragraphs above). Wilber identifies two important points that follow from this ‘transcend and include’ idea. First, when humans harm the biosphere, they are actually hurting their own being. This idea is expressed in BRD as structural coupling.

Transcendent Spirit-in-action: Wilber’s second point about ‘transcend and include’ is that Spirit includes all holons because it transcends all. In the integral vision, Spirit both transcends and is

immanent in the process of evolution, and it is becoming more and more manifest as humanity evolves. Similar ideas are expressed in Bahá'í belief. The concept of divine unity, for instance, refers to the way in which the Creative Spirit both transcends (as the Animator, Creator, Omnipotent, Transcendent, Incomprehensible, etc.) and is immanent in (as the Spirit that encompasses, regulates, maintains, directs, influences, and is reflected in everything) the process of evolution. The Creative Spirit has manifested more and more of its essence with each successive Manifestation to correspond with the maturation of humanity.

Nondual spirituality: Nondual spirituality integrates the Ascending (purely transcendental) and Descending (purely material) paths. BRD is an excellent example of nondual spirituality. Even though the material world is considered a chimera, work and service in the material world are forms of worship, and asceticism is forbidden. Moreover, the ultimate goal of BRD is balanced material and spiritual development — a world in which the greatest (i.e., most sustainable and just) material achievements are realized as a result of

unprecedented spiritual development.

Materialism is the primary problem: Wilber stresses how the true problems the world faces are not superficial problems like industrialization, ozone depletion, overpopulation, or resource depletion — the main problem is the lack of mutual understanding and mutual agreement in the noosphere about how to proceed with those problems. This problem can only be overcome through a difficult and laborious process of interior growth and transcendence. But because the materialism of the Descending path dominates the contemporary world, few people recognize the spiritual root of the world's problems. A similar idea is central to BRD. From the Bahá'í perspective, the principal cause of the world's suffering is lack of spiritual development.

All-quadrants view: The key to the integral vision is an all-quadrants view. That is, evolution occurs and must be thought of as occurring simultaneously in four interwoven and mutually-determining quadrants: the interior of individuals (the upper left or intentional quadrant), the exterior of individuals (the upper right or behavioral quadrant), the interior of the collective (the lower left or cultural

quadrant), and the exterior of the collective (the lower right or social quadrant). These four quadrants may also be simplified to I, We, and It or the Left and Right Hand paths.

Although less explicitly, BRD shares this same perspective. The Right and Left Hand paths correspond with the ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ dimensions of resource development. Moreover, the individual-community interdynamic is a persistent theme in BRD. For instance, individual faith (interior of individuals) is fueled by both the individual cycle of growth (exterior of individuals) and community growth (exterior of the collective) to produce a global community that embraces the concept of unity in diversity (interior of the collective).

Validity claims: Wilber also identifies a validity claim — a test of whether or not an interpretation or perception corresponds with Spiritual reality — for each of the four quadrants. Again, although not explicitly labeled as validity claims, there are similar concepts in BRD. The validity claim for the individual exterior quadrant is propositional truth. In the Bahá’í Faith, there are four ways of testing the validity of propositional truth — the use of the senses, reasoning, the text of the

Holy Scriptures, and divine inspiration — each of which should be used in a systematic, organized, directed, and conscious way to arrive at a coherent model of whatever phenomenon is being investigated.

For the individual interior quadrant, the validity claim is truthfulness and trustworthiness. The degree to which individuals ‘correspond’ well with spiritual reality in BRD is measured largely by the degree to which they exhibit the qualities of truthfulness and trustworthiness, which are the foundation of all other virtues. For the collective interior quadrant, the validity claim is justness or mutual understanding.

Justice, in the Bahá’í Faith, is defined as that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. As more and more people distinguish truth from falsehood (i.e., are just), mutual understanding (or justness) will become more prevalent.

Finally, for the collective exterior quadrant, the validity claim is functional fit, or how various holons fit together in the overall system or community of Spirit. Functional fit is simply another way of saying unity, which is the bedrock of BRD.

Despite these many similarities, there are also some significant differences between Wilber's integral vision of evolution and Bahá'í resource development:

Spiritual agency: Although evolution does have direction, Spirit does not have any real agency in the integral vision — it is immanent in all things and in the process of evolution. In contrast, the Creative Spirit in BRD, although all-encompassing and incomprehensible (i.e., it is the holon that transcends and includes all other holons), nevertheless is identified as an entity distinct from its creation that actively assists humankind in its development through the Holy Spirit, the Manifestations, and the teachings and laws that they share with humanity. It is through these intermediaries that the goal of spiritual development — the knowledge of and love for the Creative Spirit — may be pursued.

The importance of love: It is difficult to find any reference to 'love' in Wilber's writings. In blatant contrast, love is central to BRD. Love of the Creative Spirit, or faith, is the 'spirit of life' and the source of all other human love. Moreover, love is the cause of life, the 'glue' of

creation that unites the world, and the catalyst of material and spiritual development.

The role of individual development: From Wilber's perspective, the key to evolution in the integral vision is individual spiritual development. As a matter of fact, even though he stresses the importance of taking an all-quadrants view, he places so much emphasis on the individual that he fails to adequately draw the connections between individual development (i.e., the upper left quadrant) and the other three quadrants.

Although BRD is equally anthropocentric in its orientation — because of the way in which they 'enfold' yet transcend all of the qualities of other holons with their spiritual capacities, humans have a distinguished station in the world and tremendous responsibilities for furthering the emergence of the New World Order — it still maintains an all-quadrants view. Individual development, for instance, is not a uniquely 'interior' process — fueling the cycle of growth requires action and work. Moreover, individual development is dependent upon development in the community (e.g., through fellowship and

consultation) and institutions (e.g., the Administrative Order).

The potential for individual development: In the integral vision, few people develop high enough levels of spirituality to truly embrace a global perspective. Wilber describes the higher stages of spiritual development as rare, elite, extraordinary, and very difficult to achieve. Although spiritual development in BRD does require considerable volition and effort, everybody has the potential to develop spiritually and to embrace a global perspective through the internalization of the unity of creation, which is the key to the emergence of the New World Order. Individual development is possible, in part, because of the agency of the Creative Spirit and the direct assistance it provides. As a matter of fact, spiritual development in BRD is impossible without divine assistance.

In Chapter 5, the four models of spiritually-inspired resource development — Bahá'í resource development, Palmer's process of 'knowing as we are know', Bawden's systemic development of integrated critical learning systems, and Wilber's evolution in the

integral vision — are synthesized to develop a more comprehensive definition of the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

This exploration began by suggesting that a more holistic understanding of spiritually-inspired resource development might provide some clues about how humans can become better stewards of the world's natural resources. Spiritually-inspired resource development is defined as the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice. It is an example of the 'process' between 'what is' and 'what could be' in the context of environmental stewardship and developmentalism. The objective of this study, therefore, is to develop a framework for understanding spiritually-inspired resource development by modeling the systemic characteristics of resource development in one belief system, that of the Bahá'í Faith, and examining that model in light of literature in which similar models or elements thereof are examined. To do this, systems tools and theological data are used to develop a theoretical, systemic model of Bahá'í resource development. That model is then compared and contrasted with other models of

spiritually-inspired resource development. The final task, which is the objective of this chapter, is to develop a more comprehensive framework for understanding spiritually-inspired resource development.

The Pattern of Organization of Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development

In Chapter 2, it is explained that one of the defining criteria of living systems is their pattern of organization — an abstract description of the configuration of relationships among the system's components and processes of production that determines the system's essential characteristics and characterizes the system as belonging to a particular class. The class of systems of interest in this exploration has been labeled 'spiritually-inspired resource development', so the objective of this study — to develop a framework for understanding SIRD — can be achieved by describing the pattern of organization of SIRD.

Following the comparison in Chapter 4 of the four models of SIRD in question, it is now possible to develop an improved working-

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definition of the pattern of organization of SIRD. In the process, the basic characteristics of spiritually-inspired resource development identified in Chapter 4 — that it be systemic or holistic; explicitly consider the role of spirituality; integrate theory and practice; address the interface between people and the environment in the context of developmentalism; and describe dynamic developmental, transformational, or evolutionary processes — can be expanded upon, clarified, and supplemented.

Because Bahá'í resource development, 'knowing as we are known', the systemic development of integrated critical learning systems, and evolution in the integral vision are all systems of spiritually-inspired resource development, SIRD should share characteristics with each of these four models. But, as is clear above, the four models are complementary yet different — each has its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, in order to synthesize them into a single, coherent pattern of organization of SIRD, the author must subjectively select the strengths of each that seem to best fit the emerging pattern of organization. What follows is his humble attempt

at such a synthesis.

In Chapter 1, resource development is defined as the process connecting ‘what is’ with ‘what will be’. Therefore, **ontology** (i.e., ‘what is’, or the nature of reality) and **outcomes** (i.e., ‘what will be’) are two headings under which the following synthesis is organized. Moreover, a central theme to each of the four models is the nature of knowing, so **epistemology** is another heading used below. Finally, because spiritually-inspired resource development is a process, **methodology** (i.e., engaging the process) and the nature of the **process** itself are also headings around which the synthesis below is organized.

Holarchic, All-Quadrant, Evolutionary Ontology

The pattern of organization of SIRD is defined by the following basic ontological assumptions:

- the Kosmos (i.e., the cosmos (the domain of matter), the biosphere (the domain of life), the noosphere (the domain of mind), and the theosphere (the domain of the divine)) is a diverse yet interdependent and unified holarchic network;
- the internal and external dynamics within both individual and communal holons (i.e., each of Wilber’s four quadrants) are mutually-determining;

- paradoxically, the Creative Spirit includes yet transcends all holons — it is an omniscient, omnipotent, and incomprehensible agent whose attributes are reflected in material reality and that actively facilitates the processes of development and evolution;
- love, which is the ability to transcend self and embrace the reality of another (or become structurally coupled) and whose source is the Creative Spirit, binds the Kosmos together and fuels development and evolution;
- materialism and aspirituality, which together inhibit people from understanding the nature of the Kosmos and from advancing the processes of development and evolution, are the principle roots of the problems that afflict all four spheres of the Kosmos.

Transdisciplinary, Relational, Active, and Epistemic Epistemology

The four models of spiritually-inspired resource development also share many assumptions about how the nature of reality is known.

Therefore, the pattern of organization of SIRD is also defined by the following basic epistemological assumptions:

- knowledge is transdisciplinary and transcendent (i.e., it emerges from the *interaction* among various fields of human knowledge and *transcends* individual disciplines);
- material and spiritual learning emerge simultaneously from praxis — the mutually-reinforcing interaction of knowledge, volition, and action;
- meta-learning (i.e., consciousness of the process of learning) and epistemic learning (i.e., learning about the world views which contextualize what is being learned) from a holonocentric perspective (from which other world views may be embraced) improve the process of development;

- truth has four validity criteria, each of which corresponds with one of Wilber's quadrants: propositional truth (individual exterior), truthfulness (individual interior), justice (community interior), and unity (community exterior).

Prayerful, Meditative, Communal, Consultative, and Critical Methodology of Praxis Grounded in Sacred Texts

Each of the four models of spiritually-inspired resource development also identifies practical ways in which to initiate and sustain the process of spiritually-inspired resource development. These additional elements of the pattern of organization of SIRD, which together improve the balance between material and spiritual development, include:

- providing everybody with equal access to educational opportunities;
- communicating and communing within the holarchy of the Kosmos through prayer and meditation;
- learning through the study of sacred texts*;
- learning communally through fellowship and consultation;
- integrating learning, volition, and action as praxis through the application of spiritual principles in work, service, sacrifice, and grassroots initiative;
- becoming self-referential and critical of community processes and dynamics, conscious of power relationships, and aware of the influence these power relationships have as potential distorters of

*'Sacred texts' in this context refers to the written and oral teachings of all spiritual belief systems.

- communication, learning, and development;
- accepting the assistance of the Creative Spirit.

A Process of Emergence from Complexity

Together, this ontology, epistemology, and methodology form the foundation of the process of spiritually-inspired resource development. The nature of that process is yet another defining characteristic of the pattern of organization of SIRD:

- the structure of individual holons and the structure connecting holons within the greater holarchy of the Kosmos is a dissipative structure in a state between order and chaos;
- order in the midst of chaos is maintained through the structure provided by decentralized organizational systems like the Bahá'í Administrative Order and by religion, which in its genuine sense (i.e., *religio* or reconnection) is strong, attentive, humble, and loving relationships (or structural coupling) between the physical, living, and spiritual dimensions of the holarchy of the Kosmos, especially between humans and the Creative Spirit;
- chaos is fueled by praxis and the process of societal disintegration;
- during periodic destabilizing bifurcation points, holons either disintegrate or evolve into higher states of complexity;
- as new holons evolve (or unfold), they enfold their predecessors;
- new properties and meaning emerge at each new level of evolution;
- development, therefore, is a gradual process of holarchic material and spiritual evolution that is facilitated by the Creative Spirit, catalyzed by love (or structural coupling), and fueled by epistemic praxis.

Summary of the Pattern of Organization of Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development

To summarize, spiritually-inspired resource development is the internal and external drive by both individuals and communities toward greater self-transcendence — that is, toward the evolution and **manifestation** of the unifying Spirit of creation. This evolutionary **drive** is a process of prayerful, consultative, integrated, and epistemic **praxis** facilitated by the Creative Spirit. In the process, loving **relationships** among individuals, between individuals and the rest of the **organic** world, and between individuals and the Creative Spirit are **strengthened**, and truth, truthfulness, justice, and unity become more **manifest**. Balanced material and spiritual development emerges out of **these** complex, systemic interactions.

The Autopoietic Pattern of Organization of SIRD

But is the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource **development** autopoietic? The concept of ‘pattern of organization’ is

introduced in Chapter 2 in the discussion of the criteria of living systems. Capra argues that all living systems have an autopoietic pattern of organization (i.e., are self-bounded, self-generating, self-perpetuating, and self-organizing networks that continually recreate their own structure). Moreover, according to Capra, the qualities of a living system's autopoietic pattern of organization are embodied in its *dissipative* structure, and this structure changes through self-generation, structural coupling, and bifurcation. Capra calls this process of embodiment 'cognition', or the process of life; in other words, as Maturana and Varela observe, the being and doing of an autopoietic system are inseparable. Mingers suggests, however, that autopoiesis should only be used metaphorically to describe human systems.

In Chapter 3, it is observed that the pattern of organization of Bahá'í resource development may be described metaphorically as 'autopoietic vitalism', which is a process through which self-making networks are created and supported by some non-physical entity or force (e.g., the Creative Spirit). Specifically, BRD is a religious system

that creates new structures and new modes of behavior through spiritual development, learning, and evolution. Based on the characteristics of the pattern of organization of SIRD outlined above, it appears that SIRD shares (at least metaphorically) that same autopoietic pattern of organization. It is autopoietic — SIRD continually self-generates and self-organizes through education, learning, and praxis at both the individual and community level. And vitalism is key — the Creative Spirit facilitates these self-generating activities. Moreover, this autopoietic pattern of organization is embodied in SIRD's structure, which changes through self-generation, structural coupling, and bifurcation, and this process of embodiment brings forth a world; in other words, the being and doing of SIRD are inseparable. The world brought forth in the case of SIRD is described immediately below.

The Outcome of SIRD: The New World Order

Spiritually-inspired resource development is a dynamic process whose emergent properties are new states of spiritually-inspired

evolution at every holarchic level. As the process of evolution continues, the properties of the New World Order gradually emerge. Because they are emergent, many of those properties are completely unpredictable. Common among the models of SIRD that identified outcomes, however, are the following characteristics: spiritually-transformed individuals and communities that embrace equality, justice, and moderation as core values; individual and communal internalization of the unity of the Kosmos; a global commonwealth; balanced material and spiritual development; and more sustainable environmental stewardship and developmentalism.

The Core Principles of Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development

Reflecting upon the pattern of organization of spiritually-inspired resource development, it becomes clear that conventional modes of developmentalism and environmental stewardship are grounded in a completely different set of assumptions and principles than is SIRD.

This exploration affirms the following set of principles embraced by those who consciously engage the process of spiritually-inspired

resource development:

- Development — the gradual, organic process of qualitative improvement — is distinct from developmentalism, which is the professional promotion of material development;
- The modernization paradigm of developmentalism, which elevates individualism, consumption, and competition as well as dualistic, mechanistic, and hierarchical thinking to the rank of virtues and has made the extraction of non-renewable natural resources, the production of disease-causing pollution, the extinction of species, and human exploitation necessary and acceptable externalities of ‘progress’, is unsustainable;
- Technological ‘fixes’ (e.g., sustainable agriculture practices, more efficient automobiles, and more effective brushes on smoke stacks, etc.), economic incentives (e.g., ‘green’ taxes or credits), and governmental policies (e.g., endangered species protection, clean air and water legislation, or international greenhouse gas treaties) are necessary but not sufficient solutions to the environmental crisis;
- Overly materialistic and aspiritual orientations and assumptions about the nature of development and the environment are the root of many of the world’s ills;
- Sustainable change in the nature of developmentalism and environmental stewardship emerges out of a gradual process of transformation characterized by the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice;
- Learning, organizational development, leadership, and paradigm or world view shifts are necessary but not sufficient elements of this process of transformation;
- Systems theory and methods facilitate the understanding of and engagement in this process of transformation;
- Human development is as much internal (i.e., in the realm of theory and spirit) as it is external (i.e., in the realm of behavior and practice) and as individual as it is communal, and

development is largely a function of the mutually-determining interactions between the internal and external dimensions of individuals and communities;

- Knowledge is transdisciplinary and transcendent, so learning is best done in collective, reflective, and critical consultation from a holonocentric perspective;
- Spirit is both immanent in material reality and an agent in this process of transformation, so faith in and the active engagement of Spirit through prayer, meditation, and the study of sacred texts advances the process;
- Strong, attentive, humble, and loving relationships among individuals, between people and the Creative Spirit, and between people and the natural world fuel this process of transformation;
- Knowledge divorced from action is of limited utility, and action facilitates the internalization of knowledge, so praxis — the integration of knowledge and action — catalyzes this process of transformation;
- Everything is connected, so all action or inaction either furthers or impedes this process of transformation;
- Balancing individual liberties with communal responsibilities requires decentralized governmental and administrative structure;
- Material, intellectual, and spiritual progress can be evaluated by the degree to which individuals and communities discover propositional truth, exhibit truthfulness, uphold justice, and maintain unity.

Supplementary Observations

During the course of this exploration, several observations

'emerged' for the author during his exploration of spiritually-inspired resource development. These are briefly explained below.

Why not call SIRD 'integral development'?

When all is said and done, spiritually-inspired resource development is not a very useful name for the process of transformation that the author set out to describe. This is not to say that it has not served its purpose — it does capture the essence of **what** the author was trying to better understand, which is the spiritual **dimension** of the gap between 'what is' and 'what could be'. But after **exploring** SIRD in more depth, it is clear that it is really just a holistic, **systemic**, or holarchic form of development. That is, free from all of **the** various modifiers, it is most simply a process of qualitative **improvement** in any and all aspects of life, which is development. Yet, it **is** different from what most people (especially those who work in the **various** fields of developmentalism) refer to as development because it **explicitly** integrates matter, life, mind, spirit, individuals, communities, **theory**, practice, love, and all forms of knowing into a unified model of **development**. Therefore, in order to differentiate the process that is **called** spiritually-inspired resource development and to free it from a **label** that neither rolls easily off the tongue nor best describes its

unified nature, perhaps the name of this process ought to be changed to *integral development* *.

‘Integral development’ seems appropriate for a number of reasons. For one, it fits nicely with the definition of spiritually-inspired resource development: the dynamic, systemic interaction between *spirit*, natural resources, and human theory and practice. Moreover, *the* essence of Palmer’s process of knowing as we are known is the *integration* of intellectual and spiritual knowledge. Similarly, Bawden *describes* the systemic development of *integrated* critical learning *systems*, and Wilber articulates an *integral* vision of evolution.

*This author is not the first to use the term ‘integral development’. For example, the participants in the Fourth Uganda Theological Week in 1989 defined ‘integral development’ as “a *continuous*, well-planned process of improvement of the quality of life for *every* person and for all people in various sectors of society” (Agbasiere, 248), which “must cater for the whole human person, and *encompass* the people in the nation as a whole: by developing their *spiritual*, religious, social, personal, moral, cultural, economic, political, *mental*, educational, physical and environmental dimensions of life” (Agbasiere, 252-253). Similarly, Goulet defines ‘integral development’ as “a *normative* concept embracing three elements: the good life; the *best foundations* of life in society; and the proper stance toward natural and man-made environments” (1990, 43); for Goulet, an ethic of ‘integral development’ locates “environmental concerns at the heart of *normative* discourse on development” (1990, 36).

Henceforth, the process that was formerly referred to as spiritually-inspired resource development is now called integral development.

The Strengths of the Systems Perspective Revisited

In Chapters 1 and 2, it is proposed that the process of resource **d**evelopment can be conceptualized as a system, so systems methods **p**rovide the language and tools most appropriate for studying resource **d**evelopment. The alternative would be a more traditional, **r**eductionist approach, but it would fail to capture those characteristics **t**hat are unique to the system as a whole. Under the assumption that **s**ystems concepts would prove useful in capturing the essence of **r**esource development, Chapter 2 is devoted largely to explaining **s**ystems jargon. It is worthwhile, therefore, at the conclusion of the **e**xploration, to assess the degree to which the use of a systemic **a**pproach in this exploration was justified.

It is clear to the author that this exploration would have been **e**xremely difficult if not impossible without systems tools. The **f**ollowing systems concepts proved to be particularly useful:

- **'holarchy'** captures the nature of the interrelationships between the different components and processes of integral development;
- **'dissipative structure'** characterizes the balance in integral development between the order provided by organizational structures and loving relationships and the chaos created by praxis and societal disintegration;
- **'structural coupling'** describes the coevolutionary nature of the loving relationships of integral development;
- **'bifurcation points'** mark epochal transition points of evolution in integral development;
- **'emergent properties'** are the characteristics of 'what could be' that are a product of the evolutionary processes of integral development; and the
- **'pattern of organization'** of integral development is the final product of this exploration.

Moreover, each of these concepts is grounded in more basic systems **c**oncepts, like 'observer', 'boundary', 'components', 'cybernetics', 'f**e**edback loops', and 'equilibrium'. Clearly, the use of a systemic **a**pproach in this exploration was not only justified but necessary.

Integral development as participatory, collaborative, action research

Similarly, the concepts and tools of another field — that of **P**articipatory research — are particularly useful for *experiencing* integral **d**evelopment. Put most simply, integral development is communities **o**f people learning and working together to foster material and spiritual

development. Similarly, communities engaged in participatory, collaborative, action research fuse research and practice as co-learners investigating ways in which to improve the situation in a particular context. The dichotomy between ‘subject’ and ‘researcher’, which is basic to traditional forms of research, is avoided in participatory research. Integral development, therefore, may be thought of as participatory action research in which there is not necessarily an outside ‘researcher’ involved and in which one of the participants includes the Creative Spirit. Those interested in empirically studying the process of integral development would therefore find participatory approaches to be particularly useful.

Integral development as the marriage of liberalism and the Creative Spirit

In his “note to the reader” in *The Eye of Spirit*, Wilber presents his integral vision as the integration of liberalism and spirituality. He argues that “The most pressing political issue of the day, both in America and abroad, is a way to integrate the tradition of liberalism with a genuine spirituality” (Wilber 1998, xiii). He suggests that

liberalism and spirituality are in two separate camps. In one camp are

the liberals who

champion individual rights and freedoms against the tyranny of the collective, and who therefore are deeply suspicious of any and all religious movements, precisely because the latter are always ready to impose their beliefs on others, and tell you what you must do in order to save your soul (Wilber 1998, xiii).

In their vigilance, liberals have tended to replace salvation by God

with salvation by individualism and economics but in the process have

too often replaced religious tyranny with economic tyranny:

[T]he God of the almighty dollar replaced the God of the Pope. Your soul could no longer be crushed by God, but it could be crushed by the factory. What was of *ultimate concern* in life ceased to be your relationship with the Divine and centered instead on your relationship to your income. And thus, even in the midst of economic plenty, your soul could slowly starve to death (Wilber 1998, xiv).

In the other camp are the conservatives who embrace a civic

humanist tradition, communal standards and values, and religious

values. Yet, as Wilber points out, “A cultural tyranny is never far from

a conservative smile, and liberals recoil in horror from the “love” that

conservatives profess for all God’s children, because the chilling fact is

that if you are not one of their God's children, unpleasant days await you" (Wilber 1998, xiv).

One of Wilber's goals in developing the integral vision was to embrace the good and jettison the bad from each camp to develop a *liberal* spirituality free from cultural and materialistic tyrannies. Arguably, he for the most part succeeds. By doing so, he assisted this author in developing a model of integral development that (hopefully) successfully marries liberalism and spirituality.

There is no silver bullet

Too often within circles of developmentalism, individuals or organizations embrace a 'silver bullet'. That is, they have, usually based on their own set of geographically and temporally localized set of experiences, come to the conclusion that one thing or another is the 'key' to development. These silver bullets include everything from 'learning' to 'relationship' to 'cultural assimilation' to 'soil fertility' to 'free trade' to 'self-reliance' to 'participation' to 'collaboration' to 'grassroots initiative' — the list is endless. While these practitioners

may be right, they are only partially right. If there is one thing that an improved understanding of integral development clarifies, it is that no single dimension or component of that process is the 'key' to making the system work. The answer is not just spirituality or holistic thinking or consultation — it is the process itself, and improving that process requires improving each of its components and their dynamic interactions.

The perils of developmentalism

To a large extent, the author was originally motivated to undertake this exploration because of his frustration with society's unsustainable development practices (or developmentalism) and because of the disastrous way in which developmentalism is impacting the natural environment. It seems appropriate, therefore, at the conclusion of the exploration, to summarize and clarify the differences between developmentalism and integral development.

Developmentalism is not development. It is only one small piece of the process, and it most generally:

- overemphasizes the material and neglects the spiritual components of development;
- fails to account for the interactions among the internal and external dimensions of individuals and communities;
- ignores the power of love (or anything that is not tangible and/or measurable, for that matter) in the physical, living, and spiritual dimensions of the Kosmos;
- encourages disciplinary and reductionist rather than transdisciplinary and systemic scholarship;
- measures and evaluates according to standards of propositional truth without regard for other standards of truth, including truthfulness, justice, and unity;
- embraces a technocentric world view without considering egocentric, ecocentric, or holonocentric perspectives;
- fails to question the epistemological assumptions being made or acknowledge alternative ways of knowing and learning;
- fails to acknowledge prayer, meditation, and the study of sacred writings as modes of learning;
- reserves education for the elite;
- reinforces hierarchical power structures and encourages debate rather than promoting equality and consultation;
- promotes externally-developed technologies and practices rather than grassroots initiative;
- attempts to create development with simplistic designs, plans, and goals rather than allowing it to emerge out of complexity;
- places temporal parameters (of usually less than five years) on development rather than recognizing it as an eternal process; and
- focuses on finite projects rather than process.

Unanswered Questions and Acknowledged Gaps

Losing the trees

When taking a systemic perspective, one is always forced to address the question of magnification. That is, one must consciously choose the level(s) of the holarchy on which to focus. In the process, one always runs the risk of sacrificing detail for the sake of maintaining a ‘big picture’ view. And if one attempts to do both — look at both the whole and the parts in detail — the exploration is liable to become burdensome in length. Recognizing this, the author consciously attempted to never lose sight of the ‘forest’, even if it meant sacrificing an understanding of some of the ‘trees’ in the process. He therefore acknowledges that most of the components and processes of integral development deserve closer scrutiny and exploration. Some of these include:

- the role of tests and trials in spiritual development;
- the role of disintegrative forces in integral development;
- the role of the family as a structural institution and integrative force in integral development; and
- the role of wealth in striking the balance between material and spiritual development.

Recommendations for Scholarship and Practice

An improved understanding of integral development has some profound implications for future scholarship and practice. Based on the exploration above, scholar-practitioners of integral development should:

- Move beyond reactively explaining ‘what is’ to proactively improving it;
- Institutionalize holarchic/integral scholarship and practice that complements but does not replace disciplinary, reductionist scholarship and practice;
- Create decentralized, democratically-elected, and structurally egalitarian organizational structures;
- Consciously create integrated critical learning systems that integrate material and spiritual knowledge, volition, and action;
- Create environments that explicitly foster and support the development of loving relationships among people, the natural world, and the Creative Spirit;
- Integrate prayer and meditation into scholarship and practice;
- Draw on all sources of knowledge and wisdom, including sacred texts;
- Promote fellowship among teams of scholars and practitioners;
- Institutionalize consultative decision-making and research, including thesis and dissertation projects conducted by teams;
- Encourage the development of meta-learning, epistemic learning, and criticality;
- Work, serve, sacrifice, and initiate development processes in the communities in which they live and work;
- Embrace the complexity and emergent properties of integral

- development;
- Evaluate scholarship and practice not just against standards of propositional truth but also according to the degree to which they promote and encourage truthfulness, justice, and unity.

Next Steps for the Author

As this exploration has made abundantly clear, knowledge without action is of limited utility. As a matter of fact, the goal of this exploration is to discover clues about *how* to become better environmental stewards, *how* to practice more sustainable development, and *how* to move more effectively toward ‘what could be’. It is an attempt to learn more about the process of integral development so that it can be *engaged* more successfully. In short, the pattern of organization of integral development described above is the ‘what could be’ of the ‘process’ that connects the ‘what is’ and the ‘what could be’ of environmental stewardship and developmentalism.

The logical next step is to translate that ‘what could be’ into ‘what is’ — to try to participate in that ideal process. As noted in Chapter 1, such an attempt would help to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the model developed in this exploration. Moreover, as

is noted in this chapter, integral development is by nature a participatory process, so it would be an appropriate next step for the investigator to consciously participate in the process of integral development.

That, in fact, is what the author hopes to do during his dissertation research. Adopting the philosophy and methods of participatory research, he would like to explore and document integral development in collaboration with a diverse, local, spiritual community interested in improving its development practice and environmental stewardship. Together, the author and community members would seek to realize the ideal set of recommendations for scholarship and practice listed immediately above. That is, they would design and create an environment and egalitarian organizational structure that explicitly encourage the spiritual and material development of both the community and its members. As much time would be devoted to prayer, meditation, the study of sacred texts, consultation, and communion with nature as would be to education and the stewardship of local natural resources and the improvement of material conditions.

The knowledge and wisdom of community members would be integrated with the knowledge from external sources. The development of loving relationships among the community's members would be actively encouraged through time spent together in fellowship. Plans would be made, but bifurcations and the flux between order and chaos that characterizes dissipative structures would also be accommodated. To critically evaluate its learning and **p**ractice, the community would gauge the degree to which it and its **m**embers discover propositional truths and become more truthful, just, **a**nd unified through the process of integral development. This is a tall **o**rd**e**r, but the author is convinced that such initiatives will prove **e**ssential to the emergence of a global community and environment **t**hat this generation can proudly bequeath to its children.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ENDNOTES

‘What is’: The State of the World from a Bahá’í World View

The Universe is Unified and Interdependent

1. “The organization of God is one; the evolution of existence is one; **the** divine system is one. Whether they be small or great beings, all are **subject** to one law and system” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Questions*, 199).
2. “Universal beings resemble and can be compared to particular **beings**, for both are subjected to one natural system, one universal law **and** divine organization. So you will find the smallest atoms in the **universal** system are similar to the greatest beings of the universe. It is **clear** that they come into existence from one laboratory of might under **one** natural system and one universal law; therefore, they may be **compared** to one another” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Questions*, 182).
3. “Reflect upon the inner realities of the universe, the secret wisdoms **involved**, the enigmas, the inter-relationships, the rules that govern all. **For** every part of the universe is connected with every other part by **ties** that are very powerful and admit of no imbalance, nor any **slackening** whatever” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 157).
4. “**R**ecognition that creation is an organic whole and that humanity has **the** responsibility to care for this whole, welcome as it is, does not **represent** an influence which can by itself establish in the **consciousness** of people a new system of values. Only a breakthrough in **understanding** that is scientific and spiritual in the fullest sense of

the terms will empower the human race to assume the trusteeship toward which history impels it” (Universal House of Justice *The Prosperity of Humankind*).

5. “[T]here is an essential oneness in all existing things” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 284).

6. “The greatest power in the realm and range of human existence is spirit — the divine breath which animates and pervades all things. It is manifested throughout creation in different degrees or kingdoms. In the vegetable kingdom it is the augmentative spirit or power of growth, the animus of life and development in plants, trees and organisms of the floral world. In this degree of its manifestation spirit is unconscious of the powers which qualify the kingdom of the animal. The distinctive virtue or plus of the animal is sense perception; it sees, hears, smells, tastes and feels but is incapable, in turn, of conscious ideation or reflection which characterizes and differentiates the human kingdom. The animal neither exercises nor apprehends this distinctive human power and gift. From the visible it cannot draw conclusions regarding the invisible, whereas the human mind from visible and known premises attains knowledge of the unknown and invisible. For instance, Christopher Columbus from information based upon known and provable facts drew conclusions which led him unerringly across the vast ocean to the unknown continent of America. Such power of accomplishment is beyond the range of animal intelligence. Therefore, this power is a distinctive attribute of the human spirit and kingdom. The animal spirit cannot penetrate and discover the mysteries of things. It is a captive of the senses. No amount of teaching, for instance, would enable it to grasp the fact that the sun is stationary, and the earth moves around it. Likewise, the human spirit has its limitations. It cannot comprehend the phenomena of the Kingdom transcending the human station, for it is a captive of powers and life forces which have their operation upon its own plane of existence, and it cannot go beyond that boundary” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 58).

7. “**W**hen we look upon the world of existence, we realize that all

material things have a common bond; and yet, on the other hand, there are certain points of distinction between them. For instance, all earthly objects have common bodily ties. The minerals, vegetables and animals have elemental bodies in common with each other. Likewise, they have place in the order of creation. This is the common tie or point of contact between them. All of them pass through the process of composition and decomposition; this is a natural law to which all are subject. This law is ruling throughout creation and constitutes a bond of connection among created things. But at the same time there are certain distinguishing features between these objects. For instance, between the mineral and vegetable, the vegetable and animal, the animal and human, points of distinction exist which are unmistakable and significant. Likewise, there are distinctions between kinds and species of each kingdom. When we consider the mineral kingdom in detail, we observe not only points of similarity between objects but points of distinction as well. Some are immovable bodies, some hard and solid; some have the power of expansion and contraction; some are liquid, some gaseous; some have weight; others, like fire and electricity, have not. So there are many points of distinction among these kinds of elements” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation*, 189).

8. “To conclude: the beings, whether great or small, are connected with one another by the perfect wisdom of God, and affect and influence one another. If it were not so, in the universal system and the general arrangement of existence, there would be disorder and imperfection. But as beings are connected one with another with the greatest strength, they are in order in their places and perfect” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Questions*, 247).

9. “The unity which is productive of unlimited results is first a unity of mankind which recognizes that all are sheltered beneath the overshadowing glory of the All-Glorious, that all are servants of one God; for all breathe the same atmosphere, live upon the same earth, move beneath the same heavens, receive effulgence from the same sun and are under the protection of one God. This is the most great unity, and its results are lasting if humanity adheres to it; but mankind has

hitherto violated it, adhering to sectarian or other limited unities such as racial, patriotic or unity of self-interests; therefore, no great results have been forthcoming. Nevertheless, it is certain that the radiance and favors of God are encompassing, minds have developed, perceptions have become acute, sciences and arts are widespread, and capacity exists for the proclamation and promulgation of the real and ultimate unity of mankind, which will bring forth marvelous results. It will reconcile all religions, make warring nations loving, cause hostile kings to become friendly and bring peace and happiness to the human world. It will cement together the Orient and Occident, remove forever the foundations of war and upraise the ensign of the Most Great Peace. These limited unities are, therefore, signs of that great unity which will make all the human family one by being productive of the attractions of conscience in mankind” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation, 191*).

10. “We cannot segregate the human heart for the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions” (Shoghi Effendi in a letter dated 17 February 1933, in Herbert).

11. “But I mean that this limitless universe is like the human body, all the members of which are connected and linked with one another with the greatest strength. How much the organs, the members and the parts of the body of man are intermingled and connected for mutual aid and help, and how much they influence one another! In the same way, the parts of this infinite universe have their members and elements connected with one another, and influence one another spiritually and materially.

“For example, the eye sees, and all the body is affected; the ear hears, and all the members of the body are moved. Of this there is no doubt; and the universe is like a living person. Moreover, the connection which exists between the members of beings must

necessarily have an effect and impression, whether it be material or spiritual” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Questions*, 245).

12. “Now, if we imagine a time when man belonged to the animal world, or when he was merely an animal, we shall find that existence would have been imperfect — that is to say, there would have been no man, and this chief member, which in the body of the world is like the brain and mind in man, would have been missing. The world would then have been quite imperfect” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Questions*, 178).

“Material civilisation is likened to the body, whereas divine civilization is the spirit of that body. A body not manifesting the spirit is dead; a fruitless tree is worthless” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 104).

13. “O thou who seekest the Kingdom of heaven! This world is even as the body of man, and the Kingdom of God is as the spirit of life. See how dark and narrow is the physical world of man’s body, and what a prey it is to diseases and ills. On the other hand, how fresh and bright is the realm of the human spirit. Judge thou from this metaphor how the world of the Kingdom hath shone down, and how its laws have been made to work in this nether realm. Although the spirit is hidden from view, still its commandments shine out like rays of light upon the world of the human body. In the same way, although the Kingdom of heaven is hidden from the sight of this unwitting people, still, to him who seeth with the inner eye, it is plain as day” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 192).

14. “Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashes, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory” (Bahá’u’lláh *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, 44).

“What is it of which ye can rightly boast? Is it on your food and your drink that ye pride yourselves, on the riches ye lay up in your treasuries, on the diversity and the cost of the ornaments with which ye deck yourselves? If true glory were to consist in the possession of such perishable things, then the earth on which ye walk must needs vaunt itself over you, because it supplieth you, and bestoweth upon you, these very things, by the decree of the Almighty. In its bowels are contained, according to what God hath ordained, all that ye possess. From it, as a sign of His mercy, ye derive your riches. Behold then your state, the thing in which ye glory! Would that ye could perceive it!” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 252-253).

15. “By nature is meant those inherent properties and necessary relations derived from the realities of things. And these realities of things, though in the utmost diversity, are yet intimately connected one with the other. . . .Liken the world of existence to the temple of man. All the organs of the human body assist one another, therefore life continues. . . .Likewise among the parts of existence there is a wonderful connection and interchange of forces which is the cause of life of the world and the continuation of these countless phenomena” (Bahá’í International Community *The Bahá’í Statement on Nature*, 4).

16. “As preordained by the Fountainhead of Creation, the temple of the world hath been fashioned after the image and likeness of the human body. In fact each mirroreth forth the image of the other, wert thou but to observe with discerning eyes. By this is meant that even as the human body in this world which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent entity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together.

“Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is

influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly.

“Consider for instance how one group of created things consituteth the vegetable kingdom, and another the animal kingdom. Each of these two maketh use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential to the life of the other. In other words, the growth and development of the vegetable world is impossible without the existence of the animal kingdom, and the maintenance of animal life is inconceivable without the cooperation of the vegetable kingdom. Of like kind are the relationships that exist among all created things. Hence it was stated that cooperation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness. . . .

“And thus when contemplating the human world thou beholdest this wondrous phenomenon shining resplendent from all sides with the utmost perfection, inasmuch as in this station acts of cooperation, mutual assistance and reciprocity are not confined to the body and to things that pertain to the material world, but for all conditions, whether physical or spiritual, such as those related to minds, thoughts, opinions, manners, customs, attitudes, understandings, feelings or other human susceptibilities. In all these though shouldst find these binding relationships securely established. The more this relationship is strengthened and expanded, the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity. Indeed without these vital ties it would be wholly impossible for the world of humanity to attain true felicity and success” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Research Department *Huqúqu’lláh*, 21-22).

17. “It is obvious that all created things are connected one to another by a linkage complete and perfect, even, for example, as are the members of the human body. Note how all the members and component parts of the human body are connected one to another. In the same way, all the members of this endless universe are linked one to another. The foot and the step, for example, are connected to the ear and the eye; the eye must look ahead before the step is taken. The

ear must hear before the eye will carefully observe. And whatever member of the human body is deficient, produceth a deficiency in the other members. The brain is connected with the heart and stomach, the lungs are connected with all the members. So is it with the other members of the body.

“And each one of these members hath its own special function. The mind force — whether we call it pre-existent or contingent — doth direct and co-ordinate all the members of the human body, seeing to it that each part or member duly performeth its own special function. If, however, there be some interruption in the power of the mind, all the members will fail to carry out their essential functions, deficiencies will appear in the body and the functioning of its members, and the power will prove ineffective. . . .

“Furthermore, although all created things grow and develop, yet are they subjected to influences from without. For instance, the sun giveth heat, the rain nourisheth, the wind bringeth life, so that man can develop and grow. Thus it is clear that the human body is under influences from the outside, and that without those influences man could not grow. And likewise, those outside influences are subjected to other influences in their turn. For example, the growth and development of a human being is dependent upon the existence of water, and water is dependent upon the existence of rain, and rain is dependent upon the existence of clouds, and clouds are dependent upon the existence of the sun, which causeth land and sea to produce vapour, the condensation of vapour forming the clouds. Thus each one of these entities exerteth its influence and is likewise influenced in its turn” (*Abdu'l-Bahá Selections*, 48-49).

“The body politic may be likened to the human organism. As long as the various members and parts of that organism are coordinated and cooperating in harmony, we have as a result the expression of life in its fullest degree. When these members lack coordination and harmony, we have the reverse, which in the human organism is disease, dissolution, death. Similarly, in the body politic of humanity dissension, discord and warfare are always destructive and

inevitably fatal. All created beings are dependent upon peace and coordination, for every contingent and phenomenal being is a composition of distinct elements. As long as there is affinity and cohesion among these constituent elements, strength and life are manifest; but when dissension and repulsion arise among them, disintegration follows. This is proof that peace and amity, which God has willed for His children, are the saving factors of human society, whereas war and strife, which violate His ordinances, are the cause of death and destruction. Therefore, God has sent His Prophets to announce the message of goodwill, peace and life to the world of mankind” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation, 98-99*).

The Universe was Created by and is Regulated by the Creative Force

18. “Regard thou the one true God as One Who is apart from, and immeasurably exalted above, all created things. The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. He Who is the Eternal Truth is the one Power Who exerciseth undisputed sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in the mirror of the entire creation. All existence is dependent upon Him, and from Him is derived the source of the sustenance of all things. This is what is meant by Divine unity; this is its fundamental principle” (*Bahá’u’lláh Gleanings, 166*).

“He is really a believer in the Unity of God who recognizeth in each and every created thing the sign of the revelation of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, and not he who maintaineth that the creature is indistinguishable from the Creator” (*Bahá’u’lláh Gleanings, 189*).

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“Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light” (Bahá'u'lláh *Gleanings*, 177).

“Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God” (Bahá'u'lláh *Gleanings*, 184).

“Inasmuch as He, the sovereign Lord of all, hath willed to reveal His sovereignty in the kingdom of names and attributes, each and every created thing hath, through the act of the Divine Will, been made a sign of His glory. So pervasive and general is this revelation that nothing whatsoever in the whole universe can be discovered that doth not reflect His splendor” (Bahá'u'lláh *Gleanings*, 184).

“How all-encompassing are the wonders of His boundless grace! Behold how they have pervaded the whole of creation. Such is their virtue that not a single atom in the entire universe can be found which doth not declare the evidences of His might, which doth not glorify His holy Name, or is not expressive of the effulgent light of His unity. So perfect and comprehensive is His creation that no mind nor heart, however keen or pure, can ever grasp the nature of the most insignificant of His creatures; much less fathom the mystery of Him Who is the Day Star of Truth, Who is the invisible and unknowable Essence” (Bahá'u'lláh *Gleanings*, 62).

“No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within

it, God before it, or God after it” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 178).

“When, however, thou dost contemplate the innermost essence of all things, and the individuality of each, thou wilt behold the signs of thy Lord’s mercy in every created thing, and see the spreading rays of His Names and Attributes throughout all the realm of being, with evidences which none will deny save the froward and the unaware. Then wilt thou observe that the universe is a scroll that discloseth His hidden secrets, which are preserved in the well-guarded Tablet. And not an atom of all the atoms in existence, not a creature from amongst the creatures but speaketh His praise and telleth of His attributes and names, revealeth the glory of His might and guideth to His oneness and His mercy: and none will gainsay this who hath ears to hear, eyes to see, and a mind that is sound.

“And whensoever thou dost gaze upon creation all entire, and dost observe the very atoms thereof, thou wilt note that the rays of the Sun of Truth are shed upon all things and shining within them, and telling of that Day-Star’s splendours, Its mysteries, and the spreading of Its lights. Look thou upon the trees, upon the blossoms and fruits, even upon the stones. Here too wilt thou behold the Sun’s rays shed upon them, clearly visible within them, and manifested by them” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 41-42).

20. “Nature in its essence is the embodiment of my Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God’s Will and its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 142).

21. “By nature is meant those inherent properties and necessary relations derived from the realities of things. And these realities of things, though in the utmost diversity, are yet intimately connected with the other. For these divine realities an all-unifying agency is needed that shall link them all one to the other” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Tablet to August Forel*, 13).

“It hath therefore been made evident and proved that interaction, cooperation and interrelation amongst the beings are under the direction and will of a motive Power which is the origin, the motive force and the pivot of all interactions in the universe” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Tablet to August Forel, 23*).

“Likewise, look into this endless universe: a universal power inevitably existeth, which encompasseth all, directing and regulating all the parts of this infinite creation; and were it not for this Director, this Co-ordinator, the universe would be flawed and deficient. It would be even as a madman; whereas ye can see that this endless creation carrieth out its functions in perfect order, every separate part of it performing its own task with complete reliability, nor is there any flaw to be found in all its workings. Thus it is clear that a Universal Power existeth, directing and regulating this infinite universe. Every rational mind can grasp this fact.

“Furthermore, although all created things grow and develop, yet are they subjected to influences from without. For instance, the sun giveth heat, the rain nourisheth, the wind bringeth life, so that man can develop and grow. Thus it is clear that the human body is under influences from the outside, and that without those influences man could not grow. And likewise, those outside influences are subjected to other influences in their turn. For example, the growth and development of a human being is dependent upon the existence of water, and water is dependent upon the existence of rain, and rain is dependent upon the existence of clouds, and clouds are dependent upon the existence of the sun, which causeth land and sea to produce vapour, the condensation of vapour forming the clouds. Thus each one of these entities exerteth its influence and is likewise influenced in its turn. Inescapably then, the process leadeth to One Who influenceth all, and yet is influenced by none, thus severing the chain. The inner reality of that Being, however, is not known, although His effects are clear and evident” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Selections, 48-49*).

“Existence is of two kinds: one is the existence of God which is

beyond the comprehension of man. He, the invisible, the lofty and the incomprehensible, is preceded by no cause but rather is the Originator of the cause of causes. He, the Ancient, hath had no beginning and is the all-independent. The second kind of existence is the human existence. It is a common existence, comprehensible to the human mind, is not ancient, is dependent and hath a cause to it. The mortal substance does not become eternal and vice-versa; the human kind does not become a Creator and vice-versa. The transformation of the innate substance is impossible” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 61).

22. “To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. ‘No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving . . .’” (*Bahá’u’lláh Gleanings*, 46-47).

23. “Arise, O people, and, by the power of God’s might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies — gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of their wretched worshipers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection. We cherish the hope that the Hand of divine power may lend its assistance to mankind and deliver it from its state of grievous abasement” (*Bahá’u’lláh Tablets*, 86).

“The soul does not evolve from degree to degree as a law — it only evolves nearer to God, by the Mercy and Bounty of God” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Paris*, 66).

“Look not at thy weakness and impotence; nay, look at the

power of thy Lord, which hath surrounded all regions” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 190).

“Then it is clear that the honor and exaltation of man must be something more than material riches. Material comforts are only a branch, but the root of the exaltation of man is the good attributes and virtues which are the adornments of his reality. These are the divine appearances, the heavenly bounties, the sublime emotions, the love and knowledge of God; universal wisdom, intellectual perception, scientific discoveries, justice, equity, truthfulness, benevolence, natural courage and innate fortitude; the respect for rights and the keeping of agreements and covenants; rectitude in all circumstances; serving the truth under all conditions; the sacrifice of one’s life for the good of all people; kindness and esteem for all nations; obedience to the teachings of God; service in the Divine Kingdom; the guidance of the people, and the education of the nations and races. This is the prosperity of the human world! This is the exaltation of man in the world! This is eternal life and heavenly honor!

“These virtues do not appear from the reality of man except through the power of God and the divine teachings, for they need supernatural power for their manifestation. It may be that in the world of nature a trace of these perfections may appear, but they are unstable and ephemeral; they are like the rays of the sun upon the wall.

“As the compassionate God has placed such a wonderful crown upon the head of man, man should strive that its brilliant jewels may become visible in the world” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Questions*, 79-80).

“These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the

mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 66).

24. “Unless the Holy Spirit become intermediary, one cannot attain directly to the bounties of God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Bahá’í World Faith*, 370).

“It is self-evident that the unity of the human world and the Most Great Peace cannot be accomplished through material means . . . the promotion of the oneness of the kingdom of humanity, which is the essence of the teachings of all the Manifestations of God, is impossible except through the divine power and breaths of the Holy Spirit. Other powers are too weak and are incapable of accomplishing this” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 13?).

“Do not take into consideration your own aptitudes and capacities, but fix your gaze on the consummate bounty, the divine bestowal and the power of the Holy Spirit — the power that converteth the drop of water into a sea and the star into a sun” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 104).

“Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word. Should they endeavor to fulfill these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that assembly shall become the center of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Shoghi Effendi *Bahá’í Administration*, 22-23).

“Whosoever a company of people shall gather in a meeting place, shall engage in glorifying God, and shall speak with one another

of the mysteries of God, beyond any doubt the breathings of the Holy Spirit will blow gently over them, and each shall receive a share thereof” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 94).

“If a small number of people gather lovingly together, with absolute purity and sanctity, with their hearts free of the world, experiencing the emotions of the Kingdom and the powerful magnetic forces of the Divine, and being at one in their happy fellowship, that gathering will exert its influence over all the earth. The nature of that band of people, the words they speak, the deeds they do, will unleash the bestowals of Heaven, and provide a foretaste of eternal bliss. The hosts of the Company on high will defend them, and the angels of the Abhá Paradise, in continuous succession, will come down to their aid” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 81).

25. “[A]ll parts of the creational world are of one whole. . . .All the parts are subordinate and obedient to the whole. The contingent beings are the branches of the tree of life while the Messenger of God is the root of that tree” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Bahá’í World Faith*, 364).

26. “O honoured lady! For a single purpose were the Prophets, each and all, sent down to earth; for this was Christ made manifest, for this did Bahá’u’lláh raise up the call of the Lord: that the world of man should become the world of God, this nether realm the Kingdom, this darkness light, this satanic wickedness all the virtues of heaven — and unity, fellowship and love be won for the whole human race, that the organic unity should reappear and the bases of discord be destroyed and life everlasting and grace everlasting become the harvest of mankind” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 31).

Humanity’s Primary Purpose is to Spiritually Develop Toward Knowing and Loving the Creative Spirit

27. “What the Bahá’ís do believe though is that we have three aspects of our humanness, so to speak, a body, a mind and an immortal

identity — soul or spirit. We believe the mind forms a link between the soul and the body, and the two interact on each other” (Shoghi Effendi *Arohanui: Letters to New Zealand*, 89).

28. “In the world of existence there is nothing so important as spirit, nothing so essential as the spirit of man. The spirit of man is the most noble of phenomena. The spirit of man is the meeting between man and God. The spirit of man is the animus of human life and the collective center of all human virtues. The spirit of man is the cause of the illumination of this world” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 239).

29. “Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 72).

30. The spiritual world “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).

31. “I was a Hidden Treasure. I wished to be made known, and thus I called creation into being in order that I might be known” (Bahá’u’lláh *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 176; note 23).

32. “Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him — a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 65).

33. “All things are beneficial if joined with the love of God; and without His love all things are harmful, and act as a veil between man and the Lord of the Kingdom. When His love is there, every bitterness turneth sweet, and every bounty rendereth a wholesome pleasure. For example, a melody, sweet to the ear, bringeth the very spirit of life to a heart in love with God, yet staineth with lust a soul engrossed in

sensual desires. And every branch of learning, conjoined with the love of God, is approved and worthy of praise; but bereft of His love, learning is barren — indeed, it bringeth on madness. Every kind of knowledge, every science, is as a tree: if the fruit of it be the love of God, then is it a blessed tree, but if not, that tree is but dried-up wood, and shall only feed the fire” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 181).

34. “[T]hat which is the cause of everlasting life, eternal honor, universal enlightenment, real salvation and prosperity is, first of all, the knowledge of God. It is known that the knowledge of God is beyond all knowledge, and it is the greatest glory of the human world. For in the existing knowledge of the reality of things there is material advantage, and through it outward civilization progresses; but the knowledge of God is the cause of spiritual progress and attraction, and through it the perception of truth, the exaltation of humanity, divine civilization, rightness of morals and illumination are obtained.

“Second, comes the love of God, the light of which shines in the lamp of the hearts of those who know God; its brilliant rays illuminate the horizon and give to man the life of the Kingdom. In truth, the fruit of human existence is the love of God, for this love is the spirit of life, and the eternal bounty. If the love of God did not exist, the contingent world would be in darkness; if the love of God did not exist, the hearts of men would be dead, and deprived of the sensations of existence; if the love of God did not exist, spiritual union would be lost; if the love of God did not exist, the light of unity would not illuminate humanity; if the love of God did not exist, the East and West, like two lovers, would not embrace each other; if the love of God did not exist, division and disunion would not be changed into fraternity; if the love of God did not exist, indifference would not end in affection; if the love of God did not exist, the stranger would not become the friend. The love of the human world has shone forth from the love of God and has appeared by the bounty and grace of God” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Questions*, 300-301).

35. “The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this

most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness. Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 70).

Social and Economic Development is Encouraged by the Creative Spirit

36. “The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilization, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God, and in securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race; and the supreme agencies for accomplishing these two objectives are the excellent qualities with which humanity has been endowed” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 60).

37. “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 215).

38. “Great is the station of man. Great also must be his endeavours for the rehabilitation of the world and the well-being of nations” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 174).

“[T]he purpose underlying this most mighty Revelation is none other than the rehabilitation of the world and its nations: that perchance the power of utterance may prevail over the power of arms, and the world’s affairs be administered through the potency of love” (Bahá’u’lláh, in Research Department *Trustworthiness*, 21 or 5).

“This servant appealeth to every diligent and enterprising soul to exert his utmost endeavor and arise to rehabilitate the conditions in all

regions and to quicken the dead with the living waters of wisdom and utterance” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 172).

People were created to “work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony” (Bahá’u’lláh, in Research Department *Trustworthiness*, 5).

39. “How long shall we drift on the wings of passion and vain desire; how long shall we spend our days like barbarians in the depths of ignorance and abomination? God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it. Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labor at all times and along all lines, whether the occasion be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge. We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end. How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfil his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man’s, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if he urges on the steed of high endeavor in the arena of civilization and justice. “We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves”(Qur’án 41:53).

“And this is man’s uttermost wretchedness: that he should live inert, apathetic, dull, involved only with his own base appetites. When he is thus, he has his being in the deepest ignorance and savagery, sinking lower than the brute beasts. “They are like the brutes: Yea, they go more astray... For the vilest beasts in God’s sight, are the deaf, the dumb, who understand not”(Qur’án 7:178, 8:22).

“We must now highly resolve to arise and lay hold of all those

instrumentalities that promote the peace and well-being and happiness, the knowledge, culture and industry, the dignity, value and station, of the entire human race. Thus, through the restoring waters of pure intention and unselfish effort, the earth of human potentialities will blossom with its own latent excellence and flower into praiseworthy qualities . . .” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Secret*, 3-4).

40. “Promote ye the development of the cities of God and His countries” (*Bahá’u’lláh Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 76).

Love is the Glue of Creation and the Catalyst of Development

41. “[L]ove is the ground of all things” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 67).

42. “Love is the very cause of life. . . . [T]he elements are held together by the law of attraction. . . . The wonderful Law of Attraction, Harmony, and Unity, holds together this marvelous Creation” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Paris*, 139).

“We declare that love is the cause of the existence of all phenomena and that the absence of love is the cause of disintegration or nonexistence. Love is the conscious bestowal of God, the bond of affiliation in all phenomena” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation*, 255).

43. “The greatest gift of man is universal love — that magnet which renders existence eternal. It attracts realities and diffuses life with infinite joy. If this love penetrate the heart of man, all the forces of the universe will be realized in him, for it is a divine power which transports him to a divine station and he will make no progress until he is illumined thereby. Strive to increase the love-power of reality, to make your hearts greater centers of attraction and to create new ideals and relationships.

“First of all, be ready to sacrifice your lives for one another, to prefer the general well-being to your personal well-being. Create relationship that nothing can shake; form an assembly that nothing can break up; have a mind that never ceases acquiring riches that

nothing can destroy. If love did not exist, what of reality would remain? It is the fire of the love of God which renders man superior to the animal. Strengthen this superior force through which is attained all the progress in the world” (*Abdu'l-Bahá Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 110).

44. “The essence of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings is all-embracing love, for love includeth every excellence of humankind. It causeth every soul to go forward” (*Abdu'l-Bahá Selections*, 66).

45. “Know thou of a certainty that Love is the secret of God's holy Dispensation, the manifestation of the All-Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings. Love is heaven's kindly light, the Holy Spirit's eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul. Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. Love is the one means that ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next. Love is the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul. Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms. Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe. Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world, and the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation” (*Abdu'l-Bahá Selections*, 27).

46. “O ye beloved of God! Know ye, verily, that the happiness of mankind lieth in the unity and the harmony of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity among all men” (*Abdu'l-Bahá Selections*, 283-286).

47. “There are four kinds of love. The first is the love that flows from God to man; it consists of the inexhaustible graces, the Divine effulgence and heavenly illumination. Through this love the world of

being receives life. Through this love man is endowed with physical existence, until, through the breath of the Holy Spirit — this same love — he receives eternal life and becomes the image of the Living God. This love is the origin of all the love in the world of creation.

“The second is the love that flows from man to God. This is faith, attraction to the Divine, enkindlement, progress, entrance into the Kingdom of God, receiving the Bounties of God, illumination with the lights of the Kingdom. This love is the origin of all philanthropy; this love causes the hearts of men to reflect the rays of the Sun of Reality.

“The third is the love of God towards the Self or Identity of God. This is the transfiguration of His Beauty, the reflection of Himself in the mirror of His Creation. This is the reality of love, the Ancient Love, the Eternal Love. Through one ray of this Love all other love exists.

“The fourth is the love of man for man. The love which exists between the hearts of believers is prompted by the ideal of the unity of spirits. This love is attained through the knowledge of God, so that men see the Divine Love reflected in the heart. Each sees in the other the Beauty of God reflected in the soul, and finding this point of similarity, they are attracted to one another in love. This love will make all men the waves of one sea, this love will make them all the stars of one heaven and the fruits of one tree. This love will bring the realization of true accord, the foundation of real unity.

“But the love which sometimes exists between friends is not (true) love, because it is subject to transmutation; this is merely fascination. As the breeze blows, the slender trees yield. If the wind is in the East the tree leans to the West, and if the wind turns to the West the tree leans to the East. This kind of love is originated by the accidental conditions of life. This is not love, it is merely acquaintanceship; it is subject to change.

“Today you will see two souls apparently in close friendship; tomorrow all this may be changed. Yesterday they were ready to die for one another, today they shun one another’s society! This is not love; it is the yielding of the hearts to the accidents of life. When that

which has caused this 'love' to exist passes, the love passes also; this is not in reality love.

“Love is only of the four kinds that I have explained. (a) The love of God towards the identity of God. Christ has said God is Love. (b) The love of God for His children - for His servants. (c) The love of man for God and (d) the love of man for man. These four kinds of love originate from God. These are rays from the Sun of Reality; these are the Breathings of the Holy Spirit; these are the Signs of the Reality” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 180-181).

48. “Love is Heaven’s kindly light, the Holy Spirit’s eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 27).

“Do not despair! Work steadily! Sincerity and love will conquer hate. How many seemingly impossible events are coming to pass these days! Set your faces towards the Light of the World. Show love to all; ‘Love is the breath of the Holy Spirit in the heart of Man’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 30).

All Humans are Equal

49. “Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you. O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory” (Bahá’u’lláh *Arabic Hidden Words*, #68).

50. “[Bahá’u’lláh] has shown that although individuals may differ in development and capacity, they are essentially and intrinsically equal as human beings, just as the waves of the sea are innumerable and

different, but the reality of the sea is one. The plurality of humanity may be likened to the waves, but the reality of humankind is like the sea itself. All the waves are of the same water; all are waves of one ocean” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 284).

51. “Bahá’u’lláh has proclaimed the oneness of the world of humanity. He has caused various nations and divergent creeds to unite. He has declared that difference of race and color is like the variegated beauty of flowers in a garden. If you enter a garden, you will see yellow, white, blue, red flowers in profusion and beauty — each radiant within itself and although different from the others, lending its own charm to them. Racial difference in the human kingdom is similar. If all the flowers in a garden were of the same color, the effect would be monotonous and wearying to the eye” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 69).

52. “The rational soul has no sex, and whatever social inequities may have been dictated by the survival requirements of the past, they clearly cannot be justified at a time when humanity stands at the threshold of maturity” (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*).

53. “Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God” (Bahá’u’lláh, in Research Department *Women*, 40-41).

54. “The sixth principle or teaching of Bahá’u’lláh concerns the equality of man and woman. He has declared that in the estimation of God there is no distinction of sex. The one whose heart is most pure, whose deeds and service in the Cause of God are greater and nobler, is most acceptable before the divine threshold — whether male or female. In the vegetable and animal kingdoms sex exists in perfect equality and without distinction or invidious estimate. The animal, although inferior to man in intelligence and reason, recognizes sex equality. Why should man, who is endowed with the sense of justice and sensibilities of conscience, be willing that one of the members of the human family should be rated and considered as subordinate? Such differentiation is neither intelligent nor conscientious; therefore, the principle of religion has been revealed by Bahá’u’lláh that woman must be given the privilege of equal education with man and full right

to his prerogatives” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 108).

55. “The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized; humanity cannot wing its way to heights of real attainment. When the two wings . . . become equivalent in strength, enjoying the same prerogatives, the flight of man will be exceedingly lofty and extraordinary” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 375).

56. “The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Esslemont, 149).

57. “[I]t is well-established in history that where woman has not participated in human affairs the outcomes have never attained a state of completion and perfection. On the other hand, every influential undertaking of the human world wherein woman has been a participant has attained importance” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 134).

58. “As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 136).

Humans have a Distinguished Station

59. “Now, if we imagine a time when man belonged to the animal world, or when he was merely an animal, we shall find that existence would have been imperfect — that is to say, there would have been no man, and this chief member, which in the body of the world is like the brain and mind in man, would have been missing. The world would then have been quite imperfect. It is thus proved that if there had been a time when man was in the animal kingdom, the perfection of existence would have been destroyed; for man is the greatest member

of this world, and if the body was without this chief member, surely it would be imperfect. We consider man as the greatest member because, among the creatures, he is the sum of all existing perfections. When we speak of man, we mean the perfect one, the foremost individual in the world, who is the sum of spiritual and apparent perfections, and who is like the sun among the beings. Then imagine that at one time the sun did not exist, but that it was a planet; surely at such a time the relations of existence would be disordered. How can such a thing be imagined? To a man who examines the world of existence what we have said is sufficient” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Questions*, 178).

60. “Consider how all other phenomenal existence and beings are captives of nature. The sun, that colossal center of our solar system, the giant stars and planets, the towering mountains, the earth itself and its kingdoms of life lower than the human — all are captives of nature except man. No other created thing can deviate in the slightest degree from obedience to natural law. The sun in its glory and greatness millions of miles away is held prisoner in its orbit of universal revolution, captive of universal natural control. Man is the ruler of nature. According to natural law and limitation he should remain upon the earth, but behold how he violates this command and soars above the mountains in airplanes. He sails in ships upon the surface of the ocean and dives into its depths in submarines. Man makes nature his servant; he harnesses the mighty energy of electricity, for instance, and imprisons it in a small lamp for his uses and convenience. He speaks from the East to the West through a wire. He is able to store and preserve his voice in a phonograph. Though he is a dweller upon earth, he penetrates the mysteries of starry worlds inconceivably distant. He discovers latent realities within the bosom of the earth, uncovers treasures, penetrates secrets and mysteries of the phenomenal world and brings to light that which according to nature’s jealous laws should remain hidden, unknown and unfathomable. Through an ideal inner power man brings these realities forth from the invisible plane to the visible. This is contrary to nature’s law.

“It is evident, therefore, that man is ruler over nature’s sphere

and province. Nature is inert; man is progressive. Nature has no consciousness; man is endowed with it. Nature is without volition and acts perforce, whereas man possesses a mighty will. Nature is incapable of discovering mysteries or realities, whereas man is especially fitted to do so. Nature is not in touch with the realm of God; man is attuned to its evidences. Nature is uninformed of God; man is conscious of Him. Man acquires divine virtues; nature is denied them. Man can voluntarily discontinue vices; nature has no power to modify the influence of its instincts. Altogether it is evident that man is more noble and superior, that in him there is an ideal power surpassing nature. He has consciousness, volition, memory, intelligent power, divine attributes and virtues of which nature is completely deprived and bereft; therefore, man is higher and nobler by reason of the ideal and heavenly force latent and manifest in him” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 177-180).

61. Human being “is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Questions*, 235).

62. “When we look at upon the human kingdom, we readily observe that it is superior to all others. In the differentiation of life in the world of existence, there are four degrees or kingdoms: the mineral, vegetable, animal, and human. The mineral kingdom is possessed of certain virtue which we term cohesion. The vegetable kingdom possesses cohesive properties plus the power of growth, or augmentive power. The animal kingdom is possessed of the virtues of the mineral and vegetable plus the powers of the senses. But the animal, although gifted with sensibilities, is utterly bereft of consciousness, absolutely out of touch with the world of consciousness and spirit. The animal possesses no powers by which it can make discoveries which lie beyond the realm of the senses. It has no power of intellectual origination. For example, an animal located in Europe is not capable of discovering the continent of America. It understands only phenomena which come within the range of its senses and instinct. It cannot abstractly reason out anything. The animal cannot conceive of the earth being spherical or revolving upon its axis. It cannot apprehend that the little

stars in the heavens are tremendous worlds vastly greater than the earth. The animal cannot abstractly conceive of intellect. Of these powers it is bereft. Therefore, these powers are peculiar to man, and it is made evident that in the human kingdom there is a reality of which the animal is lacking. What is that reality? It is the spirit of man. By it man is distinguished above all the other phenomenal kingdoms. Although he possesses all the virtues of the lower kingdoms, he is further endowed with the spiritual faculty, the heavenly gift of consciousness” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 258).

“. . . it is indubitable that minerals are endowed with a spirit and life according to the requirements of that stage. . . .

“In the vegetable world, too, there is the power of growth, and that power of growth is the spirit. In the animal world there is the sense of feeling, but in the human world there is an all-embracing power . . . the reasoning power of the mind. . . .

“In like manner the mind proveth the existence of an unseen Reality that embraceth all beings, and that existeth and revealeth itself in all stages . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Auguste Forel and the Bahá’í Faith*, 9-10, in White, R., 53).

63. “God has created all earthly things under a law of progression in material degrees, but He has created man and endowed him with powers of advancement toward spiritual and transcendental kingdoms” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 302).

64. “The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names — the human spirit and the rational soul — designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings. But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a

ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets.

“But the mind is the power of the human spirit. Spirit is the lamp; mind is the light which shines from the lamp. Spirit is the tree, and the mind is the fruit. Mind is the perfection of the spirit and is its essential quality, as the sun’s rays are the essential necessity of the sun” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Questions*, 208-209).

65. “To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 177).

66. “How strange then it seems that man, notwithstanding his endowment with this ideal power, will descend to a level beneath him and declare himself no greater than that which is manifestly inferior to his real station. God has created such a conscious spirit within him that he is the most wonderful of all contingent beings. In ignoring these virtues he descends to the material plane, considers matter the ruler of existence and denies that which lies beyond. Is this virtue? In its fullest sense this is animalistic, for the animal realizes nothing more. In fact, from this standpoint the animal is the greater philosopher because it is completely ignorant of the Kingdom of God, possesses no spiritual susceptibilities and is uninformed of the heavenly world. In brief, this is a view of the pathway of nature” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 177-180).

Genuine Religion is the Key to Balancing Material and Spiritual Development

67. “Religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquility amongst its peoples. . . .The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 63-64).

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

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

69. “Our purpose is to show how true religion promotes the civilization and honor, the prosperity and prestige, the learning and advancement

of a people once abject, enslaved and ignorant, and how, when it falls into the hands of religious leaders who are foolish and fanatical, it is diverted to the wrong ends, until this greatest of splendors turns into blackest night” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Secret*, 80).

70. “The greatest bestowal of God in the world of humanity is religion, for assuredly the divine teachings of religion are above all other sources of instruction and development to man. Religion confers upon man eternal life and guides his footsteps in the world of morality. It opens the doors of unending happiness and bestows everlasting honor upon the human kingdom. It has been the basis of all civilization and progress in the history of mankind” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation*, 361).

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

“No serious attempt to set human affairs aright, to achieve world peace, can ignore religion. Man’s perception and practice of it are largely the stuff of history. An eminent historian described religion as a ‘faculty of human nature’. That the perversion of this faculty has contributed to much of the confusion in society and the conflicts in and between individuals can hardly be denied. But neither can any fair-minded observer discount the preponderating influence exerted by religion on the vital expressions of civilization. Furthermore, its indispensability to social order has repeatedly been demonstrated by its direct effect on laws and morality.

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the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 63-64).

73. “So far as earthly existence is concerned, many of the greatest achievements of religion have been moral in character. Through its teachings and through the examples of human lives illumined by these teachings, masses of people in all ages and lands have developed the capacity to love. They have learned to discipline the animal side of their natures, to make great sacrifices for the common good, to practise forgiveness, generosity, and trust, to use wealth and other resources in ways that serve the advancement of civilization. Institutional systems have been devised to translate these moral advances into the norms of social life on a vast scale. However obscured by dogmatic accretions and diverted by sectarian conflict, the spiritual impulses set in motion by such transcendent figures as Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Muhammad have been the chief influence in the civilizing of human character” (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*).

“The second pathway is that of religion, the road of the divine Kingdom. It involves the acquisition of praiseworthy attributes, heavenly illumination and righteous actions in the world of humanity. This pathway is conducive to the progress and uplift of the world. It is the source of human enlightenment, training and ethical improvement — the magnet which attracts the love of God because of the knowledge of God it bestows. This is the road of the holy Manifestations of God; for They are, in reality, the foundation of the divine religion of oneness. There is no change or transformation in this pathway. It is the cause of human betterment, the acquisition of heavenly virtues and the illumination of mankind.

“Alas that humanity is completely submerged in imitations and unrealities, notwithstanding that the truth of divine religion has ever remained the same. Superstitions have obscured the fundamental reality, the world is darkened, and the light of religion is not apparent. This darkness is conducive to differences and dissensions; rites and dogmas are many and various; therefore, discord has arisen among the religious systems, whereas religion is for the unification of mankind.

True religion is the source of love and agreement amongst men, the cause of the development of praiseworthy qualities, but the people are holding to the counterfeit and imitation, negligent of the reality which unifies, so they are bereft and deprived of the radiance of religion. They follow superstitions inherited from their fathers and ancestors. To such an extent has this prevailed that they have taken away the heavenly light of divine truth and sit in the darkness of imitations and imaginations. That which was meant to be conducive to life has become the cause of death; that which should have been an evidence of knowledge is now a proof of ignorance; that which was a factor in the sublimity of human nature has proved to be its degradation. Therefore, the realm of the religionist has gradually narrowed and darkened, and the sphere of the materialist has widened and advanced; for the religionist has held to imitation and counterfeit, neglecting and discarding holiness and the sacred reality of religion. When the sun sets, it is the time for bats to fly. They come forth because they are creatures of the night. When the lights of religion become darkened, the materialists appear. They are the bats of night. The decline of religion is their time of activity; they seek the shadows when the world is darkened and clouds have spread over it” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 177-180).

74. “No serious attempt to set human affairs aright, to achieve world peace, can ignore religion. Man’s perception and practice of it are largely the stuff of history. An eminent historian described religion as a ‘faculty of human nature’. That the perversion of this faculty has contributed to much of the confusion in society and the conflicts in and between individuals can hardly be denied. But neither can any fair-minded observer discount the preponderating influence exerted by religion on the vital expressions of civilization. Furthermore, its indispensability to social order has repeatedly been demonstrated by its direct effect on laws and morality” (Universal House of Justice *The Promise of World Peace*).

75. “Religion, moreover, is not a series of beliefs, a set of customs; religion is the teachings of the Lord God, teachings which constitute

the very life of humankind, which urge high thoughts upon the mind, refine the character, and lay the groundwork for man's everlasting honour" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Selections*, 52-53).

"The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquility of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God. Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind" (Bahá'u'lláh *Tablets*, 129-130).

Institutions Provide the Structure of Religion

76. "Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind — the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve — is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence" (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 42-43).

77. "The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This Cause is a Cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do

this is to reform the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual” (Shoghi Effendi, in *Universal House of Justice The Local Spiritual Assembly*, 28).

78. “The Administrative Order, which ever since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ascension has evolved and is taking shape under our very eyes in no fewer than forty countries of the world, may be considered as the framework of the Will itself, the inviolable stronghold wherein this new-born child is being nurtured and developed. This Administrative Order, as it expands and consolidates itself, will no doubt manifest the potentialities and reveal the full implications of this momentous document — this most remarkable expression of the Will of One of the most remarkable Figures of the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh. It will, as its component parts, its organic institutions, begin to function with efficiency and vigor, assert its claim and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind.

“It should be noted in this connection that this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá’u’lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism. Nowhere in the sacred scriptures of any of the world’s religious systems, nor even in the writings of the Inaugurator of the Bábi Dispensation, do we find any provisions establishing a covenant or providing for an administrative order that can compare in scope and authority with those that lie at the very basis of the Bahá’í Dispensation. Has either Christianity or Islam, to take as an instance two of the most widely diffused and outstanding among the world’s recognized religions, anything to offer that can measure with, or be regarded as equivalent to, either the Book of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant or to the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá? Does the text of either the Gospel or the Qur’ān confer

sufficient authority upon those leaders and councils that have claimed the right and assumed the function of interpreting the provisions of their sacred scriptures and of administering the affairs of their respective communities? Could Peter, the admitted chief of the Apostles, or the Imam Ali, the cousin and legitimate successor of the Prophet, produce in support of the primacy with which both had been invested written and explicit affirmations from Christ and Muhammad that could have silenced those who either among their contemporaries or in a later age have repudiated their authority and, by their action, precipitated the schisms that persist until the present day? Where, we may confidently ask, in the recorded sayings of Jesus Christ, whether in the matter of succession or in the provision of a set of specific laws and clearly defined administrative ordinances, as distinguished from purely spiritual principles, can we find anything approaching the detailed injunctions, laws and warnings that abound in the authenticated utterances of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Can any passage of the Qur'án, which in respect to its legal code, its administrative and devotional ordinances marks already a notable advance over previous and more corrupted Revelations, be construed as placing upon an unassailable basis the undoubted authority with which Muhammad had, verbally and on several occasions, invested His successor? Can the Author of the Bábi Dispensation however much He may have succeeded through the provisions of the Persian Bayan in averting a schism as permanent and catastrophic as those that afflicted Christianity and Islam — can He be said to have produced instruments for the safeguarding of His Faith as definite and efficacious as those which must for all time preserve the unity of the organized followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh?

“Alone of all the Revelations gone before it this Faith has, through the explicit directions, the repeated warnings, the authenticated safeguards incorporated and elaborated in its teachings, succeeded in raising a structure which the bewildered followers of bankrupt and broken creeds might well approach and critically examine, and seek, ere it is too late, the invulnerable security of its world-embracing shelter” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 144-146).

79. “The major task of National Assemblies, therefore, is to increase the local communities’ awareness of needs and possibilities, and to guide and coordinate the efforts resulting from such awareness” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 603).

The Covenant Maintains Religious Unity

80. “The Greater Covenant into which, as affirmed in His writings, God had, from time immemorial, entered, through the Prophets of all ages, with the whole of mankind, regarding the newborn Revelation, had already been fulfilled. It had now to be supplemented by a Lesser Covenant which He felt bound to make with the entire body of His followers concerning the One Whose advent He characterized as the fruit and ultimate purpose of His Dispensation. Such a Covenant had invariably been the feature of every previous religion” (Shoghi Effendi *God Passes By*, 27).

“Today the dynamic power of the world of existence is the power of the Covenant which like unto an artery pulsateth in the body of the contingent world and protecteth Bahá’í unity.

“The Bahá’ís are commanded to establish the oneness of mankind; if they cannot unite around one point how will they be able to bring about the unity of mankind?

“The purpose of the Blessed Beauty in entering into this Covenant and Testament was to gather all existent beings around one point so that the thoughtless souls, who in every cycle and generation have been the cause of dissension, may not undermine the Cause. He hath, therefore, commanded that whatever emanateth from the Centre of the Covenant is right and is under His protection and favour, while all else is error” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 208-209).

81. “The Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fulness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs” (Universal House of Justice *The*

Covenant and Administration, 2).

“The holy Manifestations Who have been the Sources or Founders of the various religious systems were united and agreed in purpose and teaching. Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh are one in spirit and reality. Moreover, each Prophet fulfilled the promise of the One Who came before Him and, likewise, Each announced the One Who would follow. Consider how Abraham foretold the coming of Moses, and Moses embodied the Abrahamic statement. Moses prophesied the Messianic cycle, and Christ fulfilled the law of Moses. It is evident, therefore, that the Holy Manifestations Who founded the religious systems are united and agreed; there is no differentiation possible in Their mission and teachings; all are reflectors of reality, and all are promulgators of the religion of God. The divine religion is reality, and reality is not multiple; it is one. Therefore, the foundations of the religious systems are one because all proceed from the indivisible reality” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation*, 197-198).

82. “In the Bahá’í view, the physical evolution of the cosmos and of all life on earth, the social and intellectual development of civilization, and the spiritual maturation of each human being are emergent processes expressive of one universal creative force. Within this emergent context, the truths revealed through religious revelation, like the truths discovered through science, are relative and progressive. Throughout the ages, the teachings of a succession of spiritual luminaries have guided humanity’s spiritual and social development, and animated the evolution of human consciousness towards greater awareness and responsibility. While earlier Revelations provided the spiritual impetus for higher levels of social cohesion in accordance with the capacities of the time, the ultimate vision of a peaceful and unified society remained a prophetic image” (*White Spiritual Foundation*, 62).

“Know thou assuredly that the essence of all the Prophets of God is one and the same. Their unity is absolute. God, the Creator, saith: There is no distinction whatsoever among the Bearers of My Message.

They all have but one purpose; their secret is the same secret. To prefer one in honor to another, to exalt certain ones above the rest, is in no wise to be permitted. Every true Prophet hath regarded His Message as fundamentally the same as the Revelation of every other Prophet gone before Him. If any man, therefore, should fail to comprehend this truth, and should consequently indulge in vain and unseemly language, no one whose sight is keen and whose understanding is enlightened would ever allow such idle talk to cause him to waver in his belief.

“The measure of the revelation of the Prophets of God in this world, however, must differ. Each and every one of them hath been the Bearer of a distinct Message, and hath been commissioned to reveal Himself through specific acts. It is for this reason that they appear to vary in their greatness. Their Revelation may be likened unto the light of the moon that sheddeth its radiance upon the earth. Though every time it appeareth, it revealeth a fresh measure of its brightness, yet its inherent splendor can never diminish, nor can its light suffer extinction.

“It is clear and evident, therefore, that any apparent variation in the intensity of their light is not inherent in the light itself, but should rather be attributed to the varying receptivity of an ever-changing world. Every Prophet Whom the Almighty and Peerless Creator hath purposed to send to the peoples of the earth hath been entrusted with a Message, and charged to act in a manner that would best meet the requirements of the age in which He appeared. God’s purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 78-79).

“That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion. These principles and laws, these

firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 287-288).

“The cause of this fellowship and unity lies in the fact that the divine law has two distinct aspects or functions: one the essential or fundamental, the other the material or accidental. The first aspect of the revealed religion of God is that which concerns the ethical development and spiritual progress of mankind, the awakening of potential human susceptibilities and the descent of divine bestowals. These ordinances are changeless, essential, eternal. The second function of the divine religion deals with material conditions, the laws of human intercourse and social regulation. These are subject to change and transformation in accordance with the time, place and conditions. The essential ordinances of religion were the same during the time of Abraham, the day of Moses and the cycle of Jesus, but the accidental or material laws were abrogated and superseded according to the exigency and requirement of each succeeding age. For example, in the law of Moses there were ten distinct commandments in regard to murder, which were revealed according to the requirement and capacity of the people, but in the day of Jesus these were abrogated and superseded in conformity with the changed and advanced human conditions (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 97-98; see also *Promulgation*, 32, 105-106, 151, 168, 197).

“In the Word of God there is still another unity — the oneness of the Manifestations of God, Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. This is a unity divine, heavenly, radiant, merciful — the one reality appearing in its successive Manifestations. For instance, the sun is one and the same, but its points of dawning are various. During the summer season it rises from the northern point of the ecliptic; in winter it appears from the southern point of rising. Each month between, it appears from a certain zodiacal position. Although these dawning points are different,

the sun is the same sun which has appeared from them all. The significance is the reality of Prophethood which is symbolized by the sun, and the holy Manifestations are the dawning places or zodiacal points. ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 192).

“That all the Messengers of God should be regarded as ‘abiding in the same Tabernacle, soaring in the same Heaven, seated upon the same Throne, uttering the same Speech, and proclaiming the same Faith’ must, however much we may extol the measure of Divine Revelation vouchsafed to mankind at this crowning stage of its evolution, remain the unalterable foundation and central tenet of Bahá’í belief. Any variations in the splendor which each of these Manifestations of the Light of God has shed upon the world should be ascribed not to any inherent superiority involved in the essential character of any one of them, but rather to the progressive capacity, the ever-increasing spiritual receptiveness, which mankind, in its progress towards maturity, has invariably manifested” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 166).

“The religions brought to mankind by a succession of spiritual luminaries have been the primary link between humanity and that ultimate reality, and have galvanized and refined mankind’s capacity to achieve spiritual success together with social progress” (Universal House of Justice *The Promise of World Peace*).

83. “Ceasing to designate to itself a movement, a fellowship and the like — designations that did grave injustice to its ever-unfolding system — dissociating itself from such appellations as Bábi sect, Asiatic cult, and offshoot of Shi’ih Islam, with which the ignorant and the malicious were wont to describe it, refusing to be labeled as a mere philosophy of life, or as an eclectic code of ethical conduct, or even as a new religion, the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh is now visibly succeeding in demonstrating its claim and title to be regarded as a World Religion, destined to attain, in the fullness of time, the status of a world-embracing Commonwealth, which would be at once the instrument and the guardian of the Most Great Peace announced by its

Author. Far from wishing to add to the number of the religious systems, whose conflicting loyalties have for so many generations disturbed the peace of mankind, this Faith is instilling into each of its adherents a new love for, and a genuine appreciation of the unity underlying, the various religions represented within its pale” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 196-197).

The Current Materialistic World Order is Defective

84. “However, until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For although, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, which exquisitely manifests its intended aims, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions are imminent.

“Consequently, when thou lookest at the orderly pattern of kingdoms, cities and villages, with the attractiveness of their adornments, the freshness of their natural resources, the refinement of their appliances, the ease of their means of travel, the extent of knowledge available about the world of nature, the great inventions, the colossal enterprises, the noble discoveries and scientific researches, thou wouldst conclude that civilization conduceth to the happiness and the progress of the human world. Yet shouldst thou turn thine eye to the discovery of destructive and infernal machines, to the development of forces of demolition and the invention of fiery implements, which uproot the tree of life, it would become evident and manifest unto thee that civilization is conjoined with barbarism. Progress and barbarism go hand in hand, unless material civilization be confirmed by Divine Guidance, by the revelations of the All-Merciful and by godly virtues, and be reinforced by spiritual conduct, by the ideals of the Kingdom and by the outpourings of the Realm of Might” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 283-286).

85. "For the world is dark with discord and selfishness, hearts are negligent, souls are bereft of God and His heavenly bestowals. Man is submerged in the affairs of this world. His aims, objects and attainments are mortal, whereas God desires for him immortal accomplishments. In his heart there is no thought of God. He has sacrificed his portion and birthright of divine spirituality. Desire and passion, like two unmanageable horses, have wrested the reins of control from him and are galloping madly in the wilderness. This is the cause of the degradation of the world of humanity. This is the cause of its retrogression into the appetites and passions of the animal kingdom. Instead of divine advancement we find sensual captivity and debasement of heavenly virtues of the soul. By devotion to the carnal, mortal world human susceptibilities sink to the level of animalism" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 184).

86. "Indeed the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is the lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind that people in general do no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence. There is not sufficient demand for things that we call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence.

"The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook on life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit" (Shoghi Effendi *Directives of the Guardian*, 86).

87. "Consider now, that the most advanced and civilized countries of the world have been turned into arsenals of explosives, that the continents of the globe have been transformed into huge camps and battlefields, that the peoples of the world have formed themselves into armed nations, and that the governments of the world are vying with each other as to who will first step into the field of carnage and bloodshed, thus subjecting mankind to the utmost degree of affliction. Therefore, this civilization and material progress should be combined

with the Most Great Guidance so that this nether world may become the scene of the appearance of the bestowals of the Kingdom, and physical achievements may be conjoined with the effulgences of the Merciful. This in order that the beauty and perfection of the world of man may be unveiled and be manifested before all in the utmost grace and splendour. Thus everlasting glory and happiness shall be revealed” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 283-286).

88. “The unrestrained exploitation of natural resources is merely a symptom of an overall sickness of the human spirit” (Bahá’í International Community *Earth Charter*).

“The violent derangement of the world’s equilibrium; the trembling that will seize the limbs of mankind; the radical transformation of human society; the rolling up of the present-day Order; the fundamental changes affecting the structure of government; the weakening of the pillars of religion; the rise of dictatorships; the spread of tyranny; the fall of monarchies; the decline of ecclesiastical institutions; the increase of anarchy and chaos; the extension and consolidation of the Movement of the Left; the fanning into flame of the smouldering fire of racial strife; the development of infernal engines of war; the burning of cities; the contamination of the atmosphere of the earth — these stand out as the signs and portents that must either herald or accompany the retributive calamity which, as decreed by Him Who is the Judge and Redeemer of mankind, must, sooner or later, afflict a society which, for the most part, and for over a century, has turned a deaf ear to the Voice of God’s Messenger in this day — a calamity which must purge the human race of the dross of its age-long corruptions, and weld its component parts into a firmly-knit world-embracing Fellowship — a Fellowship destined, in the fullness of time, to be incorporated in the framework, and to be galvanized by the spiritualizing influences, of a mysteriously expanding, divinely appointed Order, and to flower, in the course of future Dispensations, into a Civilization, the like of which mankind has, at no stage in its evolution, witnessed” (Shoghi Effendi *Messages*, 103).

89. “The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective” (Bahá’u’lláh, in Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 32).

“Such, we might well admit, is the state which individuals and institutions alike are approaching. ‘No two men,’ Bahá’u’lláh, lamenting the plight of an erring humanity, has written, ‘can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united. The evidences of discord and malice are apparent everywhere, though all were made for harmony and union.’ ‘How long,’ He, in the same Tablet, exclaims, ‘will humanity persist in its waywardness? How long will injustice continue? How long is chaos and confusion to reign amongst men? How long will discord agitate the face of society? The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divideth and afflicteth the human race is daily increasing’” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 187).

Humanity is Simultaneously Devolving and Evolving

90. “Just as the organic evolution of mankind has been slow and gradual, and involved successively the unification of the family, the tribe, the city-state, and the nation, so has the light vouchsafed by the Revelation of God, at various stages in the evolution of religion, and reflected in the successive Dispensations of the past, been slow and progressive. Indeed the measure of Divine Revelation, in every age, has been adapted to, and commensurate with, the degree of social progress achieved in that age by a constantly evolving humanity” (Shoghi Effendi *Promised Day*, 117).

91. “As we view the world around us, we are compelled to observe the manifold evidences of that universal fermentation which, in every continent of the globe and in every department of human life, be it religious, social, economic or political, is purging and reshaping

humanity in anticipation of the Day when the wholeness of the human race will have been recognized and its unity established. A twofold process, however, can be distinguished, each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive. The former, as it steadily evolves, unfolds a System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing; while the latter, as its disintegrating influence deepens, tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity's progress towards its destined goal. The constructive process stands associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and is the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish. The destructive forces that characterize the other should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline.

“A titanic, a spiritual struggle, unparalleled in its magnitude yet unspeakably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is being waged as a result of these opposing tendencies, in this age of transition through which the organized community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh and mankind as a whole are passing” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 170).

92. “Chaos and confusion are daily increasing in the world. They will attain such intensity as to render the frame of mankind unable to bear them. Then will men be awakened and become aware that religion is the impregnable stronghold and the manifest light of the world, and its laws, exhortations and teachings the source of life on earth” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Research Department *Peace*, 14).

93. “Adversity, prolonged, worldwide, afflictive, allied to chaos and universal destruction, must needs convulse the nations, stir the conscience of the world, disillusion the masses, precipitate a radical change in the very conception of society, and coalesce ultimately the disjointed, the bleeding limbs of mankind into one body, single,

organically united, and indivisible” (Shoghi Effendi *Promised Day*, 123).

94. “[A] future society . . . is to emerge out of the chaos and confusion of the present age” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 8).

95. See endnote 91.

“We are indeed living in an age which, if we would correctly appraise it, should be regarded as one which is witnessing a dual phenomenon. The first signalizes the death pangs of an order, effete and godless, that has stubbornly refused, despite the signs and portents of a century-old Revelation, to attune its processes to the precepts and ideals which that Heaven-sent Faith proffered it. The second proclaims the birth pangs of an Order, divine and redemptive, that will inevitably supplant the former, and within Whose administrative structure an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-embracing, is imperceptibly maturing. The one is being rolled up, and is crashing in oppression, bloodshed, and ruin. The other opens up vistas of a justice, a unity, a peace, a culture, such as no age has ever seen. The former has spent its force, demonstrated its falsity and barrenness, lost irretrievably its opportunity, and is hurrying to its doom. The latter, virile and unconquerable, is plucking asunder its chains, and is vindicating its title to be the one refuge within which a sore-tried humanity, purged from its dross, can attain its destiny” (Shoghi Effendi *Promised Day*, 16).

“Only if humanity’s collective childhood has indeed come to an end and the age of its adulthood is dawning does such a prospect represent more than another utopian mirage. To imagine that an effort of the magnitude envisioned here can be summoned up by despondent and mutually antagonistic peoples and nations runs counter to the whole of received wisdom. Only if, as Bahá’u’lláh asserts to be the case, the course of social evolution has arrived at one of those decisive turning points through which all of the phenomena of existence are impelled suddenly forward into new stages of their

development, can such a possibility be conceived. A profound conviction that just so great a transformation in human consciousness is underway has inspired the views set forth in this statement. To all who recognize in it familiar promptings from within their own hearts, Bahá'u'lláh's words bring assurance that God has, in this matchless day, endowed humanity with spiritual resources fully equal to the challenge:

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

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

“The turmoil now convulsing human affairs is unprecedented, and many of its consequences enormously destructive. Dangers unimagined in all history gather around a distracted humanity. The greatest error that the world's leadership could make at this juncture, however, would be to allow the crisis to cast doubt on the ultimate outcome of the process that is occurring. A world is passing away and a new one is struggling to be born. The habits, attitudes, and institutions that have accumulated over the centuries are being subjected to tests that are as necessary to human development as they are inescapable” (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*).

96. “I testify that no sooner had the First Word proceeded, through the potency of Thy will and purpose, out of His mouth, and the First Call gone forth from His lips than the whole creation was revolutionized, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths. Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, entities of a new creation, and revealing, in the unseen realms, the signs and tokens of Thy unity and oneness. Through that Call Thou didst announce unto all Thy servants the advent of Thy most great

Revelation and the appearance of Thy most perfect Cause”
(Bahá'u'lláh *Prayers and Meditations*, 295-296).

97. “Few will fail to recognize that the Spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh upon the world, and which is manifesting itself with varying degrees of intensity through the efforts consciously displayed by His avowed supporters and indirectly through certain humanitarian organizations, can never permeate and exercise an abiding influence upon mankind unless and until it incarnates itself in a visible Order, which would bear His name, wholly identify itself with His principles, and function in conformity with His laws” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 19).

98. “Humanity, whether viewed in the light of man’s individual conduct or in the existing relationships between organized communities and nations, has, alas, strayed too far and suffered too great a decline to be redeemed through the unaided efforts of the best among its recognized rulers and statesmen — however disinterested their motives, however concerted their action, however unsparing in their zeal and devotion to its cause. No scheme which the calculations of the highest statesmanship may yet devise; no doctrine which the most distinguished exponents of economic theory may hope to advance; no principle which the most ardent of moralists may strive to inculcate, can provide, in the last resort, adequate foundations upon which the future of a distracted world can be built. No appeal for mutual tolerance which the worldly-wise might raise, however compelling and insistent, can calm its passions or help restore its vigor. Nor would any general scheme of mere organized international cooperation, in whatever sphere of human activity, however ingenious in conception, or extensive in scope, succeed in removing the root cause of the evil that has so rudely upset the equilibrium of present-day society. Not even, I venture to assert, would the very act of devising the machinery required for the political and economic unification of the world — a principle that has been increasingly advocated in recent times — provide in itself the antidote against the poison that is steadily undermining the vigor of organized peoples and nations. What else, might we not confidently affirm, but the unreserved acceptance of

the Divine Program enunciated, with such simplicity and force as far back as sixty years ago, by Bahá'u'lláh, embodying in its essentials God's divinely appointed scheme for the unification of mankind in this age, coupled with an indomitable conviction in the unfailing efficacy of each and all of its provisions, is eventually capable of withstanding the forces of internal disintegration which, if unchecked, must needs continue to eat into the vitals of a despairing society. 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" (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 33-34).

'What could be': A Bahá'í Vision of Human Possibilities in a New World Order

99. "Praise be to God, throughout succeeding centuries and ages the call of civilization hath been raised, the world of humanity hath been advancing and progressing day by day, various countries have been developing by leaps and bounds, and material improvements have increased, until the world of existence obtained universal capacity to receive the spiritual teachings and to hearken to the Divine Call. The suckling babe passeth through various physical stages, growing and developing at every stage, until its body reacheth the age of maturity. Having arrived at this stage it acquireth the capacity to manifest spiritual and intellectual perfections. The lights of comprehension, intelligence and knowledge become perceptible in it and the powers of its soul unfold. Similarly, in the contingent world, the human species hath undergone progressive physical changes and, by a slow process, hath scaled the ladder of civilization, realizing in itself the wonders, excellencies and gifts of humanity in their most glorious form, until it gained the capacity to express the splendours of spiritual perfections and divine ideals and became capable of hearkening to the call of God. Then at last the call of the Kingdom was raised, the spiritual virtues and perfections were revealed, the Sun of Reality dawned, and the teachings of the Most Great Peace, of the oneness of the world of humanity and of the universality of men, were promoted. We hope

that the effulgence of these rays shall become more and more intense, and the ideal virtues more resplendent, so that the goal of this universal human process will be attained and the love of God will appear in the utmost grace and beauty and bedazzle all hearts.

“O ye beloved of God! Know ye, verily, that the happiness of mankind lieth in the unity and the harmony of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity among all men” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 283-286).

100. “The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend” (*Shoghi Effendi World Order*, 202).

101. “Similarly there are periods and stages in the collective life of humanity. At one time it was passing through its stage of childhood, at another its period of youth, but now it has entered its long-predicted phase of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere apparent. . . . That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race can neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day, this period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former state of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities. New bounties, perfect bestowals, are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Shoghi Effendi World Order*, 164-165).

102. “The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather 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 — all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Era — should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.

“That mystic, all-pervasive, yet undefinable change, which we associate with the stage of maturity inevitable in the life of the individual and the development of the fruit must, if we would correctly apprehend the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh, have its counterpart in the evolution of the organization of human society. A similar stage must sooner or later be attained in the collective life of mankind, producing an even more striking phenomenon in world relations, and endowing the whole human race with such potentialities of well-being as shall provide, throughout the succeeding ages, the chief incentive required for the eventual fulfillment of its high destiny. Such a stage of maturity in the process of human government must, for all time, if we would faithfully recognize the tremendous claim advanced by Bahá’u’lláh, remain identified with the Revelation of which He was the Bearer” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 163-164).

“The violent derangement of the world’s equilibrium; the trembling that will seize the limbs of mankind; the radical

transformation of human society; the rolling up of the present-day Order; the fundamental changes affecting the structure of government; the weakening of the pillars of religion; the rise of dictatorships; the spread of tyranny; the fall of monarchies; the decline of ecclesiastical institutions; the increase of anarchy and chaos; the extension and consolidation of the Movement of the Left; the fanning into flame of the smouldering fire of racial strife; the development of infernal engines of war; the burning of cities; the contamination of the atmosphere of the earth — these stand out as the signs and portents that must either herald or accompany the retributive calamity which, as decreed by Him Who is the Judge and Redeemer of mankind, must, sooner or later, afflict a society which, for the most part, and for over a century, has turned a deaf ear to the Voice of God's Messenger in this day — a calamity which must purge the human race of the dross of its age-long corruptions, and weld its component parts into a firmly-knit world-embracing Fellowship — a Fellowship destined, in the fullness of time, to be incorporated in the framework, and to be galvanized by the spiritualizing influences, of a mysteriously expanding, divinely appointed Order, and to flower, in the course of future Dispensations, into a Civilization, the like of which mankind has, at no stage in its evolution, witnessed" (*Shoghi Effendi Messages*, 103).

103. "Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind — the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve — is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and

perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds — creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world — a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.

“It represents the consummation of human evolution — an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations.

“The principle of the Oneness of Mankind, as proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh, carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 42-43).

104. “Soon will the present-day order be rolled up and a new one spread out in its stead” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 7).

105. “For Bahá’u’lláh . . . has . . . laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 19).

Material Characteristics of the New World Order

Global Governance

106. “How clear, how prophetic, must sound the words uttered by Bahá’u’lláh in the light of recent international developments: ‘Be united, O concourse of the sovereigns of the world, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice.’ ‘The time must come,’ He, foreshadowing the tentative efforts that are now being made, has written, ‘when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world’s Great Peace among men. . . .Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him.’

“The sovereigns of the world, writes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in elaboration of this theme, ‘must conclude a binding treaty, and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world, and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. . . .All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to insure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. . . .The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government’” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 191-192).

107. The Universal House of Justice calls for “global cooperation of the family of nations in devising and adopting measures designed to preserve the ecological balance this earth was given by its Creator” (Research Department *Conservation of the Earth’s Resources*, 15).

108. "The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hinderances and restrictions, and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve centre of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. A world language will either be invented or chosen from among the existing languages and will be taught in the schools of all the federated nations as an auxiliary to their mother tongue. A world script, a world literature, a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind. In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will co-operate, and will harmoniously develop. The press will, under such a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversified views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously manipulated by vested interests, whether private or public, and will be liberated from the influence of contending governments and peoples. The economic resources of the world will

be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be co-ordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

“National rivalries, hatreds and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding and co-operation. The causes of religious strife will be permanently removed, economic barriers and restrictions will be completely abolished, and the inordinate distinction between classes will be obliterated. Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear. The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

“A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation — such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 203-204).

Permeating Spirit of Justice

109. “Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity’s oneness into a collective will through

which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. . . .

“At the individual level, justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. . . .

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

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

“At the heart of the discussion of a strategy of social and economic development, therefore, lies the issue of human rights. The

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

110. "There can be no doubt whatever that if the daystar of justice, which the clouds of tyranny have obscured, were to shed its light upon men, the face of the earth would be completely transformed" (Bahá'u'lláh *Gleanings*, 219).

Gender Equality

111. "According to the spirit of this age, women must advance and fulfill their mission in all departments of life, becoming equal to men. They must be on the same level as men and enjoy equal rights. This is my earnest prayer and it is one of the fundamental principles of Bahá'u'lláh" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, from "Religion as an Agent for Promoting the Advancement of Women at all Levels" in *The Greatness that Might be Theirs*).

112. "Without doubt education will establish her equality with men" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 136-137).

"That is to say, there must be no difference in the education of

male and female in order that womankind may develop equal capacity and importance with man in the social and economic equation. Then the world will attain unity and harmony” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 108).

113. “The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals — or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Esslemont, 149).

114. “When men own the equality of women there will be no need for them to struggle for their rights!” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 171).

115. “The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized; humanity cannot wing its way to heights of real attainment. When the two wings . . . become equivalent in strength, enjoying the same prerogatives, the flight of man will be exceedingly lofty and extraordinary” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 375).

116. “Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible. Even granted that woman is inferior to man in some degree of capacity or accomplishment, this or any other distinction would continue to be productive of discord and trouble. The only remedy is education, opportunity; for equality means equal qualification. In brief, the assumption of superiority by man will continue to be depressing to the ambition of woman, as if her

attainment to equality was creationally impossible; woman's aspiration toward advancement will be checked by it, and she will gradually become hopeless. On the contrary, we must declare that her capacity is equal, even greater than man's. This will inspire her with hope and ambition, and her susceptibilities for advancement will continually increase. She must not be told and taught that she is weaker and inferior in capacity and qualification. If a pupil is told that his intelligence is less than his fellow pupils, it is a very great drawback and handicap to his progress. He must be encouraged to advance by the statement, 'You are most capable, and if you endeavor, you will attain the highest degree.'

"It is my hope that the banner of equality may be raised throughout the five continents where as yet it is not fully recognized and established. In this enlightened world of the West woman has advanced an immeasurable degree beyond the women of the Orient. And let it be known once more that until woman and man recognize and realize equality, social and political progress here or anywhere will not be possible. For the world of humanity consists of two parts or members: one is woman; the other is man. Until these two members are equal in strength, the oneness of humanity cannot be established, and the happiness and felicity of mankind will not be a reality. God willing, this is to be so" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 76-77).

117. "In past ages humanity has been defective and inefficient because it has been incomplete. War and its ravages have blighted the world; the education of woman will be a mighty step toward its abolition and ending, for she will use her whole influence against war. Woman rears the child and educates the youth to maturity. She will refuse to give her sons for sacrifice upon the field of battle. In truth, she will be the greatest factor in establishing universal peace and international arbitration. Assuredly, woman will abolish warfare among mankind. Inasmuch as human society consists of two parts, the male and female, each the complement of the other, the happiness and stability of humanity cannot be assured unless both are perfected. Therefore, the standard and status of man and woman must become equalized" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 108).

“When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinctions are conducive to discord and strife” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 175).

Moderation

118. “Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation. He discerneth the truth in all things, through guidance of Him Who is the All-Seeing. The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. Thus warneth you He Who is the All-Knowing. If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 342-343).

“In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil. Consider the civilization of the West, how it hath agitated and alarmed the peoples of the world” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 69).

119. “It is incumbent upon them who are in authority to exercise moderation in all things. Whatsoever patheth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favorably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 216).

“Overstep not the bounds of moderation, and deal justly with them that serve thee. . . . Deal with them with undeviating justice, so that none among them may suffer want, or be pampered with luxuries. This is but manifest justice” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 235).

Economic Reorganization

120. “There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor its founders be considered as having been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists of the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Bahá’u’lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá’í economists in establishing such institutions which will adjust the economic relationships of the world” (Shoghi Effendi *Bahá’í News*, 2).

“Economic questions will not attract hearts. The love of God alone will attract them. Economic questions are most interesting; but the power which moves, controls and attracts the hearts of men is the love of God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 239).

121. “Bahá’u’lláh set forth principles of guidance and teaching for economic readjustment. Regulations were revealed by Him which ensure the welfare of the commonwealth. As the rich man enjoys his life surrounded by ease and luxuries, so the poor man must, likewise, have a home and be provided with sustenance and comforts commensurate with his needs. This readjustment of the social economy is of the greatest importance inasmuch as it ensures the stability of the world of humanity; and until it is effected, happiness and prosperity are impossible” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 181-182).

122. “The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit. This is fully explained in the Bahá’í teachings, and without knowledge of its principles no improvement in the economic state can be realized. The Bahá’ís will bring about this improvement and betterment but not through sedition and appeal to physical force — not through warfare, but welfare. Hearts must be so cemented together, love must become so dominant that the rich shall most willingly extend assistance to the

poor and take steps to establish these economic adjustments permanently. If it is accomplished in this way, it will be most praiseworthy because then it will be for the sake of God and in the pathway of His service” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 238-239).

“To state the matter briefly, the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh advocate voluntary sharing, and this is a greater thing than the equalization of wealth. For equalization must be imposed from without, while sharing is a matter of free choice.

“Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because of the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one’s substance, leadeth to society’s comfort and peace. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honour upon humankind” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 115).

“And among the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh is voluntary sharing of one’s property with others among mankind. This voluntary sharing is greater than equality, and consists in this, that man should not prefer himself to others, but rather should sacrifice his life and property for others. But this should not be introduced by coercion so that it becomes a law and man is compelled to follow it. Nay, rather, man should voluntarily and of his own choice sacrifice his property and life for others, and spend willingly for the poor, just as is done in Persia among the Bahá’ís” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 302).

123. “Indeed, in an important sense, progress in this area will itself be a measure of the success of any development program. Given the vital role of economic activity in the advancement of civilization, visible evidence of the pace at which development is progressing will be the extent to which women gain access to all avenues of economic endeavor. The challenge goes beyond ensuring an equitable

distribution of opportunity, important as that is. It calls for a fundamental rethinking of economic issues in a manner that will invite the full participation of a range of human experience and insight hitherto largely excluded from the discourse. The classical economic models of impersonal markets in which human beings act as autonomous makers of self-regarding choices will not serve the needs of a world motivated by ideals of unity and justice. Society will find itself increasingly challenged to develop new economic models shaped by insights that arise from a sympathetic understanding of shared experience, from viewing human beings in relation to others, and from a recognition of the centrality to social well-being of the role of the family and the community. Such an intellectual breakthrough — strongly altruistic rather than self-centered in focus — must draw heavily on both the spiritual and scientific sensibilities of the race, and millennia of experience have prepared women to make crucial contributions to the common effort” (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*).

Transformed Development and Environmental Stewardship

124. “Each one of the ordinances We have revealed is a mighty stronghold for the preservation of the world of being” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 69).

“We need a change of heart, a reframing of all our conceptions and a new orientation of our activities. The inward life of man as well as his outward environment have to be reshaped if human salvation is to be secured” (Shoghi Effendi, in Research Department *Conservation*, 15).

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

represent an influence which can by itself establish in the consciousness of people a new system of values. Only a breakthrough in understanding that is scientific and spiritual in the fullest sense of the terms will empower the human race to assume the trusteeship toward which history impels it” (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*).

125. “[I]t is essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal, and that ye be even kinder to him than to your fellow-man. . . .

“[T]o blessed animals the utmost kindness must be shown, the more the better” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 158-159).

“Regarding the eating of animal flesh and abstinence therefrom. . . [man] is not in need of meat, nor is he obliged to eat it. . . . Truly, the killing of animals and the eating of their meat is somewhat contrary to pity and compassion, and if one can content oneself with cereals, fruit, oil and nuts . . . , it would undoubtedly be better and more pleasing” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Research Department *Conservation*, 11).

“As humanity progresses, meat will be used less and less, for the teeth of man are not carnivorous. For example, the lion is endowed with carnivorous teeth, which are intended for meat, and if meat be not found, the lion starves. The lion cannot graze; its teeth are of different shape. The digestive system of the lion is such that it cannot receive nourishment save through meat. The eagle has a crooked beak, the lower part shorter than the upper. It cannot pick up grain; it cannot graze; therefore, it is compelled to partake of meat. The domestic animals have herbivorous teeth formed to cut grass, which is their fodder. The human teeth, the molars, are formed to grind grain. The front teeth, the incisors, are for fruits, etc. It is, therefore, quite apparent according to the implements for eating that man’s food is intended to be grain and not meat. When mankind is more fully developed, the eating of meat will gradually cease” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 170-171).

126. “The Lord of all mankind hath fashioned this human realm to be a Garden of Eden, an earthly paradise. If, as it must, it findeth the way to harmony and peace, to love and mutual trust, it will become a true abode of bliss, a place of manifold blessings and unending delights. Therein shall be revealed the excellence of humankind, therein shall the rays of the Sun of Truth shine forth on every hand” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 275).

127. “Recognition that creation is an organic whole and that humanity has the responsibility to care for this whole, welcome as it is, does not represent an influence which can by itself establish in the consciousness of people a new system of values. Only a breakthrough in understanding that is scientific and spiritual in the fullest sense of the terms will empower the human race to assume the trusteeship toward which history impels it” (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*).

128. Shoghi Effendi links the preservation and reclamation of the earth’s resources with both the “protection [of the] physical world and [the] heritage [of] future generations [which] constitutes yet another force working for peace and brotherhood” (Research Department *Conservation*, 14).

Relative to economic and social development, the Universal House of Justice underlines the importance of “agriculture and the preservation of the ecological balance of the world” (Universal House of Justice, in Research Department *Conservation*, 13).

“[A]ssisting in endeavours to conserve the environment in ways which blend with the rhythm of life of our community must assume more importance in Bahá’í activities” (Universal House of Justice, in Research Department *Conservation*, iv).

“[M]ankind has a profound responsibility to protect the natural environment and preserve its ecological balance” (Universal House of Justice *The Six Year Plan, Summary of Achievements*, 75).

129. “Strange and astonishing things exist in the earth but they are hidden from the minds and the understandings of men. These things are capable of changing the whole atmosphere of the earth and their contamination would prove lethal” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 69).

“[T]he proper exercise of this responsibility is the key to whether his inventive genius produces beneficial results, or creates havoc in the material world” (Universal House of Justice, in Research Department *Conservation*, 2).

130. “The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 217).

Balanced Material and Spiritual Development

131. “The oneness of mankind . . . implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 602).

132. “He Who is the Eternal Truth — exalted by His glory — hath made the fulfillment of every undertaking on earth dependent on material means” (Bahá’u’lláh, in Research Department *Huqúqu’lláh*, 12)

133. “Progress is the expression of spirit in the world of matter” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 90).

134. “No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness of mankind. Only when material and spiritual civilization are linked and coordinated will happiness be assured. Then material civilization will not contribute its energies to the forces of evil in destroying the oneness of humanity, for in material civilization good and evil advance together and maintain the same pace. For example, consider the material progress of man in the last decade. Schools and colleges, hospitals, philanthropic institutions, scientific academics and temples of philosophy have been founded, but hand in hand with these

evidences of development, the invention and production of means and weapons for human destruction have correspondingly increased. . . .

“All this is the outcome of material civilization; therefore, although material advancement furthers good purposes in life, at the same time it serves evil ends. The divine civilization is good because it cultivates morals. Consider what the Prophets of God have contributed to human morality. Jesus Christ summoned all to the Most Great Peace through the acquisition of pure morals. If the moral precepts and foundations of divine civilization become united with the material advancement of man, there is no doubt that the happiness of the human world will be attained and that from every direction the glad tidings of peace upon earth will be announced. Then humankind will achieve extraordinary progress, the sphere of human intelligence will be immeasurably enlarged, wonderful inventions will appear, and the spirit of God will reveal itself; all men will consort in joy and fragrance, and eternal life will be conferred upon the children of the Kingdom. Then will the power of the divine make itself effective and the breath of the Holy Spirit penetrate the essence of all things. Therefore, the material and the divine, or merciful, civilizations must progress together until the highest aspirations and desires of humanity shall become realized” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 109-110).

“Two calls to success and prosperity are being raised from the heights of the happiness of mankind, awakening the slumbering, granting sight to the blind, causing the heedless to become mindful, bestowing hearing upon the deaf, unloosing the tongue of the mute and resuscitating the dead.

“The one is the call of civilization, of the progress of the material world. This pertaineth to the world of phenomena, promoteth the principles of material achievement, and is the trainer for the physical accomplishments of mankind. It compriseth the laws, regulations, arts and sciences through which the world of humanity hath developed; laws and regulations which are the outcome of lofty ideals and the result of sound minds, and which have stepped forth into the arena of existence through the efforts of the wise and cultured in past and

subsequent ages. The propagator and executive power of this call is just government.

“The other is the soul-stirring call of God, Whose spiritual teachings are safeguards of the everlasting glory, the eternal happiness and illumination of the world of humanity, and cause attributes of mercy to be revealed in the human world and the life beyond.

“This second call is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God.

“However, until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For although, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, which exquisitely manifests its intended aims, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions are imminent.

“Consequently, when thou lookest at the orderly pattern of kingdoms, cities and villages, with the attractiveness of their adornments, the freshness of their natural resources, the refinement of their appliances, the ease of their means of travel, the extent of knowledge available about the world of nature, the great inventions, the colossal enterprises, the noble discoveries and scientific researches, thou wouldst conclude that civilization conduceth to the happiness and the progress of the human world. Yet shouldst thou turn thine eye to the discovery of destructive and infernal machines, to the development of forces of demolition and the invention of fiery implements, which uproot the tree of life, it would become evident and manifest unto thee that civilization is conjoined with barbarism. Progress and barbarism go hand in hand, unless material civilization be confirmed by Divine Guidance, by the revelations of the All-Merciful and by godly virtues, and be reinforced by spiritual conduct, by the

ideals of the Kingdom and by the outpourings of the Realm of Might.

“Consider now, that the most advanced and civilized countries of the world have been turned into arsenals of explosives, that the continents of the globe have been transformed into huge camps and battlefields, that the peoples of the world have formed themselves into armed nations, and that the governments of the world are vying with each other as to who will first step into the field of carnage and bloodshed, thus subjecting mankind to the utmost degree of affliction. Therefore, this civilization and material progress should be combined with the Most Great Guidance so that this nether world may become the scene of the appearance of the bestowals of the Kingdom, and physical achievements may be conjoined with the effulgences of the Merciful. This in order that the beauty and perfection of the world of man may be unveiled and be manifested before all in the utmost grace and splendour. Thus everlasting glory and happiness shall be revealed.

“Praise be to God, throughout succeeding centuries and ages the call of civilization hath been raised, the world of humanity hath been advancing and progressing day by day, various countries have been developing by leaps and bounds, and material improvements have increased, until the world of existence obtained universal capacity to receive the spiritual teachings and to hearken to the Divine Call. The suckling babe passeth through various physical stages, growing and developing at every stage, until its body reacheth the age of maturity. Having arrived at this stage it acquireth the capacity to manifest spiritual and intellectual perfections. The lights of comprehension, intelligence and knowledge become perceptible in it and the powers of its soul unfold. Similarly, in the contingent world, the human species hath undergone progressive physical changes and, by a slow process, hath scaled the ladder of civilization, realizing in itself the wonders, excellencies and gifts of humanity in their most glorious form, until it gained the capacity to express the splendours of spiritual perfections and divine ideals and became capable of hearkening to the call of God. Then at last the call of the Kingdom was raised, the spiritual virtues

and perfections were revealed, the Sun of Reality dawned, and the teachings of the Most Great Peace, of the oneness of the world of humanity and of the universality of men, were promoted. We hope that the effulgence of these rays shall become more and more intense, and the ideal virtues more resplendent, so that the goal of this universal human process will be attained and the love of God will appear in the utmost grace and beauty and bedazzle all hearts.

“O ye beloved of God! Know ye, verily, that the happiness of mankind lieth in the unity and the harmony of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity among all men” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 283-286).

135. “Material civilisation is likened to the body, whereas divine civilization is the spirit of that body. A body not manifesting the spirit is dead; a fruitless tree is worthless” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 104).

136. “Material development may be likened to the glass of a lamp, whereas divine virtues and spiritual susceptibilities are the light within the glass. The lamp chimney is worthless without the light; likewise, man in his material condition requires the radiance and vivification of the divine graces and merciful attributes” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 288).

“Material civilization is like unto the lamp, while spiritual civilization is the light in that lamp. If the material and spiritual civilization become united, then we will have the light and the lamp together, and the outcome will be perfect. For material civilization is like unto a beautiful body, and spiritual civilization is like unto the spirit of life. If that wondrous spirit of life enters this beautiful body, the body will become a channel for the distribution and development of the perfections of humanity” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 11).

137. “Man has two powers; and his development, two aspects. One power is connected with the material world, and by it he is capable of material advancement. The other power is spiritual, and through its development his inner, potential nature is awakened. These powers

are like two wings. Both must be developed, for flight is impossible with one wing. Praise be to God! Material advancement has been evident in the world, but there is need of spiritual advancement in like proportion. We must strive unceasingly and without rest to accomplish the development of the spiritual nature in man, and endeavor with tireless energy to advance humanity toward the nobility of its true and intended station. For the body of man is accidental; it is of no importance. The time of its disintegration will inevitably come. But the spirit of man is essential and, therefore, eternal. It is a divine bounty. It is the effulgence of the Sun of Reality and, therefore, of greater importance than the physical body” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 59-60).

Spiritual Characteristics of the New World Order

Transformed Individuals: The Development of Spiritual Character and a New Way of Life

138. “This challenge, so severe and insistent, and yet so glorious, faces no doubt primarily the individual believer on whom, in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire community. He it is who constitutes the warp and woof on which the quality and pattern of the whole fabric must depend. He it is who acts as one of the countless links in the mighty chain that now girdles the globe. He it is who serves as one of the multitude of bricks which support the structure and insure the stability of the administrative edifice now being raised in every part of the world. Without his support, at once whole-hearted, continuous and generous, every measure adopted, and every plan formulated, by the body which acts as the national representative of the community to which he belongs, is foredoomed to failure. The World Center of the Faith itself is paralyzed if such a support on the part of the rank and file of the community is denied it. The Author of the Divine Plan Himself is impeded in His purpose if the proper instruments for the execution of His design are lacking. The sustaining strength of Bahá’u’lláh Himself, the Founder of the Faith, will be withheld from every and

each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part” (Shoghi Effendi *Citadel of Faith*, 130-131).

139. “We must therefore rise to serve the members of the human race and educate first the individuals, so that the nations, which are composed of individuals, and the governments, which belong to those nations, may both be converted and guided, and that through this agency the unity of mankind may be established and its prosperity and success realized” (Shoghi Effendi, in Office of Social and Economic Development *Social and Economic Development*, 25).

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

141. “No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God “has endowed each humble being with ability and talent

. . . “ (Universal House of Justice *Wellspring of Guidance*, 39).

142. “all, irrespective of circumstances or resources, are endowed with the capacity to respond in some measure [to the call from the Universal House of Justice to initiate development activities]; all can share; all can participate in the joint enterprise of applying more systematically the principles of the Faith to upraising the quality of human life” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 603).

“Ultimately, the call to action is addressed to the individual friends, whether they be adult or youth, veteran or newly enrolled” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 604).

143. “‘Regard the world as the human body,’ wrote Bahá’u’lláh to Queen Victoria. We can surely regard the Bahá’í world, the army of God, in the same way. In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God “has endowed each humble being with ability and talent,” and is supremely true of the body of the Bahá’í world community, for this body is already an organism, united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source, and illumined with the conscious knowledge of its unity. Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed, and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us. . . .The Bahá’í World Community, growing like a healthy new body, develops new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity, when every soul, living for the Cause of God, will receive from that Cause, health, assurance, and the overflowing bounties of Bahá’u’lláh which are diffused through His divinely ordained Order” (Universal House of Justice *Wellspring*, 37-38).

144. “The first, the fundamental purpose underlying creation hath ever

been, and will continue to be, none other than the appearance of trustworthiness and godliness, of sincerity and goodwill amongst mankind, for these qualities are the cause of peace, security and tranquility” (Bahá’u’lláh, in Research Department *Trustworthiness*, 2)

“And yet, is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God’s universal Manifestation would be apparent” (Bahá’u’lláh *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, 240).

145. “The aim of the prophet of God is to raise man to the degree of knowledge of his potentiality and to illumine him through the light of the kingdom, to transform ignorance into wisdom, injustice into justice, error into knowledge, cruelty into affection and incapability into progress. In short, to make all the attainments of existence resplendent in him” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Divine Plan*, 110).

146. “The whole purpose of Bahá’u’lláh is that we should become a new kind of people, people who are upright, kind, intelligent, truthful, and honest and who live according to His great laws laid down for this new epoch in man’s development. To call ourselves Bahá’ís is not enough, our inmost being must become ennobled and enlightened through living a Bahá’í life” (Shoghi Effendi, in *Universal House of Justice Living the Life*, 21).

147. “Be united in counsel be one in thought. Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday. Man’s merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches. Take heed that your words be purged from idle fancies and worldly desires and your deeds be cleansed from craftiness and suspicion. Dissipate not the wealth of your precious lives in the pursuit of evil and corrupt affection, nor let your endeavors be spent in promoting your personal interest. Be generous in your days of plenty, and be patient in the hour of loss. Adversity is followed by success and rejoicings follow woe. Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto

that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low. Beware lest ye sow tares of dissension among men or plant thorns of doubt in pure and radiant hearts” (Bahá’u’lláh, in *Universal House of Justice Prosperity*).

148. “Then it is clear that the honor and exaltation of man must be something more than material riches. Material comforts are only a branch, but the root of the exaltation of man is the good attributes and virtues which are the adornments of his reality. These are the divine appearances, the heavenly bounties, the sublime emotions, the love and knowledge of God; universal wisdom, intellectual perception, scientific discoveries, justice, equity, truthfulness, benevolence, natural courage and innate fortitude; the respect for rights and the keeping of agreements and covenants; rectitude in all circumstances; serving the truth under all conditions; the sacrifice of one’s life for the good of all people; kindness and esteem for all nations; obedience to the teachings of God; service in the Divine Kingdom; the guidance of the people, and the education of the nations and races. This is the prosperity of the human world! This is the exaltation of man in the world! This is eternal life and heavenly honor! (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Questions*, 79-80).

“Humility exalteth man to the heaven of glory and power, whilst pride abaseth him to the depths of wretchedness and degradation” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 64).

149. “[M]an’s supreme honor and real happiness lie in self-respect, in high resolves and noble purposes, in integrity and moral quality, in immaculacy of mind” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Secret*, 19).

Strong, Growing Communities

150. “[T]hrough the restoring waters of pure intention and unselfish effort, the earth of human potentialities will blossom with its own latent excellence” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Secret*, 4).

151. “The Purpose of the one true God, exalted be His glory, in

revealing Himself unto men is to lay bare those gems that lie hidden within the mine of their true and inmost selves” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 287).

152. “The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá’í community itself, with the friends endeavouring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. . . .In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 602).

“We go forward confident that the wholehearted involvement of the friends in these activities will ensure a deeper consolidation of the community at all levels” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 603).

153. “A Bahá’í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike” (Universal House of Justice in a letter to a National Spiritual Assembly in May 1984, in Office of Social and Economic Development, 34).

154. “This challenge [to initiate development activities] evokes the resourcefulness, flexibility and cohesiveness of the many communities composing the Bahá’í world” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 603).

“There are two principles which the House of Justice feels are fundamental to the generality of such projects of social and economic development, although, of course, there will be exceptions. The first is that they must be built on a substructure of existing, sufficiently strong

local Bahá'í communities. The second is that the long-term conduct of the project should aim at self-sufficiency and not be dependent upon continuing financial support from outside.

“The first principle implies that the projects of social and economic development now to be undertaken are a natural stage of the growth of the Bahá'í community and are needed by the community itself although they will, of course, benefit a much wider segment of society. The Bahá'í world is in no position financially or from the point of view of manpower, to launch undertakings for the economic and social development of populations in areas where there are but few believers. The greatest need of all peoples is for the Faith itself, so that they may know the destiny towards which they as individuals and as members of society must strive, and will learn from the teachings those virtues and methods which will enable them to work together in harmony, forbearance and trustworthiness.

“The second principle must take into account that any project started by the Cause should be designed to grow soundly and steadily, and not to collapse from attrition. In other words, external assistance and funds, Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í, may be used for capital acquisitions, to make surveys, to initiate activities, to bring in expertise, but the aim should be for each project to be able to continue and to develop on the strength of local Bahá'í labor, funds and enthusiasm even if all external aid should be cut off” (Universal House of Justice in a letter written on its behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, May 8, 1984, in Office of Social and Economic Development, 44-45).

155. “The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth. The indispensability of this coherence is unmistakably illustrated in His ordination of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, the spiritual centre of every Bahá'í community round which must flourish dependencies dedicated to the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific advancement of mankind” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 602).

156. "But however inspiring the conception of Bahá'í worship, as witnessed in the central Edifice of this exalted Temple, it cannot be regarded as the sole, nor even the essential, factor in the part which the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, as designed by Bahá'u'lláh, is destined to play in the organic life of the Bahá'í community. Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits centering around the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, Bahá'í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervor, can never hope to achieve beyond the meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshiper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshiper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote. Nor will the exertions, no matter how disinterested and strenuous, of those who within the precincts of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will be engaged in administering the affairs of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth, fructify and prosper unless they are brought into close and daily communion with those spiritual agencies centering in and radiating from the central Shrine of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Nothing short of direct and constant interaction between the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship centering in the heart of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, and the energies consciously displayed by those who administer its affairs in their service to humanity can possibly provide the necessary agency capable of removing the ills that have so long and so grievously afflicted humanity. For it is assuredly upon the consciousness of the efficacy of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, reinforced on one hand by spiritual communion with His Spirit, and on the other by the intelligent application and the faithful execution of the principles and laws He revealed, that the salvation of a world in travail must ultimately depend. And of all the institutions that stand associated with His Holy Name, surely none save the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can most adequately provide the essentials of Bahá'í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the

world. Therein lies the secret of the loftiness, of the potency, of the unique position of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Bahá'u'lláh" (Shoghi Effendi *Bahá'í Administration*, 185-186).

"A symbol of this process may be seen in the House of Worship and its dependencies. The first part to be built is the central edifice which is the spiritual heart of the community. Then, gradually, as the outward expression of this spiritual heart, the various dependencies, those 'institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant' are erected and function. This process begins in an embryonic way long before a Bahá'í community reaches the stage of building its own Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, for even the first local center that a Bahá'í community erects can begin to serve not only as the spiritual and administrative center and gathering place of the community, but also as the site of a tutorial school and the heart of other aspects of community life. The principle remains, however, that the spiritual precedes the material. First comes the illumination of hearts and minds by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and then the grass roots stirring of the believers wishing to apply these teachings to the daily life of their community. Such stirrings can be fostered, encouraged and assisted by the national and continental institutions of the Faith, but without them any activities introduced from above might well prove abortive" (Universal House of Justice in a letter written on its behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, May 8, 1984, in Office of Social and Economic Development, 9-10).

Spiritualized Institutions and Organizations

157. "The institutions of society will succeed in eliciting and directing the potentialities latent in the consciousness of the world's peoples to the extent that the exercise of authority is governed by principles that are in harmony with the evolving interests of a rapidly maturing human race. Such principles include the obligation of those in

authority to win the confidence, respect, and genuine support of those whose actions they seek to govern; to consult openly and to the fullest extent possible with all whose interests are affected by decisions being arrived at; to assess in an objective manner both the real needs and the aspirations of the communities they serve; to benefit from scientific and moral advancement in order to make appropriate use of the community's resources, including the energies of its members. No single principle of effective authority is so important as giving priority to building and maintaining unity among the members of a society and the members of its administrative institutions. Reference has already been made to the intimately associated issue of commitment to the search for justice in all matters" (Universal House of Justice *Prosperity*).

158. "These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in Shoghi Effendi *God Passes By*, 332).

159. "The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This Cause is a Cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do this is to reform the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual" (Shoghi Effendi, in Universal House of Justice *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, 28).

160. "[The Administration] is the ideal instrument to make spiritual laws function properly in the material affairs of the world" (Shoghi Effendi, in Hornby, 1).

161. "It is with that self-same Order that the Founder of the promised Revelation, twenty years later — incorporating that same term in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas — identified the System envisaged in that Book, affirming that 'this most great Order' had deranged the world's

equilibrium, and revolutionized mankind's ordered life. It is the features of that self-same Order which, at a later stage in the evolution of the Faith, the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and the appointed Interpreter of His teachings, delineated through the provisions of His Will and Testament. It is the structural basis of that self-same Order which, in the Formative Age of that same Faith, the stewards of that same Covenant, the elected representatives of the world-wide Bahá'í community, are now laboriously and unitedly establishing. It is the superstructure of that self-same Order, attaining its full stature through the emergence of the Bahá'í World Commonwealth — the Kingdom of God on earth — which the Golden Age of that same Dispensation must, in the fullness of time, ultimately witness" (Shoghi Effendi *God Passes By*, 25-26).

"The onrushing forces so miraculously released through the agency of two independent and swiftly successive Manifestations are now under our very eyes and through the care of the chosen stewards of a far-flung Faith being gradually mustered and disciplined. They are slowly crystallizing into institutions that will come to be regarded as the hall-mark and glory of the age we are called upon to establish and by our deeds immortalize. For upon our present-day efforts, and above all upon the extent to which we strive to remodel our lives after the pattern of sublime heroism associated with those gone before us, must depend the efficacy of the instruments we now fashion — instruments that must erect the structure of that blissful Commonwealth which must signalize the Golden Age of our Faith" (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 98).

"The Administrative Order, which ever since 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension has evolved and is taking shape under our very eyes in no fewer than forty countries of the world, may be considered as the framework of the Will itself, the inviolable stronghold wherein this new-born child is being nurtured and developed. This Administrative Order, as it expands and consolidates itself, will no doubt manifest the potentialities and reveal the full implications of this momentous

document — this most remarkable expression of the Will of One of the most remarkable Figures of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. It will, as its component parts, its organic institutions, begin to function with efficiency and vigor, assert its claim and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind.

“It should be noted in this connection that this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism. Nowhere in the sacred scriptures of any of the world's religious systems, nor even in the writings of the Inaugurator of the Bábi Dispensation, do we find any provisions establishing a covenant or providing for an administrative order that can compare in scope and authority with those that lie at the very basis of the Bahá'í Dispensation. Has either Christianity or Islam, to take as an instance two of the most widely diffused and outstanding among the world's recognized religions, anything to offer that can measure with, or be regarded as equivalent to, either the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant or to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Does the text of either the Gospel or the Qur'án confer sufficient authority upon those leaders and councils that have claimed the right and assumed the function of interpreting the provisions of their sacred scriptures and of administering the affairs of their respective communities? Could Peter, the admitted chief of the Apostles, or the Imam Ali, the cousin and legitimate successor of the Prophet, produce in support of the primacy with which both had been invested written and explicit affirmations from Christ and Muhammad that could have silenced those who either among their contemporaries or in a later age have repudiated their authority and, by their action, precipitated the schisms that persist until the present day? Where, we

may confidently ask, in the recorded sayings of Jesus Christ, whether in the matter of succession or in the provision of a set of specific laws and clearly defined administrative ordinances, as distinguished from purely spiritual principles, can we find anything approaching the detailed injunctions, laws and warnings that abound in the authenticated utterances of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Can any passage of the Qur'ān, which in respect to its legal code, its administrative and devotional ordinances marks already a notable advance over previous and more corrupted Revelations, be construed as placing upon an unassailable basis the undoubted authority with which Muhammad had, verbally and on several occasions, invested His successor? Can the Author of the Bábi Dispensation however much He may have succeeded through the provisions of the Persian Bayan in averting a schism as permanent and catastrophic as those that afflicted Christianity and Islam — can He be said to have produced instruments for the safeguarding of His Faith as definite and efficacious as those which must for all time preserve the unity of the organized followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh?

“Alone of all the Revelations gone before it this Faith has, through the explicit directions, the repeated warnings, the authenticated safeguards incorporated and elaborated in its teachings, succeeded in raising a structure which the bewildered followers of bankrupt and broken creeds might well approach and critically examine, and seek, ere it is too late, the invulnerable security of its world-embracing shelter” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 144-146).

“In addition to these He, as well as 'Abdu'l-Bahá after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 19).

162. “Conscious of their high calling, confident in the society-building

power which their Faith possesses, they press forward, undeterred and undismayed, in their efforts to fashion and perfect the necessary instruments wherein the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh can mature and develop. It is this building process, slow and unobtrusive, to which the life of the world-wide Bahá'í Community is wholly consecrated, that constitutes the one hope of a stricken society. For this process is actuated by the generating influence of God's changeless Purpose, and is evolving within the framework of the Administrative Order of His Faith" (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 195).

163. "A word should now be said regarding the theory on which this Administrative Order is based and the principle that must govern the operation of its chief institutions. 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. Such an attempt would in itself betray a lack of complete appreciation of the excellence of the handiwork of its great Author. How could it be otherwise when we remember that this Order constitutes the very pattern of that divine civilization which the almighty Law of Bahá'u'lláh is designed to establish upon earth? The divers and ever-shifting 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.

"The Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast Administrative Order is the sole framework, is, both in theory and practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world's recognized religious systems. No form of democratic government; no system of autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or republican; no intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order; nor even any of the recognized types of theocracy, whether it be the Hebrew Commonwealth, or the various Christian ecclesiastical organizations, or the Imamate or the Caliphate in Islam — none of these can be identified or be said to conform with the Administrative Order which

the master-hand of its perfect Architect has fashioned.

“This new-born Administrative Order incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.

“The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh must in no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character inasmuch as the basic assumption which requires all democracies to depend fundamentally upon getting their mandate from the people is altogether lacking in this Dispensation. In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the members of the Universal House of Justice, it should be borne in mind, are not, as Bahá'u'lláh's utterances clearly imply, responsible to those whom they represent, nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly elect them. They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision. ‘God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth,’ is Bahá'u'lláh's incontrovertible assurance. They, and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation. Moreover, he who symbolizes the hereditary principle in this Dispensation has been made the interpreter of the words of its Author, and ceases consequently, by virtue of the actual authority vested in him, to be the figurehead

invariably associated with the prevailing systems of constitutional monarchies.

“Nor can the Bahá’í Administrative Order be dismissed as a hard and rigid system of unmitigated autocracy or as an idle imitation of any form of absolutistic ecclesiastical government, whether it be the Papacy, the Imamate or any other similar institution, for the obvious reason that upon the international elected representatives of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá’í writings. Neither the Guardian of the Faith nor any institution apart from the International House of Justice can ever usurp this vital and essential power or encroach upon that sacred right. The abolition of professional priesthood with its accompanying sacraments of baptism, of communion and of confession of sins, the laws requiring the election by universal suffrage of all local, national, and international Houses of Justice, the total absence of episcopal authority with its attendant privileges, corruptions and bureaucratic tendencies, are further evidences of the non-autocratic character of the Bahá’í Administrative Order and of its inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs.

“Nor is this Order identified with the name of Bahá’u’lláh to be confused with any system of purely aristocratic government in view of the fact that it upholds, on the one hand, the hereditary principle and entrusts the Guardian of the Faith with the obligation of interpreting its teachings, and provides, on the other, for the free and direct election from among the mass of the faithful of the body that constitutes its highest legislative organ.

“Whereas this Administrative Order cannot be said to have been modeled after any of these recognized systems of government, it nevertheless embodies, reconciles and assimilates within its framework such wholesome elements as are to be found in each one of them. The hereditary authority which the Guardian is called upon to exercise, the vital and essential functions which the Universal House of Justice discharges, the specific provisions requiring its democratic election by the representatives of the faithful — these combine to demonstrate the

truth that this divinely revealed Order, which can never be identified with any of the standard types of government referred to by Aristotle in his works, embodies and blends with the spiritual verities on which it is based the beneficent elements which are to be found in each one of them. The admitted evils inherent in each of these systems being rigidly and permanently excluded, this unique Order, however long it may endure and however extensive its ramifications, cannot ever degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagoguery which must sooner or later corrupt the machinery of all man-made and essentially defective political institutions” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 152-154).

The Essence of the New World Order: The Recognition and Internalization of Unity in Diversity

164. The Bahá'í Faith “repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 42).

165. “Bahá'u'lláh also taught that prejudices — whether religious, racial, patriotic or political — are destructive to the foundations of human development. Prejudices of any kind are the destroyers of human happiness and welfare. Until they are dispelled, the advancement of the world of humanity is not possible; yet racial, religious and national biases are observed everywhere (‘Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 181).

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

(Universal House of Justice *The Promise of World Peace*).

167. “But there is need of a superior power to overcome human prejudices, a power which nothing in the world of mankind can withstand and which will overshadow the effect of all other forces at work in human conditions. That irresistible power is the love of God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 68).

168. “Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind — the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh revolve — is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds — creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world — a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.

“It represents the consummation of human evolution — an

evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations.

“The principle of the Oneness of Mankind, as proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh, carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 42-43).

169. “It is certain that the greatest of instrumentalities for achieving the advancement and the glory of man, the supreme agency for the enlightenment and the redemption of the world, is love and fellowship and unity among all the members of the human race. Nothing can be effected in the world, not even conceivably, without unity and agreement, and the perfect means for engendering fellowship and union is true religion” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Secret*, 73).

170. “The key to success is unity in spirit and in action” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 603).

171. “It is to unity that the Guardian has been continually calling the friends. For where a united will exists, nothing can effectively oppose and hamper the forces of constructive development” (Shoghi Effendi, in Universal House of Justice *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, 16).

172. “Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day. And if we widen out the sphere of unity a little to include the inhabitants of a village who seek to be loving and united, who associate with and are kind to one another, what great advances they will be seen to make, how secure and protected they will be. Then let

us widen out the sphere a little more, let us take the inhabitants of a city, all of them together: if they establish the strongest bonds of unity among themselves, how far they will progress, even in a brief period and what power they will exert. And if the sphere of unity be still further widened out, that is, if the inhabitants of a whole country develop peaceable hearts, and if with all their hearts and souls they yearn to cooperate with one another and to live in unity, and if they become kind and loving to one another, that country will achieve undying joy and lasting glory. Peace will it have, and plenty, and vast wealth.

“Note then: if every clan, tribe, community, every nation, country, territory on earth should come together under the single-hued pavilion of the oneness of mankind, and by the dazzling rays of the Sun of Truth should proclaim the universality of man; if they should cause all nations and all creeds to open wide their arms to one another, establish a World Council, and proceed to bind the members of society one to another by strong mutual ties, what would happen then? There is no doubt whatsoever that the divine Beloved, in all His endearing beauty, and with Him a massive host of heavenly confirmations and human blessings and bestowals, would appear in His full glory before the assemblage of the world” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 279-280).

173. “The unity which is productive of unlimited results is first a unity of mankind which recognizes that all are sheltered beneath the overshadowing glory of the All-Glorious, that all are servants of one God; for all breathe the same atmosphere, live upon the same earth, move beneath the same heavens, receive effulgence from the same sun and are under the protection of one God. This is the most great unity, and its results are lasting if humanity adheres to it; but mankind has hitherto violated it, adhering to sectarian or other limited unities such as racial, patriotic or unity of self-interests; therefore, no great results have been forthcoming. Nevertheless, it is certain that the radiance and favors of God are encompassing, minds have developed, perceptions have become acute, sciences and arts are widespread, and capacity exists for the proclamation and promulgation of the real and ultimate unity of mankind, which will bring forth marvelous results. It

will reconcile all religions, make warring nations loving, cause hostile kings to become friendly and bring peace and happiness to the human world. It will cement together the Orient and Occident, remove forever the foundations of war and upraise the ensign of the Most Great Peace. These limited unities are, therefore, signs of that great unity which will make all the human family one by being productive of the attractions of conscience in mankind” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 191).

“The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 286).

“O ye beloved of God! Know ye, verily, that the happiness of mankind lieth in the unity and the harmony of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity among all men” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 286).

“It is to unity that the Guardian has been continually calling the friends. For where a united will exists, nothing can effectively oppose and hamper forces of constructive development” (Shoghi Effendi *Directives*, 5).

174. “[T]he object of life to a Bahá’í is to promote the oneness of mankind. The whole object of our lives is bound up with the lives of all human beings; not a personal salvation we are seeking, but a universal one. . . . Our aim is to produce a world civilization which will in turn react on the character of the individual. It is, in a way, the inverse of Christianity, which started with the individual unit and through it reached out to the conglomerate of men” (Shoghi Effendi in Hatcher 1982, 29).

The ‘Process’: Spiritually-Inspired Resource Development in the Bahá’í Faith

The 'Process' of Bahá'í Resource Development is Spiritual Development

175. "Until such time as the nations of the world understand and follow the admonitions of Bahá'u'lláh to whole-heartedly work together in looking after the best interests of all humankind, and unite in the search for ways and means to meet the many environmental problems besetting our planet, the House of Justice feels that little progress will be made towards their solution. . . ." (Universal House of Justice, in Research Department *Conservation*, 16).

176. "But in our concern for such immediate obvious calls upon our succor we must not allow ourselves to forget the continuing, appalling burden of suffering under which millions of human beings are always groaning — a burden which they have borne for century upon century and which it is the mission of Bahá'u'lláh to lift at last. The principal cause of this suffering, which one can witness wherever one turns, is the corruption of human morals and the prevalence of prejudice, suspicion, hatred, untrustworthiness, selfishness and tyranny among men. It is not merely material well-being that people need. What they desperately need is to know how to live their lives — they need to know who they are, to what purpose they exist, and how they should act towards one another; and, once they know the answers to these questions they need to be helped to gradually apply these answers to everyday behavior. It is to the solution of this basic problem of mankind that the greater part of all our energy and resources should be directed. There are mighty agencies in this world, governments, foundations, institutions of many kinds with tremendous financial resources which are working to improve the material lot of human beings. Anything we Bahá'ís could add to such resources in the way of special funds or contributions would be a negligible drop in the ocean. However, alone among men we have the divinely given remedy for the real ills of mankind; no one else is doing or can do this most important work, and if we divert our energy and our funds into fields in which others are already doing more than we can hope, we shall be delaying the diffusion of the Divine Message which is the most important task

of all.

“Because of such an attitude, and also because of our refusal to become involved in politics, Bahá’ís are often accused of holding aloof from the ‘real problems’ of their fellowmen. But when we hear this accusation let us not forget that those who make it are usually idealistic materialists to whom material good is the only ‘real’ good, whereas we know that the working of the material world is merely a reflection of spiritual conditions and until the spiritual conditions can be changed there can be no lasting change for the better in material affairs” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 283).

177. “[T]he most urgent need of human beings is to recognize the Manifestation of God and thereby to learn how to collaborate constructively. All over the world tremendous efforts are being made to improve the lot of mankind — or of parts of mankind, but most of these efforts are frustrated by the conflicts of aims, by corruption of the morals of those involved, by mistrust, or by fear. There is no lack of material resources in the world if they are properly used. The problem is the education of human beings in the ultimate and most important purpose of life and in how to weld the differences of opinion and outlook into a united constructive effort” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 516).

Religion is the Catalyst of Bahá’í Resource Development

178. “First comes the illumination of hearts and minds by the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, and then the grass roots stirring of the believers wishing to apply these teachings to the daily life of their community. Such stirrings can be fostered, encouraged and assisted by the national and continental institutions of the Faith, but without them any activities introduced from above might well prove abortive” (Universal House of Justice in a letter written on its behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, May 8, 1984, in Office of Social and Economic Development, 9-10).

179. “It is clear that the reality of mankind is diverse, that opinions are various and sentiments different; and this difference of opinions, of thoughts, of intelligence, of sentiments among the human species arises from essential necessity; for the differences in the degrees of existence of creatures is one of the necessities of existence, which unfolds itself in infinite forms. Therefore, we have need of a general power which may dominate the sentiments, the opinions and the thoughts of all, thanks to which these divisions may no longer have effect, and all individuals may be brought under the influence of the unity of the world of humanity. It is clear and evident that this greatest power in the human world is the love of God. It brings the different peoples under the shadow of the tent of affection; it gives to the antagonistic and hostile nations and families the greatest love and union” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Questions*, 300-301).

180. “[I]s not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God’s universal Manifestations would be apparent” (Bahá’u’lláh *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 240-241).

The Manifestations and the Teachings of the Creative Spirit Fuel Spiritual Growth and Unify Humanity

181. “Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instil new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend the truth” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 141).

182. “Can any power withstand the penetrative influence of the Word of God? Nay, by God! The proof is clear and the evidence is complete! If anyone looketh with the eyes of justice he shall be struck with wonder and amazement and will testify that all the peoples, sects and races of the world should be glad, content and grateful for the teachings and admonitions of Bahá’u’lláh. For these divine injunctions

tame every ferocious beast, transform the creeping insect into a soaring bird, cause human souls to become angels of the Kingdom, and make the human world a focus for the qualities of mercy” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 293).

“The vitality of men’s belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it? Is it within human power, O Hakím, to effect in the constituent elements of any of the minute and indivisible particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 200).

183. “There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them” (Universal House of Justice *The Promise of World Peace*).

184. “Wherefore, relate thou the Teachings of the Abhá Beauty to the urgent needs of this present day, and thou wilt see that they provide an instant remedy for the ailing body of the world. Indeed, they are the

elixir that bringeth eternal health” (*Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 59).

185. “Every man of insight will, in this day, readily admit that the counsels which the Pen of this Wronged One hath revealed constitute the supreme animating power for the advancement of the world and the exaltation of its peoples” (*Bahá’u’lláh Tablets*, 86).

186. “Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of science, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth” (*Bahá’u’lláh Tablets*, 96).

187. “That which hath streamed forth from the Most Exalted Pen is conducive to the glory, the advancement and education of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Indeed it is the sovereign remedy for every disease, could they but comprehend and perceive it” (*Bahá’u’lláh Tablets*, 73).

“Two calls to success and prosperity are being raised from the heights of the happiness of mankind, awakening the slumbering, granting sight to the blind, causing the heedless to become mindful, bestowing hearing upon the deaf, unloosing the tongue of the mute and resuscitating the dead.

“The one is the call of civilization, of the progress of the material world. This pertaineth to the world of phenomena, promoteth the principles of material achievement, and is the trainer for the physical accomplishments of mankind. It compriseth the laws, regulations, arts and sciences through which the world of humanity hath developed; laws and regulations which are the outcome of lofty ideals and the result of sound minds, and which have stepped forth into the arena of existence through the efforts of the wise and cultured in past and subsequent ages. The propagator and executive power of this call is just government.

“The other is the soul-stirring call of God, Whose spiritual teachings are safeguards of the everlasting glory, the eternal happiness

and illumination of the world of humanity, and cause attributes of mercy to be revealed in the human world and the life beyond.

“This second call is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 283-286).

188. “Indeed His ordinances constitute the mightiest stronghold for the protection of the world and the safeguarding of its peoples” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 50).

189. “[T]he precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples” (Bahá’u’lláh, in *Universal House of Justice A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book of Bahá’u’lláh*, 39).

190. “The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilization, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God, and in securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race; and the supreme agencies for accomplishing these two objectives are the excellent qualities with which humanity has been endowed” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Secret*, 60).

191. “Few will fail to recognize that the Spirit breathed by Bahá’u’lláh upon the world, and which is manifesting itself with varying degrees of intensity through the efforts consciously displayed by His avowed supporters and indirectly through certain humanitarian organizations, can never permeate and exercise an abiding influence upon mankind unless and until it incarnates itself in a visible Order, which would bear His name, wholly identify itself with His principles, and function in conformity with His laws. . . .

“In addition to these He, as well as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá after Him, has,

unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth” (Shoghi Effendi *World Order*, 19).

192. “Say: True liberty consisteth in man’s submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty. Happy is the man that hath apprehended the Purpose of God in whatever He hath revealed from the Heaven of His Will, that pervadeth all created things. Say: The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth. Whoso hath tasted of its sweetness will refuse to barter it for all the dominion of earth and heaven” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 336).

193. “The source of all good is trust in God, submission unto His command, and contentment with His holy will and pleasure” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 155).

“The beginning of all things is the knowledge of God, and the end of all things is strict observance of whatsoever hath been sent down from the empyrean of the Divine Will that pervadeth all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 5).

194. Bahá’u’lláh’s goal was to create “a new kind of people, people who are upright, kind, intelligent, truthful, and honest and who live according to His great laws laid down for this new epoch in man’s development. To call ourselves Bahá’ís is not enough, our inmost being must become ennobled and enlightened through living a Bahá’í life” (Shoghi Effendi, in Universal House of Justice *Living the Life*, 21).

195. “For the law of God is a collective center which unites various peoples, native lands, tongues and opinions. All find shelter in its

protection and become attracted by it. For example, Moses and the Mosaic law were the unifying center for the scattered sheep of Israel. He united these wandering flocks, brought them under control of divine law, educated and unified them, caused them to agree and uplifted them to a superlative degree of development. At a time when they were debased, they became glorified; ignorant, they were made knowing; in the bonds of captivity, they were given freedom; in short, they were unified. Day by day they advanced until they attained the highest degree of progress witnessed in that age. We prove, therefore, that the Manifestation of God and the law of God accomplish unity.

“It is self-evident that humanity is at variance. Human tastes differ; thoughts, native lands, races and tongues are many. The need of a collective center by which these differences may be counterbalanced and the people of the world be unified is obvious. Consider how nothing but a spiritual power can bring about this unification, for material conditions and mental aspects are so widely different that agreement and unity are not possible through outer means. It is possible, however, for all to become unified through one spirit, just as all may receive light from one sun. Therefore, assisted by the collective and divine center which is the law of God and the reality of His Manifestation, we can overcome these conditions until they pass away entirely and the races advance” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation*, 164).

196. “The real temple is the very Word of God; for to it all humanity must turn, and it is the center of unity for all mankind. It is the collective center, the cause of accord and communion of hearts, the sign of the solidarity of the human race, the source of eternal life” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation*, 65).

197. “Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. Verily, it is the penetrating power of all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 291).

198. “Consider the flowers of a garden: though differing in kind, colour, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm, and addeth unto their beauty. Thus when that unifying force, the penetrating influence of the Word of God, taketh effect, the difference of customs, manners, habits, ideas, opinions and dispositions embellisheth the world of humanity. This diversity, this difference is like the naturally created dissimilarity and variety of the limbs and organs of the human body, for each one contributeth to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole. When these different limbs and organs come under the influence of man’s sovereign soul, and the soul’s power pervadeth the limbs and members, veins and arteries of the body, then difference reinforceth harmony, diversity strengtheneth love, and multiplicity is the greatest factor for coordination. . . .In like manner, when divers shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 291).

The Process of Spiritual Development Begins with Faith

199. “But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Questions*, 208-209).

200. “Sincerity is the foundation-stone of faith. That is, a religious individual must disregard his personal desires and seek in whatever way he can wholeheartedly to serve the public interest; and it is impossible for a human being to turn aside from his own selfish advantages and sacrifice his own good for the good of the community except through true religious faith. . . .

“That individual . . . who puts his faith in God . . . will for the sake of God abandon his own peace and profit and will freely consecrate his own heart and soul to the common good” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Secret*, 96-97).

201. “Although a person of good deeds is acceptable at the Threshold of the Almighty, yet it is first ‘to know’ and then ‘to do’. . . Herein lies the difference: By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Bahá’í World Faith*, 382-383).

Divine Assistance Facilitates Spiritual Development

202. “The soul does not evolve from degree to degree as a law — it only evolves nearer to God, by the Mercy and Bounty of God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 66).

“These virtues do not appear from the reality of man except through the power of God and the divine teachings, for they need supernatural power for their manifestation. It may be that in the world of nature a trace of these perfections may appear, but they are unstable and ephemeral; they are like the rays of the sun upon the wall.

“As the compassionate God has placed such a wonderful crown upon the head of man, man should strive that its brilliant jewels may become visible in the world” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Questions*, 79-80).

“These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a

fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 66).

203. “Unless the Holy Spirit become intermediary, one cannot attain directly to the bounties of God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Bahá’í World Faith*, 370).

“The eleventh principle of Bahá’u’lláh is: The Power of the Holy Spirit, by which alone Spiritual Development is achieved. It is only by the breath of the Holy Spirit that spiritual development can come about. No matter how the material world may progress, no matter how splendidly it may adorn itself, it can never be anything but a lifeless body unless the soul is within, for it is the soul that animates the body; the body alone has no real significance. Deprived of the blessings of the Holy Spirit the material body would be inert” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 133).

“This general, universal development is not possible through the power of philosophy. It is only attainable through the pervading influence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, no matter how far the world of humanity advances, it fails to attain the highest degree unless quickened by the education and divine bestowals of the Holy Spirit. This ensures human progress and prosperity (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 206).

204. “Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord” (The Báb, in Nabíl, 65).

“Look not at thy weakness and impotence; nay, look at the power of thy Lord, which hath surrounded all regions” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 190).

“Do not take into consideration your own aptitudes and capacities, but fix your gaze on the consummate bounty, the divine bestowal and the power of the Holy Spirit — the power that

converteth the drop of water into a sea and the star into a sun”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 104).

205. “Faith is the magnet which draws the confirmation of the Merciful One. Service is the magnet which attracts the heavenly strength. I hope thou wilt attain both” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 62).

206. “Gather ye together with the utmost joy and fellowship and recite the verses revealed by the merciful Lord. By doing so the doors to true knowledge will be opened to your inner beings, and ye will then feel your souls endowed with steadfastness and your hearts filled with radiant joy” (Bahá’u’lláh, in Universal House of Justice *The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith*, 2).

“Whensoever a company of people shall gather in a meeting place, shall engage in glorifying God, and shall speak with one another of the mysteries of God, beyond any doubt the breathings of the Holy Spirit will blow gently over them, and each shall receive a share thereof” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 94).

207. “If a small number of people gather lovingly together, with absolute purity and sanctity, with their hearts free of the world, experiencing the emotions of the Kingdom and the powerful magnetic forces of the Divine, and being at one in their happy fellowship, that gathering will exert its influence over all the earth. The nature of that band of people, the words they speak, the deeds they do, will unleash the bestowals of Heaven, and provide a foretaste of eternal bliss. The hosts of the Company on high will defend them, and the angels of the Abhá Paradise, in continuous succession, will come down to their aid” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 81).

208. “Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word. Should they endeavor to fulfill these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them,

and that assembly shall become the center of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Shoghi Effendi *Bahá’í Administration*, 22-23).

209. “It is self-evident that the unity of the human world and the Most Great Peace cannot be accomplished through material means . . . the promotion of the oneness of the kingdom of humanity, which is the essence of the teachings of all the Manifestations of God, is impossible except through the divine power and breaths of the Holy Spirit. Other powers are too weak and are incapable of accomplishing this” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 13?).

“The source of perfect unity and love in the world of existence is the bond and oneness of reality. When the divine and fundamental reality enters human hearts and lives, it conserves and protects all states and conditions of mankind, establishing that intrinsic oneness of the world of humanity which can only come into being through the efficacy of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is like unto the life in the human body, which blends all differences of parts and members in unity and agreement. Consider how numerous are these parts and members, but the oneness of the animating spirit of life unites them all in perfect combination. It establishes such a unity in the bodily organism that if any part is subjected to injury or becomes diseased, all the other parts and functions sympathetically respond and suffer, owing to the perfect oneness existing. Just as the human spirit of life is the cause of coordination among the various parts of the human organism, the Holy Spirit is the controlling cause of the unity and coordination of mankind. That is to say, the bond or oneness of humanity cannot be effectively established save through the power of the Holy Spirit, for the world of humanity is a composite body, and the Holy Spirit is the animating principle of its life” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 321).

Love Catalyzes the Process of Spiritual Development

210. “Love is the source of all the bestowals of God. Until love takes possession of the heart, no other divine bounty can be revealed in it” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 255).

211. “In the world of existence there is indeed no greater power than the power of love. When the heart of man is aglow with the flame of love, he is ready to sacrifice all — even his life. In the Gospel it is said God is love” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 179-180).

“Consider, then, what the love of God means. Were it not for the love of God, all the spirits would be inanimate. The meaning of this is not physical death; nay, rather, it is that condition concerning which Christ declared, “Let the dead bury their dead,” for “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Were it not for the love of God, the hearts would not be illumined. Were it not for the love of God, the pathway of the Kingdom would not be opened. Were it not for the love of God, the Holy Books would not have been revealed. Were it not for the love of God, the divine Prophets would not have been sent to the world. The foundation of all these bestowals is the love of God. Therefore, in the human world there is no greater power than the love of God (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 257).

212. “The greatest gift of man is universal love — that magnet which renders existence eternal. It attracts realities and diffuses life with infinite joy. If this love penetrate the heart of man, all the forces of the universe will be realized in him, for it is a divine power which transports him to a divine station and he will make no progress until he is illumined thereby. Strive to increase the love-power of reality, to make your hearts greater centers of attraction and to create new ideals and relationships.

“First of all, be ready to sacrifice your lives for one another, to prefer the general well-being to your personal well-being. Create relationship that nothing can shake; form an assembly that nothing can break up; have a mind that never ceases acquiring riches that nothing can destroy. If love did not exist, what of reality would

remain? It is the fire of the love of God which renders man superior to the animal. Strengthen this superior force through which is attained all the progress in the world” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Divine Plan*, 110).

213. “The essence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings is all-embracing love, for love includeth every excellence of humankind. It causeth every soul to go forward” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 66).

214. “Know thou of a certainty that Love is the secret of God’s holy Dispensation, the manifestation of the All-Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings. Love is heaven’s kindly light, the Holy Spirit’s eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul. Love is the cause of God’s revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. Love is the one means that ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next. Love is the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul. Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms. Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe. Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world, and the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 27).

215. “O ye beloved of God! Know ye, verily, that the happiness of mankind lieth in the unity and the harmony of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity among all men” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 283-286).

Fellowship Links Individual and Community Spiritual Growth

216. “Our should be the prayer that His blessings may be vouchsafed in still greater abundance, and ours to hold fast to such means as shall

ensure a fuller outpouring of His grace and a greater measure of His divine assistance.

“One of the greatest of these means is the spirit of true fellowship and loving communion amongst the friends” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 92).

217. “The Bahá’í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory where you can translate in to living and constructive action, the principles which you imbibe from the teachings. By becoming a real part of that living organism you can catch the real spirit which runs throughout the Bahá’í teachings” (Shoghi Effendi, in National Bahá’í Education Task Force *Foundations for a Spiritual Education*, 40).

“‘Regard the world as the human body,’ wrote Bahá’u’lláh to Queen Victoria. We can surely regard the Bahá’í world, the army of God, in the same way. In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God “has endowed each humble being with ability and talent,” and is supremely true of the body of the Bahá’í world community, for this body is already an organism, united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source, and illumined with the conscious knowledge of its unity. Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed, and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us. . . .The Bahá’í World Community, growing like a healthy new body, develops new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity, when every soul, living for the Cause of God, will receive from that Cause, health, assurance, and the overflowing bounties of Bahá’u’lláh which are diffused through His divinely ordained Order” (Universal House of Justice *Wellspring*, 37-38).

218. “The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá’í

community itself, with the friends endeavouring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. . . .In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 602).

“We go forward confident that the wholehearted involvement of the friends in these activities will ensure a deeper consolidation of the community at all levels” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 603).

219. “Thou hast written . . . concerning the Feast. This festivity, which is held on a day of the nineteen-day month, was established by His Holiness the Báb, and the Blessed Beauty directed, confirmed and warmly encouraged the holding of it. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance. You should unquestionably see to it with the greatest care, and make its value known, so that it may become solidly established on a permanent basis. Let the beloved of God gather together and associate most lovingly and spiritually and happily with one another, conducting themselves with the greatest courtesy and self-restraint. Let them read the holy verses, as well as essays which are of benefit, and the letters of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; encourage and inspire one another to love each and all; chant the prayers with serenity and joy; give eloquent talks, and praise the matchless Lord.

“The host, with complete self-effacement, showing kindness to all, must be a comfort to each one, and serve the friends with his own hands.

“If the Feast is befittingly held, in the manner described, then this supper will verily be the Lord’s Supper, for its fruits will be the very fruits of that Supper, and its influence the same” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Research Department *The Nineteen Day Feast*, 1).

220. “This Feast is held to foster comradeship and love, to call God to mind and supplicate Him with contrite hearts, and to encourage

benevolent pursuits. That is, the friends should there dwell upon God and glorify Him, read the prayers and holy verses, and treat one another with the utmost affection and love. Should trouble arise between two of the friends, let both be invited in, and efforts be made to compose their differences. Let all discussion centre on the doing of charitable acts and holy deeds, that laudable results may be the fruit thereof" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in Research Department *The Nineteen Day Feast*, 2).

"The Nineteen Day Feast was inaugurated by the Báb and ratified by Bahá'u'lláh, in His holy book, the Akdas [sic], so that people may gather together and outwardly show fellowship and love, that the divine mysteries may be disclosed. The object is concord, that through this fellowship hearts may become perfectly united, and reciprocity and mutual helpfulness be established. Because the members of the world of humanity are unable to exist without being banded together, cooperation and mutual helpfulness is the basis of human society. Without the realization of these two great principles no great movement is pressed forward. . . .

"In brief, this is my hope: that the Nineteen Day Feast become the cause of great spiritual solidarity between the friends, that it may bring believers into the bond of unity, and we will then be so united together that love and wisdom will spread from this centre to all parts. This Feast is a divine Feast. It is a Lord's supper. It attracts confirmation of God like a magnet. It is the cause of the enlightenment of hearts.

"Every day great feasts and banquets are being spread with the object of material enjoyment and relish of food. People partake of certain delicacies and waters from various fountains, that they may have a good time. Balls and dances follow. All these are for the body, but this fellowship is of the enjoyment of God, for the partaking of spiritual food, for the elucidation of spiritual subjects, for the discussion and interpretation of the teachings and counsels of God. It is absolute spirituality.

"It is my hope that the Nineteen Day Feast may become firmly

established and organized so that the holy realities are behind this meeting may leave behind all prejudices and conflict, and make their hearts as a treasury of love. Even if there is the slightest feeling between certain souls — a lack of love — it must be made to entirely disappear. There must be the utmost translucency and purity of intention.

“They must enjoy the love of God, acquire the power for the promotion of the happiness of mankind and the Word of God. With such high mention must this Feast become an established institution. When they gather in this meeting, all those present must turn their faces toward the Kingdom of Abhá, and from their hearts supplicate, invoke and entreat toward the lofty throne, beg of God’s forgiveness for all shortcomings, read the teachings and arise to His service.

“Then spread the feast and give refreshments. Assuredly great results will be the outcome of such meetings. Material and spiritual benefits will be assured. All who are present will be intoxicated with the breezes of the Love of God, and the Breath of the Holy Spirit will with tremendous power inspire the hearts.

“If this meeting be established on such a rock, it will become a power which will attract heavenly confirmations, be the means of the appearance of the Light of God, and the reality of every subject will become unfolded. Such a meeting will be under the protection of God. It is my hope that you will continually hold these meetings and that each time it will become more and more the centre of all the virtues, the point for the effulgence of God.

May your hearts be enlightened!

May your faces become radiant!

May your spirits be illumined!

May your thoughts find wider range of vision!

May your spiritual susceptibilities be increased!

May the realm of God surround you, and may your hearts become the treasury of heaven!

This is my hope” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Research Department *The Nineteen Day Feast*, 4-6).

221. “As to the Nineteen Day Feast, ye must give this your most

careful attention, and firmly establish it. For this Feast bringeth bliss and unity and love to the lovers of God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Research Department *The Nineteen Day Feast*, 3).

“Ye have written of the Nineteen Day festivities. This Feast is a bringer of joy. It is the groundwork of agreement and unity. It is the key to affection and fellowship. It diffuseth the oneness of mankind (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Research Department *The Nineteen Day Feast*, 4).

222. “Regarding the Nineteen Day Feast: in a previous letter to the National Spiritual Assembly the Guardian had made it clear that, although not a binding ordinance, this Feast has been regarded by Bahá’u’lláh as highly desirable and meritorious. In the “Aqdas” He has specially emphasized its spiritual and devotional character, and also its social importance in the Bahá’í community as a means for bringing about closer fellowship and unity among the believers. The administrative significance of this Feast has been stated by the Guardian in view of the increasing need among the friends for better training in the principles and methods of Bahá’í Administration.

“The significance of the Nineteen Day Feast is thus threefold. It is a gathering of a devotional, social and administrative importance. When these three features are all combined, this Feast can and will surely yield the best and the maximum of results. The friends, however, should be on their guard lest they overstress the significance of this institution created by Bahá’u’lláh. They should also take care not to undertake or minimize its importance” (Shoghi Effendi, in Research Department *The Nineteen Day Feast*, 434).

The Administrative Order Facilitates the Process of Individual and Community Spiritual Development

223. “[T]he faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 143).

224. “all can participate in the joint enterprise of applying more systematically the principles of the Faith to upraising the quality of human life. The key to success is unity in spirit and in action” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 603).

225. “First comes the illumination of hearts and minds by the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, and then the grass roots stirring of the believers wishing to apply these teachings to the daily life of their community. Such stirrings can be fostered, encouraged and assisted by the national and continental institutions of the Faith, but without them any activities introduced from above might well prove abortive” (Universal House of Justice in a letter written on its behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, May 8, 1984, in Office of Social and Economic Development, 9-10).

Guiding Principles for Realizing ‘What could be’: Knowledge, Volition, and Action

226. “The attainment of any objective is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming, there is no execution or accomplishment” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 157).

227. “To study the principles, and to try to live according to them, are, therefore, the two essential mediums through which you can insure the development and progress of your inner spiritual life and of your outer existence as well” (Shoghi Effendi, in National Bahá’í Education Task Force *Foundations for a Spiritual Education*, 40).

228. “The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá’í community itself, with the friends endeavouring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. . . .In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress

intended by the Lord of the Age” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 602).

229. “All that ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 149).

230. “A Bahá’í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by the Bahá’í institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism” (Universal House of Justice in a letter to a National Spiritual Assembly in May 1984, in Office of Social and Economic Development, 34).

Knowledge

Universal Education

231. “Bahá’u’lláh has announced that inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction. Through this provision the lack of mutual understanding will be remedied and the unity of mankind furthered and advanced. Universal education is a universal law” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 300).

232. “The cause of universal education, which has already enlisted in its service an army of dedicated people from every faith and nation, deserves the utmost support that the governments of the world can lend it. For ignorance is indisputably the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice. No nation can achieve success unless education is accorded all its citizens.

Lack of resources limits the ability of many nations to fulfil this necessity, imposing a certain ordering of priorities. The decision-making agencies involved would do well to consider giving first priority to the education of women and girls, since it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society. In keeping with the requirements of the times, consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child” (Universal House of Justice *The Promise of World Peace*).

233. “Close investigation will show that the primary cause of oppression and injustice, of unrighteousness, irregularity and disorder, is the people’s lack of religious faith and the fact that they are uneducated” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Secret*, 18).

234. “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 260).

235. “The Manifestations of God are likewise in agreement with the view that education exerteth the strongest possible influence on humankind. They affirm, however, that differences in the level of intelligence are innate; and this fact is obvious, and not worth debating. For we see that children of the same age, the same country, the same race, indeed of the same family, and trained by the same individual, still are different as to the degree of their comprehension and intelligence. One will make rapid progress, one will receive instruction only gradually, one will remain at the lowest stage of all. For no matter how much you may polish a shell, it will not turn into a gleaming pearl, nor can you change a dull pebble into a gem whose pure rays will light the world. Never, through training and cultivation, will the colocynth and the bitter tree change into the Tree of Blessedness. That is to say, education cannot alter the inner essence of a man, but it doth exert tremendous influence, and with this power it can bring forth from the individual whatever perfections and

capacities are deposited within him. A grain of wheat, when cultivated by the farmer, will yield a whole harvest, and a seed, through the gardener's care, will grow into a great tree. Thanks to a teacher's loving efforts, the children of the primary school may reach the highest levels of achievement; indeed, his benefactions may lift some child of small account to an exalted throne. Thus is it clearly demonstrated that by their essential nature, minds vary as to their capacity, while education also playeth a great role and exerteth a powerful effect on their development" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Selections*, 132).

236. "To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Selections*, 126).

237. "But education is of three kinds: material, human and spiritual. Material education is concerned with the progress and development of the body, through gaining its sustenance, its material comfort and ease. This education is common to animals and man.

"Human education signifies civilization and progress — that is to say, government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal.

"Divine education is that of the Kingdom of God: it consists in acquiring divine perfections, and this is true education; for in this state man becomes the focus of divine blessings, the manifestation of the words, 'Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness' (Genesis 1:26). This is the goal of the world of humanity" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Questions*, 8).

238. "But education is of various kinds. There is a training and development of the physical body which ensures strength and growth. There is intellectual education or mental training for which schools and colleges are founded. The third kind of education is that of the spirit. Through the breaths of the Holy Spirit man is uplifted into the world of moralities and illumined by the lights of divine bestowals. The moral world is only attained through the effulgence of the Sun of

Reality and the quickening life of the divine spirit. For this reason the holy Manifestations of God appear in the human world. They come to educate and illuminate mankind, to bestow spiritual susceptibilities, to quicken inner perceptions and thereby adorn the reality of man — the human temple — with divine graces. Through Them man may become the point of the emanations of God and the recipient of heavenly bounties. Under the influence of Their teachings he may become the manifestation of the effulgences of God and a magnet attracting the lights of the supreme world. For this reason the holy, divine Manifestations are the first Teachers and Educators of humanity; Their traces are the highest evidences, and Their spiritual tuition is universal in its application to the world of mankind. Their influence and power are immeasurable and unlimited. One heavenly Personage has developed many nations. For example, Jesus Christ, single and unassisted, educated the Roman, Greek and Assyrian nations and all of Europe. It is evident, therefore, that the greatest education is that of the Spirit” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation*, 330).

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“[H]e must be at the same time their material and human as well

as their spiritual educator — that is to say, he must teach men to organize and carry out physical matters, and to form a social order in order to establish cooperation and mutual aid in living so that material affairs may be organized and regulated for any circumstances that may occur. In the same way he must establish human education — that is to say, he must educate intelligence and thought in such a way that they may attain complete development, so that knowledge and science may increase, and the reality of things, the mysteries of beings and the properties of existence may be discovered; that, day by day, instructions, inventions and institutions may be improved; and from things perceptible to the senses conclusions as to intellectual things may be deduced.

“He must also impart spiritual education, so that intelligence and comprehension may penetrate the metaphysical world, and may receive benefit from the sanctifying breeze of the Holy Spirit, and may enter into relationship with the Supreme Concourse. He must so educate the human reality that it may become the center of the divine appearance, to such a degree that the attributes and the names of God shall be resplendent in the mirror of the reality of man, and the holy verse ‘We will make man in Our image and likeness’ shall be realized” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Questions*, 10).

“The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge. Good character must be taught. Light must be spread afar, so that, in the school of humanity, all may acquire the heavenly characteristics of the spirit, and see for themselves beyond any doubt that there is no fiercer hell, no more fiery abyss, than to possess a character that is evil and unsound; no more darksome pit nor loathsome torment than to show forth qualities which deserve to be condemned.

“The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny or be carried away by wrath” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 136).

“The divine spirit, however, doth unveil divine realities and universal mysteries that lie within the spiritual world. It is my hope that thou wilt attain unto this divine spirit, so that thou mayest uncover the secrets of the other world, as well as the mysteries of the world below” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Selections*, 170).

239. “Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and Satanic. The one welletth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God Himself; the motive-force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire. The one is guided by the principle: ‘Fear ye God; God will teach you’; the other is but a confirmation of the truth: ‘Knowledge is the most grievous veil between man and his Creator.’ The former bringeth forth the fruit of patience, of longing desire, of true understanding, and love; whilst the latter can yield naught but arrogance, vainglory and conceit. From the sayings of those Masters of holy utterance, Who have expounded the meaning of true knowledge, the odour of these dark teachings, which have obscured the world, can in no wise be detected. The tree of such teachings can yield no result except iniquity and rebellion, and beareth no fruit but hatred and envy. Its fruit is deadly poison; its shadow a consuming fire. How well hath it been said: ‘Cling unto the robe of the Desire of thy heart, and put thou away all shame; bid the worldlywise be gone, however great their name’” (*Bahá’u’lláh Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 69-70).

240. “The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Secret*, 109).

Individual Investigation

241. “Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 295).

242. “God has given man the eye of investigation by which he may see and recognize truth. He has endowed man with ears that he may hear the message of reality and conferred upon him the gift of reason by which he may discover things for himself. This is his endowment and equipment for the investigation of reality. Man is not intended to see through the eyes of another, hear through another’s ears nor comprehend with another’s brain. Each human creature has individual endowment, power and responsibility in the creative plan of God. Therefore depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your own investigation; otherwise you will be utterly submerged in the sea of ignorance and deprived of all the bounties of God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 292-293).

243. “The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not the knowledge of thy neighbour. Ponder this in thy heart how it behoveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving kindness. Set it then before thine eyes” (Bahá’u’lláh *Arabic Hidden Words*, #2).

244. “Furthermore, know ye that God has created in man the power of

reason, whereby man is enabled to investigate reality. God has not intended man to imitate blindly his fathers and ancestors. He has endowed him with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth, and that which he finds real and true he must accept. He must not be an imitator or blind follower of any soul. He must not rely implicitly upon the opinion of any man without investigation; nay, each soul must seek intelligently and independently, arriving at a real conclusion and bound only by that reality. The greatest cause of bereavement and disheartening in the world of humanity is ignorance based upon blind imitation. It is due to this that wars and battles prevail; from this cause hatred and animosity arise continually among mankind” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation*, 291).

Prayer

245. “It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites Man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá’u’lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer merely to accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality which he can acquire chiefly by means of prayer. The Bahá’í Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man which has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide.

“Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá’u’lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and becomes a dead thing. The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual

development, and this, as already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the religion of God” (Shoghi Effendi *Directives*, 86-87).

246. “The state of prayer is the best of conditions, for man is then associating with God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 202).

“The wisdom of prayer is this, that it causes a connection between the servant and the True One, because in that state of prayer man with all his heart and soul turns his face towards His Highness the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion. The greatest happiness of a lover is to converse with his beloved, and the greatest gift for a seeker is to become familiar with the object of his longing. That is why the greatest hope of every soul who is attracted to the kingdom of God is to find an opportunity to entreat and supplicate at the ocean of His utterance, goodness and generosity” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 683-684).

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247. “Turn to God, supplicate humbly at His threshold, seeking assistance and confirmation, that God may rend asunder the veils that obscure your vision. Then will your eyes be filled with illumination, face to face you will behold the reality of God and your heart become completely purified from the dross of ignorance, reflecting the glories

and bounties of the Kingdom” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Foundations of World Unity*, 76).

248. “Know thou, verily it is becoming in a weak one to supplicate to the Strong One, and it behooveth a seeker of bounty to beseech the Glorious Bountiful One. When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His Ocean, this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being.

“During thy supplications to God and thy reciting, ‘Thy Name is my healing,’ consider how thine heart is cheered, thy soul delighted by the spirit of the love of God, and thy mind attracted to the Kingdom of God! By these attractions one’s ability and capacity increase. When the vessel is enlarged the water increases, and when the thirst grows the bounty of the cloud becomes agreeable to the taste of man. This is the mystery of supplication and the wisdom of stating one’s wants. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a tablet to an American believer, translated by Ali Kuli Khan, October 1908, in *Esselmont*, 93).

Meditation

249. “Bahá’u’lláh says there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon: the sign of the intellect is contemplation and the sign of contemplation is silence, because it is impossible for a man to do two things at one time — he cannot both speak and meditate.

“It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed.

“You cannot apply the name ‘man’ to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.

“Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit — the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation.

“The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.

“Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see.

“This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.

“This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.

“Nevertheless some thoughts are useless to man; they are like waves moving in the sea without result. But if the faculty of meditation is bathed in the inner light and characterized with divine attributes, the results will be confirmed.

“The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these.

“But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained” (Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 186-188).

250. “Happy is the man that pondereth in his heart that which hath been revealed in the Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Meditate upon this, O ye beloved of God, and let your ears be attentive unto His Word, so that ye may, by His grace and mercy, drink your fill from the crystal waters of constancy, and become as steadfast and immovable as the mountain in His Cause” (Bahá’u’lláh

Gleanings, 13).

“O maid-servant of God! Chant the Words of God, pondering over their meaning, transform them into actions!” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, vol I., 85).

Consultation

251. “[C]onsultation must have for its object the investigation of truth” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 72).

252. “The question of consultation is of the utmost importance and is one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquility and felicity of the people” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Research Department *Consultation*, 7).

Volition: Bridging the Knowledge-Action Gap

253. “Mere knowledge of principles is not sufficient. We all know and admit that justice is good, but there is need of volition and action to carry out and manifest it. For example, we might think it good to build a church, but simply thinking of it as a good thing will not help its erection. The ways and means must be provided; we must will to build it and then proceed with the construction. All of us know that international peace is good, that it is conducive to human welfare and the glory of man, but volition and action are necessary before it can be established” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 121).

“Therefore, mere knowledge is not sufficient for complete human attainment. The teachings of the Holy Books need a heavenly power and divine potency to carry them out. A house is not built by mere acquaintance with the plans. Money must be forthcoming; volition is necessary to construct it; a carpenter must be employed in its erection. It is not enough to say, ‘The plan and purpose of this house are very

good; I will live in it.' There are no walls of protection, there is no roof of shelter in this mere statement; the house must be actually built before we can live in it" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 249).

254. "My holy, My divinely ordained Revelation may be likened unto an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price, of surpassing luster. It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean, so that he may, in proportion to the eagerness of his search and the efforts he hath exerted, partake of such benefits as have been pre-ordained in God's irrevocable and hidden Tablets. If no one be willing to direct his steps towards its shores, if every one should fail to arise and find Him, can such a failure be said to have robbed this ocean of its power or to have lessened, to any degree, its treasures? How vain, how contemptible, are the imaginations which your hearts have devised, and are still devising! O My servants! The one true God is My witness! This most great, this fathomless and surging Ocean is near, astonishingly near, unto you. Behold it is closer to you than your life-vein! Swift as the twinkling of an eye ye can, if ye but wish it, reach and partake of this imperishable favor, this God-given grace, this incorruptible gift, this most potent and unspeakably glorious bounty" (Bahá'u'lláh *Gleanings*, 325).

255. "If ye will follow earnestly the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, ye shall indeed become the light of the world, the soul for the body of the world, the comfort and help for humanity, and the source of salvation for the whole universe. Strive therefore, with heart and soul, to follow the precepts of the Blessed Perfection, and rest assured that if ye succeed in living the life he marks out for you, Eternal Life and everlasting joy in the Heavenly Kingdom will be yours, and celestial sustenance will be sent to strengthen you all your days" ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Paris*, 114-115).

256. "This is the Springtime of benevolent deeds, were ye of them that comprehend. Strive ye with all your might, O people, that ye may bring forth that which will truly profit you in the worlds of your Lord,

the All-Glorious, the All-Praised” (Bahá’u’lláh, in Research Department *Huqúqu’lláh*, 8).

257. “The greatest gift of man is universal love — that magnet which renders existence eternal. It attracts realities and diffuses life with infinite joy. If this love penetrate the heart of man, all the forces of the universe will be realized in him, for it is a divine power which transports him to a divine station and he will make no progress until he is illumined thereby. Strive to increase the love-power of reality, to make your hearts greater centers of attraction and to create new ideals and relationships.

“First of all, be ready to sacrifice your lives for one another, to prefer the general well-being to your personal well-being. Create relationship that nothing can shake; form an assembly that nothing can break up; have a mind that never ceases acquiring riches that nothing can destroy. If love did not exist, what of reality would remain? It is the fire of the love of God which renders man superior to the animal. Strengthen this superior force through which is attained all the progress in the world” (Abdu’l-Bahá *Divine Plan*, 110).

258. “Until the nerves and arteries of the nation stir into life, every measure that is attempted will prove vain; for the people are as the human body, and determination and the will to struggle are as the soul, and a soulless body does not move” (Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 288).

259. “Then it is clear that the honor and exaltation of man must be something more than material riches. Material comforts are only a branch, but the root of the exaltation of man is the good attributes and virtues which are the adornments of his reality. These are the divine appearances, the heavenly bounties, the sublime emotions, the love and knowledge of God; universal wisdom, intellectual perception, scientific discoveries, justice, equity, truthfulness, benevolence, natural courage and innate fortitude; the respect for rights and the keeping of agreements and covenants; rectitude in all circumstances; serving the truth under all conditions; the sacrifice of one’s life for the good of all

people; kindness and esteem for all nations; obedience to the teachings of God; service in the Divine Kingdom; the guidance of the people, and the education of the nations and races. This is the prosperity of the human world! This is the exaltation of man in the world! This is eternal life and heavenly honor!

“These virtues do not appear from the reality of man except through the power of God and the divine teachings, for they need supernatural power for their manifestation. It may be that in the world of nature a trace of these perfections may appear, but they are unstable and ephemeral; they are like the rays of the sun upon the wall.

“As the compassionate God has placed such a wonderful crown upon the head of man, man should strive that its brilliant jewels may become visible in the world” (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá Questions*, 79-80).

260. “Arise, O people, and, by the power of God’s might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies — gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of their wretched worshipers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection. We cherish the hope that the Hand of divine power may lend its assistance to mankind and deliver it from its state of grievous abasement” (*Bahá’u’lláh Tablets*, 86).

261. “The virtues and attributes pertaining unto God are all evident and manifest, and have been mentioned and described in all the heavenly Books. Among them are trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay, thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him. These rank, according to the estimate of God, among the highest and most laudable of all acts. All other acts are, and will ever remain, secondary and subordinate unto them . . .” (*Bahá’u’lláh Gleanings*, 290).

262. “Know ye that by ‘the world’ is meant your unawareness of Him Who is your Maker, and your absorption in aught else but Him. . . .Whatsoever deterreth you, in this Day, from loving God is nothing but the world. Flee it, that you may be numbered with the blest” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 286).

263. “The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in on wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit” (Bahá’u’lláh *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 211).

264. “There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them” (Universal House of Justice *The Promise of World Peace*).

Action

265. “Although a person of good deeds is acceptable at the Threshold of the Almighty, yet it is first ‘to know’ and then ‘to do’. . . .Herein lies the difference: By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Bahá’í World Faith*, 382-383).

266. “[S]peech is not needed. Our actions will help on the world, will spread civilization, will help the progress of science, and cause the arts to develop. Without action nothing in the material world can be accomplished, neither can words unaided advance a man in the

spiritual Kingdom. It is not through lip-service only that the elect of God have attained to holiness, but by patient lives of active service they have brought light into the world.

“Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers” (*Abdu'l-Bahá Paris*, 80-81).

267. “Let deeds, not words, be your adorning” (*Bahá'u'lláh Persian Hidden Words*, #5).

268. “all, irrespective of circumstances or resources, are endowed with the capacity to respond in some measure [to the call from the Universal House of Justice to initiate development activities]; all can share; all can participate in the joint enterprise of applying more systematically the principles of the Faith to upraising the quality of human life” (*Universal House of Justice Messages*, 603).

Living the Bahá'í Life: Application of Spiritual Principles and Rectitude of Conduct

269. “In one of the Tablets these words have been revealed: O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and goodly behavior” (*Bahá'u'lláh Gleanings*, 94).

270. “The third Taraz concerneth good character. A good character is, verily, the best mantle for men from God. With it He adorneth the temples of His loved ones. By My life! The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof. Whoso attaineth unto it is accounted as a jewel among men. The glory and the upliftment of the world must needs depend upon it” (*Bahá'u'lláh Tablets*, 36).

271. “The virtues and attributes pertaining unto God are all evident and manifest, and have been mentioned and described in all the

heavenly Books. Among them are trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay, thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him. These rank, according to the estimate of God, among the highest and most laudable of all acts. All other acts are, and will ever remain, secondary and subordinate unto them . . .” (Bahá’u’lláh *Gleanings*, 290).

272. “If ye will follow earnestly the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, ye shall indeed become the light of the world, the soul for the body of the world, the comfort and help for humanity, and the source of salvation for the whole universe. Strive therefore, with heart and soul, to follow the precepts of the Blessed Perfection, and rest assured that if ye succeed in living the life he marks out for you, Eternal Life and everlasting joy in the Heavenly Kingdom will be yours, and celestial sustenance will be sent to strengthen you all your days” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 114-115).

273. “[T]rustworthiness is the chief means of attracting confirmation and prosperity” (Bahá’u’lláh, in Research Department *Trustworthiness*, 8-9).

274. “The fourth Taráz concerneth trustworthiness. Verily it is the door of security for all that dwell on earth and a token of glory on the part of the All-Merciful. He who partaketh thereof hath indeed partaken of the treasures of wealth and prosperity. Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it. All the domains of power, of grandeur and of wealth are illumined by its light” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 37).

275. “If a man were to perform every good work, yet fail in the least scruple to be entirely trustworthy and honest, his good works would become as dry tinder and his failures as soul-consuming fire. . . . [T]rustworthiness is the bedrock of His Faith and the

foundation of all virtues and perfections. A man deprived of this quality is destitute of everything” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Research Department *Trustworthiness*, 13).

Serving as Examples

276. “all, irrespective of circumstances or resources, are endowed with the capacity to respond in some measure [to the call from the Universal House of Justice to initiate development activities]; all can share; all can participate in the joint enterprise of applying more systematically the principles of the Faith to upraising the quality of human life” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 603).

277. “The old order cannot be repaired; it is being rolled up before our eyes. The moral decay and disorder convulsing human society must run their course; we can neither arrest nor divert them.

“Our task is to build the Order of Bahá’u’lláh. Undeflected by the desperate expedients of those who seek to subdue the storm convulsing human life by political, economic, social, or educational programs, let us, with single-minded devotion and concentrating all our efforts on our objective, raise His Divine System and sheltered within its impregnable stronghold, safe from the darts of doubtfulness, demonstrate the Bahá’í way of life. . . . The acute distinction between this and present-day society will inevitably arouse the interest of the more enlightened, and as the world’s gloom deepens the light of Bahá’í life will shine brighter and brighter until its brilliance must eventually attract the disillusioned masses and cause them to enter the haven of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, Who alone can bring them peace and justice and an ordered life” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 137).

“It is primarily through the potency of noble deeds and character, rather than by the power of exposition and proofs, that the friends of God should demonstrate to the world that what has been promised by God is bound to happen, that it is already taking place and that the divine glad-tidings are clear, evident and complete. For unless some

illustrious souls step forth into the arena of service and shine out resplendent in the assemblage of men, the task of vindicating the truth of this Cause before the eyes of enlightened people would be formidable indeed. However, if the friends become embodiments of virtue and good character, words and arguments will be superfluous. Their very deeds will well serve as eloquent testimony, and their noble conduct will ensure the preservation, integrity and glory of the Cause of God (Shoghi Effendi, in Universal House of Justice *Living the Life*, 2).

278. “The companions of God are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character, that all mankind may profit by their example” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 88).

279. “The great thing is to ‘live the life’ — to have our lives so saturated with the Divine teachings and the Bahá’í Spirit that people cannot fail to see a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance, an efficiency in our character and work that will distinguish us from worldly-minded people and make people wonder what is the secret of this new life in us. We must become entirely selfless and devoted to God so that every day and every moment we seek to do only what God would have us do and in the way He would have us do it. If we do this sincerely then we shall have perfect unity and harmony with each other. Where there is want of harmony, there is lack of the true Bahá’í Spirit. Unless we can show this transformation in our lives, this new power, this mutual love and harmony, then the Bahá’í teachings are but a name to us (Shoghi Effendi, in Universal House of Justice *Living the Life*, 3).

280. “We must therefore rise to serve the members of the human race and educate first the individuals, so that the nations, which are composed of individuals, and the governments, which belong to those nations, may both be converted and guided, and that through this agency the unity of mankind may be established and its prosperity and

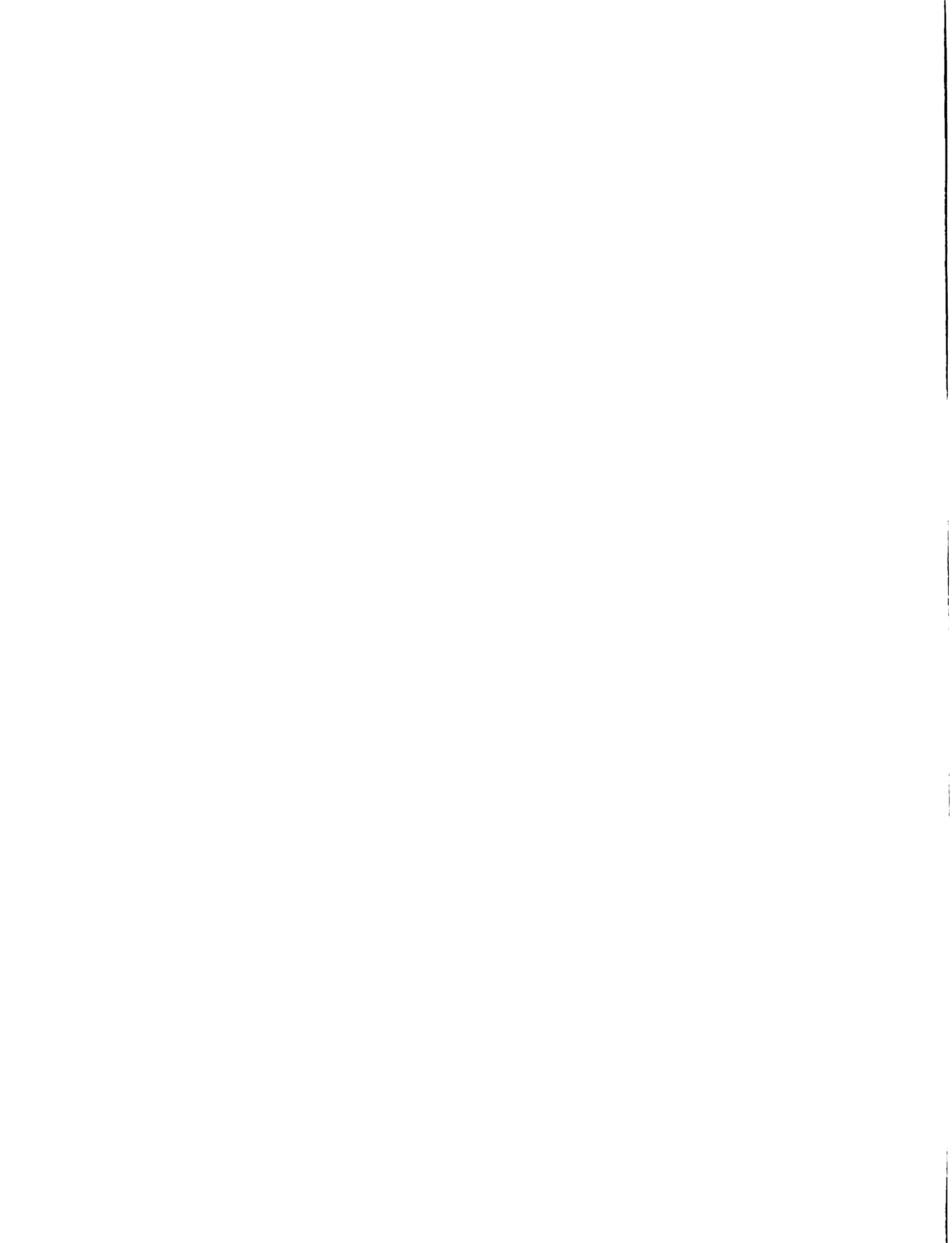
success realized” (Shoghi Effendi, in Office of Social and Economic Development *Social and Economic Development*, 25).

281. “There can be no doubt whatever that to achieve this fourfold purpose is the most strenuous, the least spectacular, and the most challenging of the tasks now confronting the American Bahá’í Community. It is primarily a task that concerns the individual believer, wherever he may be, and whatever his calling, his resources, his race, or his age. Neither the local nor national representatives of the community, no matter how elaborate their plans, or persistent their appeals, or sagacious their counsels, nor even the Guardian himself, however much he may yearn for this consummation, can decide where the duty of the individual lies, or supplant him in the discharge of that task. The individual alone must assess its character, consult his conscience, prayerfully consider all its aspects, manfully struggle against the natural inertia that weighs him down in his effort to arise, shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path, mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of His Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts, through the distinction which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them over tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself has espoused” (Shoghi Effendi *Citadel*, 148).

Work and Service as Worship

282. “Faith is the magnet which draws the confirmation of the Merciful One. Service is the magnet which attracts the heavenly strength. I hope thou wilt attain both” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 62).

283. “Ye must in this matter — that is, the serving of humankind — lay down your lives, and as ye yield yourselves, rejoice” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Selections*, 72).



284. “Service to humanity is service to God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 8).

285. “Again, is there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good? Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow-creatures? No, by the Lord God! The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good. ‘They prefer them before themselves, though poverty be their own lot.’ ‘The best of men are those who serve the people; the worst of men are those who harm the people’” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Secret*, 103).

286. “And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world’s multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Secret*, 2-3).

287. “[A]ll effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Paris*, 176-177).

“It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with

that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the day-star of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.

“The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means. When anyone occupieth himself in a craft or trade, such occupation itself is regarded in the estimation of God as an act of worship; and this is naught but a token of His infinite and all-pervasive bounty” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 26).

288. “Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship . . .” (*Abdu’l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy*, 78).

289. “Bahá’í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervour, can never hope to achieve beyond the meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshiper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshiper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity” (Shoghi Effendi *Bahá’í Administration*, 186).

290. “Say: O concourse of monks! Seclude not yourselves in your churches and cloisters. Come ye out of them by My leave, and busy, then, yourselves with what will profit you and others. Thus commandeth you He Who is the Lord of the Day of Reckoning. Seclude yourselves in the stronghold of My love. This, truly, is the seclusion that befitteeth you, could ye but know it. He that secludeth himself in his house is indeed as one dead. It behooveth man to show forth that which will benefit mankind. He that bringeth forth no fruit is fit for the fire” (Bahá’u’lláh *Epistle*, 49).

291. “The first Taráz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that man should know his own self and recognise that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. Having attained the stage of fulfilment

and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praise-worthy in the estimation of men of wisdom, and especially in the eye of servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples. They are, in truth, cup-bearers of the life-giving water of knowledge and guides unto the ideal way. They direct the peoples of the world to the straight path and acquaint them with that which is conducive to human upliftment and exaltation” (Bahá’u’lláh *Tablets*, 34-35).

Sacrifice

292. “That is to say, man must become evanescent in God. Must forget his own selfish conditions that he may thus arise to the station of sacrifice. It should be to such a degree that if he sleep, it should not be for pleasure, but to rest the body in order to do better, to speak better, to explain more beautifully, to serve the servants of God and to prove the truths. When he remains awake, he should seek to be attentive, serve the Cause of God and sacrifice his own stations for those of God. When he attains to this station, the confirmations of the Holy Spirit will surely reach him, and man with this power can withstand all who inhabit the earth (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Bahá’í World Faith*, 384).

“You must give the message through action and deed, not alone by word. Word must be conjoined with deed. You must love your friend better than yourself; yes, be willing to sacrifice yourself” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Promulgation*, 218).

“The greatest gift of man is universal love — that magnet which renders existence eternal. It attracts realities and diffuses life with infinite joy. If this love penetrate the heart of man, all the forces of the universe will be realized in him, for it is a divine power which transports him to a divine station and he will make no progress until he is illumined thereby. Strive to increase the love-power of reality, to

make your hearts greater centers of attraction and to create new ideals and relationships.

“First of all, be ready to sacrifice your lives for one another, to prefer the general well-being to your personal well-being. Create relationship that nothing can shake; form an assembly that nothing can break up; have a mind that never ceases acquiring riches that nothing can destroy. If love did not exist, what of reality would remain? It is the fire of the love of God which renders man superior to the animal. Strengthen this superior force through which is attained all the progress in the world” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Divine Plan*, 110).

293. “All the friends of God . . . should contribute to the extent possible, however modest their offering may be. God doth not burden a soul beyond its capacity. Such contributions must come from all centers and all believers. . . .O Friends of God! Be ye assured that in place of these contributions, your agriculture, your industry, and your commerce will be blessed by manifold increases, with goodly gifts and bestowals. He who cometh with one goodly deed will receive a tenfold reward. There is no doubt that the living Lord will abundantly confirm those who expend their wealth in His path” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá *Bahá’í Prayers* (US edition), 84).

Diverse Grassroots Initiative

294. “Progress in the development field will depend largely on natural stirrings at the grassroots, and it should receive its driving forces from those sources rather than from an imposition of plans and programmes from the top. . . .Different communities will, of course, perceive different approaches and different solutions to similar needs” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 603).

“Projects of economic and social development undertaken by Bahá’í institutions, . . . should be suited to the local situation and meet the particular needs and aspirations of local believers” (Universal House of Justice in a letter written on its behalf to an individual dated

May 7, 1984, in Hornby, 553).

295. “Suggestions for projects for development are welcome from whatever source they spring but ideally they should emanate from the local communities and receive support of the Local and National Assemblies; it should not be necessary to send people to countries to solicit projects. However, if a community has a desire to plan a special project, it is free to call upon people with experience to assist in the planning, design and implementation of the scheme.” (Universal House of Justice in a letter to the International Teaching Center dated November 1, 1983, in Office of Social and Economic Development, 43).

296. “The eagerness of the friends to serve, often carries them away, and they forget that a sound sense of business management is also much needed, if we are to harbor our resources and accomplish our goals” (Shoghi Effendi *Lights of Divine Guidance*, 216).

297. The NSAs should involve LSAs “in the devising and implementing of plans, within the constraints of existing circumstances and available resources” (Universal House of Justice *Messages*, 603).

298. “Projects of economic and social development undertaken by Bahá’í institutions, or assisted by them, should usually be quite modest at first, so that experience can be gained. They should be suited to the local situation and meet the particular needs and aspirations of local believers. Gradually, as knowledge and experience are gained, each National Spiritual Assembly can encourage and develop larger projects and perhaps include even the whole national community in appropriate endeavors” (Universal House of Justice in a letter written on its behalf to an individual dated May 7, 1984, in Hornby, 553).

299. “In the same way the growth and development of all beings is gradual; this is the universal divine organization and the natural system. The seed does not at once become a tree; the embryo does not at once become a man; the mineral does not suddenly become a stone. No, they grow and develop gradually and attain the limit of perfection.

“All beings, whether large or small, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections appear in them by degrees. The organization of God is one; the evolution of existence is one; the divine system is one. Whether they be small or great beings, all are subject to one law and system” (*Abdu'l-Bahá Questions*, 198-199).

Bahá'í Resource Development as a System

300. “Regard the world as the human body,’ wrote Bahá’u’lláh to Queen Victoria. We can surely regard the Bahá’í world, the army of God, in the same way. In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God “has endowed each humble being with ability and talent,” and is supremely true of the body of the Bahá’í world community, for this body is already an organism, united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source, and illumined with the conscious knowledge of its unity. Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed, and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us. . . .The Bahá’í World Community, growing like a healthy new body, develops new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity, when every soul, living for the Cause of God, will receive from that Cause, health, assurance, and the overflowing bounties of Bahá’u’lláh which are diffused through His divinely ordained Order” (*Universal House of Justice Wellspring*, 37-38).

301. “Just as the organic evolution of mankind has been slow and gradual, and involved successively the unification of the family, the tribe, the city-state, and the nation, so has the light vouchsafed by the Revelation of God, at various stages in the evolution of religion, and

reflected in the successive Dispensations of the past, been slow and progressive. Indeed the measure of Divine Revelation, in every age, has been adapted to, and commensurate with, the degree of social progress achieved in that age by a constantly evolving humanity” (Shoghi Effendi *Promised Day*, 117).

APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: the eldest son of Bahá’u’lláh and his appointed successor as leader of the Bahá’í Faith until his death in 1921; his title translates from the Persian as “Servant of the Glory”

Administrative Order of the Bahá’í Faith: the system of decentralized, democratically-elected, and structurally egalitarian

administrative institutions of the Bahá’í Faith that are charged with providing guidance for the communities they serve. Each city or village where at least nine adult Bahá’ís reside elects its own Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA), and individuals vote for delegates who elect the National Spiritual Assembly (NSA).

Members of NSAs, in turn, elect the Universal House of Justice, which is the international governing body of the Bahá’í Faith.

Bahá’ís believe that the Administrative Order will serve as the organizational framework of the global commonwealth of the

New World Order.

Attitude: a state of mind or feeling

Autopoiesis: self-making; a self-bounded, self-generating, self-perpetuating, and self-organizing pattern of organization; a network pattern of processes of production of components in which the function of each component is to participate in the production or transformation of other components in the network (i.e., recreate the network's structure) while maintaining the overall circularity of the network

Báb, The: the Manifestation who announced the coming revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in much the same way that John the Baptist announced Jesus' mission; his title translates from the Persian as "the gate" or "door"

Bahá'u'lláh: the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith whose name translates from the Persian as "the Glory of God"

Bifurcation points: critical points of instability in open systems far from equilibrium at which new forms of order may emerge spontaneously, resulting in development and evolution

Closed systems: systems in which relationships do not exist between elements of the system and everything external to the system

Chaos: unpredictable behavior in deterministic, patterned systems; the qualitative features of a chaotic system are predictable, yet its behavior is totally unpredictable

Cognition: defined by Maturana and Varela as the entire process of life, or the bringing forth of a world through knowing and doing, or the embodiment of a living system's autopoietic pattern of organization in its dissipative structure; Bawden uses cognition synonymously with learning

Complexity (as used by Waldrop to describe systemic properties): complicated and unpredictable behavior in simple systems; a region between stability (or order) and instability (or chaos) resembling the nature of dissipative structure

Consultation: a collective method of investigation and decision-making whose object is the investigation of truth. Effort is made to transcend individual perspective to arrive at a consensus about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of

action among the options open at any given moment.

Covenant: the formalized religious connection between the Creative Spirit and humankind in which the Creative Spirit pledges further guidance from future Manifestations (the Greater Covenant) in return for love, effort, and obedience. The Lesser Covenant is established between each particular Manifestation and His followers so that they will accept His appointed successor and maintain religious unity.

Creative Spirit: the omniscient, omnipotent, unknowable Spirit that created, maintains, and is immanent in — yet transcends — the Kosmos

Cybernetics: the science of control and communication, of positive and negative feedback loops, of regulation and stability

Cycle of growth: the Bahá'í process of spiritual development consisting of the mutually-reinforcing interaction among knowledge, volition, and action

Development: qualitative improvement of any and all aspects of life

Developmentalism: the professional promotion of material

development

Disintegration, the process of (in the context of Bahá'í resource development): the process of societal decline

Dissipative structure: stable, structurally open structures in states far from equilibrium that dissipate energy

Ecology: the study of the structure and functions of nature

Emergence: the evolution of emergent properties

Emergent property: a characteristic of a system that is unique to the system and cannot be explained as the sum of the parts of the system; a state or level of new complexity

Environment: everything external to a given system or holon; the world of nature external to humans (in the context of environmental stewardship)

Epistemic learning: learning about the world views which contextualize what is being learned

Evolution: self-transcendence in the direction of increasing complexity and integration

Faith: the belief — not based on logical proof or material evidence —

in the truth or value of something greater than oneself

Feedback loop: the reciprocal flow of influence in which every

influence is both a cause and an effect

Hard systems: well structured systems that are easy to measure and

quantify

Holarchy: the nested relationships of a system to its sub- and supra-

systems

Holon: systems that are simultaneously wholes and parts of larger

wholes

Holonocentrism: the ability to think systemically and therefore

understand a variety of world views

Holy Spirit: the spiritual essence of the Creative Spirit that intervenes

directly in human affairs

Justice: that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to

distinguish truth from falsehood

Kosmos: the cosmos (the domain of matter), the biosphere (the

domain of life), the noosphere (the domain of mind), and the

theosphere (the domain of the divine)

Local Spiritual Assembly: the local administrative institution of the
Bahá'í Administrative Order

Manifestations of the Creative Spirit: the prophets of the Creative
Spirit, including but not limited to Buddha, Moses, Abraham,
Jesus, Zoroaster, Muhammad, and Bahá'u'lláh

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár: a local Bahá'í house of worship

Meditation: speaking with one's own spirit

Meta-learning: consciousness of the process of learning

Modernization paradigm of development: the belief that development
is a function of macro-level economic growth and micro-level
elevated incomes

National Spiritual Assembly: the national administrative institution of
the Bahá'í Administrative Order

Natural resources: nonhuman biotic and abiotic elements of nature

Nature: the totality of physical reality

Neoclassical capitalist economics: the prevailing economic system that
presumes private ownership of the means of production,
including labor, land, and capital; individuals rationally pursue

their self-interest; self-interest is equivalent to private gain;
pursuit of self-interest provides the motive force for the market;
scarce resources are allocated most efficiently by responding to
aggregate demand; and competition over resources leads private
interest to serve the public welfare

Network: a web of interconnected and interrelated non-linear systems

New World Order: the outcome (or set of emergent properties) of

Bahá'í resource development characterized by a dynamic,
balanced coherence between material and spiritual development,
individual spiritual transformation, community and institutional
maturation, a global commonwealth, equitable economic
reorganization, equality of women and men, moderation in all
endeavors, and sustainable developmentalism and environmental
stewardship

Open systems: systems that exchange material, information, and
energy with the environment across a boundary

Paradigm: the framework of beliefs through which cultures understand
the world and their relationship with it

Pattern of organization: an abstract description of the configuration of relationships among the system's components and processes of production that determines the system's essential characteristics and characterizes the system as belonging to a particular class

Positivism: an approach to scientific inquiry that ontologically assumes a universal, knowable, decontextualized, material reality and epistemologically assumes that this reality can be discovered through value-free, dualistic, objective reductionism

Praxis: the integration of theory and practice

Prayer: communication, association, connection, and communion with the Creative Spirit

Progressive revelation: the idea that religious truth is relative, that revelation is a continuous and progressive process, and that the different messages of the Manifestations of the Creative Spirit correspond with successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society

Religion: those systems of belief, ritual, institutional life, spiritual aspiration, and ethical orientation which are premised on an

understanding of human beings as other or more than simply their social or physical identities; those institutions and activities that foster the spiritual reconnection between people and the Creative Spirit

Religious studies: the positivistic study of human transcendence

Resource development: the dynamic, systemic interaction between natural resources and human theory and practice; the process that connects 'what is' with 'what will be' in the context of environmental stewardship and developmentalism

Scholar-practitioner: one whose work integrates scholarship and practice

Self-bounded system: a system having a boundary that specifies the domain of the system's operations, defines the system as a unit, and yet is an integral part of the system

Self-generating system: a system that produces all of its components, including those of the boundary, by processes within the system

Self-organizing system: a system that acquires the ability to regulate itself with feedback loops generated by networks of

communication

Self-perpetuating system: a system that continually replaces all its components with its own processes of transformation

Shoghi Effendi: the grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who in his will and testament appointed Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith; he was succeeded as leader of the Faith, in turn, by the Universal House of Justice

Soft systems: poorly structured systems that are difficult to attach numbers to and have human beings as principal components

Spirit: animating force(s) distinct from, yet interacting with, material and intellectual existence

Spiritual: of, relating to, consisting of, or having the nature of spirit

Spiritually-inspired resource development: the dynamic, systemic interaction between spirit, natural resources, and human theory and practice. It is an example of the 'process' between 'what is' and 'what could be' in the context of environmental stewardship and developmentalism.

Stewardship: benevolent management

Structure: the way in which the physical components of a system are related to each other; in living systems, the physical embodiment of the system's pattern of organization

Structural coupling: the connections and recurrent interactions of a system with its environment that trigger changes in the system

Sustainable development: participatory paths to human progress that equitably meet the holistic, long term aspirations of the present generation without either compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs or threatening short and long term, local and global ecological stability

Sustainable resource development: resource development on equal and just terms that does not threaten ecological stability or compromise the development of present and future generations

System: a complex whole with interrelated, interacting, and interdependent components

Systemic: of or relating to the interrelated, interacting, and interdependent components of a complex whole

Theology: the study of the nature of transcendent reality from the

perspective of members of a particular spiritual tradition

Theory: knowledge, abstract thinking, or a set of assumptions

Universal House of Justice: the democratically-elected global governing body of the Bahá'í Faith

Vitalism: the belief that some non-physical entity or force (e.g., the Creative Spirit) creates and supports life

'What is': the contemporary state of the world

'What will be': the future state of the world

'What could be': future, improved versions of 'what is'

Word of God: the teachings of the Creative Spirit

World view: the framework of beliefs through which individuals understand the world and their relationship with it

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