

## A New Paradigm of Social Analysis

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*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 sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth.* (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets, p. 96)

To a Bahá'í youth requesting advice about what subjects he should study with a view to future academic teaching, Shoghi Effendi suggested either "History, Economics or Sociology, as these are fields in which Bahá'ís not only take great interest but also cover subjects which our teachings cast an entirely new light upon." (Lights of Guidance, p 516, #1406)

In this paper I want to discuss the "new light" cast by the Bahá'í teachings upon human society. This light amounts to a new paradigm of social analysis, a key unlocking the door to a new sociology. This paradigm has five principles making up its essential structure as I presently see it. These principles enable us to analyze the process of global social change.

I say new sociology because scholars of the past centuries have elaborated a material sociology, or political economy, which understands man and society as a complex of economic and social interactions. There are many perspectives within this kind of sociology, such as Marxist or liberal-democratic. But they all share certain assumptions about the real forces of change, assuming them to be material, and link these assumptions to the purpose of human existence, assuming it to be to improve material life. The Bahá'í writings elaborate a sociology of the spirit, or moral economy, which traces the development of man and society along spiritual lines. Such a sociology says that ennobling human relations is the key to social advancement because man's real goals are spiritual and ethical, not material. The Bahá'í writings say that collectively, this development is centered upon an evolving global Bahá'í community, including both the interactions between Bahá'í communities and the larger societies within which they participate.

Shoghi Effendi said that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh "feeds itself upon hidden springs of celestial strength" and "propagates itself by ways mysterious and utterly at variance with the standards accepted by the generality of mankind." (Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 51-52) Thus to fully grasp how these powerful spiritual forces work to create social growth by moral means we are going to need new concepts of change and a new vocabulary to communicate them. The discussion that follows is only my own first try.<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental assumption of this paradigm of analysis is that the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the source of that ferment now occurring within every human mind and society. His teachings pivot on the principle of the Oneness of Mankind. (Shoghi Effendi, World Order, p. 52) The supreme mission of His Revelation is to bring about the "organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations." (Shoghi Effendi, World Order, p. 63)

Most thinking people now understand that a new order of the ages favoring no nation and attached to no religious tradition is being born. But spiritual sociology says that this new

<sup>1</sup> Shoghi Effendi's writings are the most comprehensive analysis so far of the effect of these spiritual forces on society. See also Peter Khan, "The Spiritual Axis", Baha'i News, Wilmette, May 1983. General Systems Theory is one powerful attempt to develop such concepts and vocabulary.

order does not originate with the strivings of man but from the will of God, expressed as divine revelation, which human strivings respond to. For spiritual sociology the real clash of values is not between different cultural traditions but between every cultural tradition and the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh which came into the world one hundred fifty years ago.

Thus it is humanity's various responses to God's latest revelation that have shaped the course of modern history and such behaviors will continue to largely determine mankind's future. This was Shoghi Effendi's fixed and unalterable assumption, and from it he discerned at work behind the clash the Major and Minor Plans of God structuring it.<sup>2</sup>

The Major Plan, he said, is tearing down all those obstacles to human unity such as materialism, nationalism, and militarism which have grown into human thought and practice. By yanking these psychological and institutional props holding up every society out from under people it forces them to acknowledge the bankruptcy of human thought and practice and prepares them to turn to the one Vision and Order which can salvage the earth and its peoples. Though primarily a destructive force this plan has still some building left to accomplish. God alone controls it.

The Minor Plan, he explained, is about building up the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. This Order unfolds rationally and is entirely in the hands of the Bahá'ís.

These plans though unfolding separately, are really inseparable because events taking place within one are synchronized by reciprocal relations with those occurring in the other. The reciprocal relations of the Plans is this: the destructive passage of the Major Plan clears the way for the developments of the Minor Plan, while these same developments within the Minor Plan, which are the greater integration of the global Bahá'í Community, add to the accelerating drive toward full organic unity which is the building aspect of the Major Plan. Hence the integration of the Bahá'í Community foreshadows new and greater integrations of humankind. I'll return to this point later. But the key relation to grasp is that the breakdown of the old order is due to the development of the new order, as Bahá'u'lláh indicated when He wrote:

*The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System-- the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.*  
(Bahá'u'lláh, *Cleanings*:136)

This idea of synchronized reciprocal relations between the plans of God, between events in the world and events in the Bahá'í community, is our first and most important principle. Creating the oneness of mankind is a process of lifting the entire species not just psychologically but socially. Or better, humanity is lifted psychologically because it is lifted socially. Thus, Shoghi Effendi claimed that in Bahá'u'lláh's writings the principle of the Oneness of Mankind, "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." Such growth "implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced." (World:43)

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<sup>2</sup> For a brief but comprehensive description of these plans see: Universal House of Justice. Wellsprings of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust. 1969. p. 133-134

Now the institution adequate to embody the truth, demonstrate the validity and perpetuate the influence of this principle is the Bahá'í Administrative Order. And the cataclysmic organic change in the very structure of society which the world must undergo is exactly what the interactions of the Major and Minor Plans are accomplishing at this moment.

Before discussing society's organic change I want to take up the Order of Bahá'u'lláh and outline how it embodies, demonstrates and perpetuates the Oneness of Mankind. These three verbs indicate that this Order is not simply divine bureaucratic machinery. Thus completing it means more than simply getting this machinery in place and running. The second principle of the paradigm is that the Order of Bahá'u'lláh is an organic system. This means that it has both a material and a spiritual part which grow, respectively, according to organic and spiritual laws and produce material and spiritual changes within human beings.

Institutions embody values. Their functioning reflects patterns of thought. The interconnected institutions of the Bahá'í social order embody and demonstrate the principle of the Oneness of Mankind because everywhere in the world and at every level of Bahá'í society they function according to like practices, are constituted by the same set of procedures, and make and disperse decisions through similar means. Like every cell and organ of the human body, every Bahá'í institution is itself the groundplan of the complete order, each a kind of holographic image of the whole. Yet since each has its individuality the system has a means to produce continual modification of its secondary aspects so to respond innovatively to change.<sup>3</sup> Being the "organic structure of the Cause" their Administrative Order is, Bahá'ís feel, the growing social body of humankind whose soul is Revelation. The growth of this Order gradually unites mankind as one soul in one body. That is, it unites humanity's psychological and institutional life because both grow out of and reflect the same divine laws.

In terms of material effects, this unity of structure and harmony of function exhibited by Bahá'í institutions both enables and defines new kinds of collective action, allowing Bahá'ís to act like leavening through every level of society. Small Bahá'í communities influence by spiritual means developments within a locality. But when local actions are organized by national organs their effects combine to diffuse through the entire nation, and the changed nation in its turn exerts enough force to change the world. Moving upward from level to level within the Bahá'í Order there is a transfer, accumulation and reorganization of Divine energy, making an increasingly powerful spiritual force seeking to find greater social expression. And coming down from the global Bahá'í institutions flows the coordinating vision, the inspired guidance, and the detailed plans that link and combine every Bahá'í purpose with every other.

Hence, though this order is still only in embryonic form, yet since Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is a complete vision of man's collective future state, the world civilization it is to bring into existence lies structurally complete within the social order which embodies this vision, as the adult human body lies structurally complete in the human embryo. Therefore even in its present stage where it directly orders only the relations of small groups of human beings, this Divine embryo contains the relations which will, through the creative intellectual energies known as the Word of God, gradually effloresce into those coordinated and coordinating global institutions whose appearance will alone prove that humanity has become united in thought, action and aim. For this reason the Guardian also styled Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative

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<sup>3</sup> "Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh..." (Lights:p.3#10.)

Order "the nucleus and very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind." (World:144)

But Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order is also, the House of Justice said, the "fabric of the Kingdom of God on earth." (Wellsprings:134) By entering fully into this divine Order individuals obtain spiritual life. Thus the very shape and functioning of its institutions enables mankind to attain what Shoghi Effendi called "a universal salvation." (cited in Martin, Spiritual Revolution:9) Thus spiritually, too, the Bahá'í Administrative Order demonstrates and perpetuates the influence of the principle of the Oneness of Mankind. Being a system "the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed" entering into it changes us and society forever. It bestows immortality on both.

With this last thought in mind, let's examine the awful organic change we are experiencing and determine what part the individual Bahá'í and the Bahá'í community currently plays in this sea-change of humanity's collective life. In analyzing this change the other three principles of the paradigm will emerge.

When Bahá'u'lláh appeared in the mid-nineteenth century the world was already ordered, nations were related. He said the world needs to be reordered, nations need to be integrated. This is still true. Though the nations can fashion the machinery of world unity they cannot bring about humanity's complete integration because mankind must also change inwardly to have an enduring world unity. `Abdu'l-Bahá alluded to the extent of this inner change within mankind when He wrote that: "*in the character, the conduct and the manners of men, universal modifications will be made.*" (~Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections:156)

Bahá'ís believe that divine Revelation alone brings about universal modifications in human character, for Bahá'u'lláh said the object of every Revelation was to "*effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind.*" (World:25) Revelation uplifts us morally by releasing the spiritual abundance of the human heart. Even the social order of Bahá'u'lláh can function neither properly nor for long without new ways of thought and feeling, without a grounding in the divine laws that rule the higher nature of the souls of men. The individual remains the real agent of social change in the world, and his inner struggles to advance spiritually and morally give shape to those world-reordering forces loosed within society by Bahá'u'lláh. As Shoghi Effendi wrote:

One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. (Bahá'í Administration:66)

A global community requires global-minded people to live in it. Hence if Bahá'u'lláh's vision is of a mature society and His Order is the collective means to get there, it must too be a vision of a mature individuality and provide the means to create a species of mature individuals. The vision of maturity is summed up in this short counsel to every person: "*Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self.*" (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets:87)

The means to achieve this counsel is the Cause itself. Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

*Whoso ariseth to aid our Cause and summoneth to his assistance the hosts of a praiseworthy character and upright conduct the influence from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world.*" (Gleanings:287)

Self-change is every individual's contribution to civilization's advance. We should not take this change lightly for it enables a person to act righteously and "*one righteous act*", Bahá'u'lláh says, "*can elevate the dust, can tear every bond asunder, and has the power to restore the force that has spent itself and vanished.*" (Cleanings:286)

But for all the influence transformed individuals may have, it is the global Bahá'í community that holds the key to social advancement because it is the only effectively organized moral force in the world. Bahá'u'lláh's plan of social change begins with the transformation of the individual soul. From that inmost point there is movement out to the person's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. There he engages with those divine institutions that carry his individual impulse to nobler heights and diffuse its influence throughout the world. It is collectively that Bahá'ís evolve the inner form of civilization by elevating the moral standards of the human race. How exactly do they do this? What specific tasks must be done within every nation?

The inescapable fact is that creating a new organic and spiritual order is neither smooth nor swift because, as the Guardian wrote, Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation "inculcates principles irreconcilable with the accepted standards of the times". (World:55) Every society finds some of its accepted standards of value, such as race prejudice, are irreconcilable with one or more of Bahá'u'lláh's principles, as many of its institutional practices, such as legalized discrimination on the basis of race, stand in woeful contrast to His Divine Economy.

What can't be reconciled with Bahá'u'lláh's principles of social organization is an outer obstacle to the realization of the Oneness of Mankind and such obstacles are succumbing to the passage of God's Major Plan. But acceptance of any social inequality as natural or right is or leads to prejudice and every prejudice is an inner barrier obstructing the unity of mankind. Prejudices are spiritual diseases which must be healed. This is especially the Bahá'ís work since they, in Bahá'u'lláh's words, "*have been empowered to administer the infallible remedy for all the ills that afflict the children of men.*" (Cleanings:183)

The principle of all forms of healing is to read the disease for the cure. The spiritual healing of nations is no exception. The Divine Physician, or `Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi, or today the House of Justice read a nation's illness to state its cure. They identify those prejudicial thoughts and feelings and discriminatory behaviors that have become entangled within a national psyche and to which its people have become habituated. The cure is then given to the Bahá'í community in the form of specific moral tasks necessary to accomplish to heal the society's spiritual sickness. Hence they are neither arbitrary tasks nor tasks arbitrarily given. The goal of this work is to expand the nation's character until it manifests in its own unique configuration of human qualities the Oneness of Mankind -- for a truly unified world is not a unity by uniformity, but a unity "infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units." (World:43) Lets look at some examples of cures given to Bahá'í communities.

In the "Tablet of the World"<sup>4</sup> Bahá'u'lláh diagnosed the four major evils afflicting the Persia of His day as: the shedding of blood, the burning of books, the shunning the followers of other religions, and the extermination of other communities and groups. Yet, among His faithful, He says:

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<sup>4</sup> Bahá'u'lláh. Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitab-i-Aqdas. p. 81-97

*through the strengthening grace and potency of the Word of God these four barriers have been demolished, these clear injunctions have been obliterated from the Tablet and brutal dispositions have been transmuted into spiritual attributes. (Tablets:91)*

'Abdu'l-Bahá followed His Father's lead with that longer analysis of Persia we know as The Secret of Divine Civilization. The reforms he suggested there are still being carried out. Shoghi Effendi brilliantly analyzed America in The Advent of Divine Justice. In that book the Guardian told the Bahá'ís that in relation to American society the Bahá'ís must acquire certain "distinctive qualities and characteristics". The most important of these qualities were:

. . . a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color. (Advent:18)

The rectitude of conduct he had in mind would offer "a striking contrast to the deceitfulness and corruption that characterize the political life of the nation and of the parties and factions that compose it." The holiness and chastity he wanted them to manifest was "diametrically opposed to the moral laxity and licentiousness which defile the character of a not inconsiderable proportion of its citizens." The inter-racial fellowship he asked them to create must be "completely purged from the curse of racial prejudice which stigmatizes the vast majority of its people." (Advent:34)

Another example is Japan. Here we must piece together the analysis ourselves. But there seem to be three main tasks the Bahá'í community of Japan must fulfill in order to rectify the three main evils of the national character. These tasks are: to revive "*the dead body*" (Sims, Japan:31) of Japan with the "*fire of the love of God*" (Japan:60); to overcome Japan's extreme parochialism of thought by uniting the entire Asian/Pacific region into one spiritual region by strengthening the spiritual axis. (Japan:72) Lastly, the Bahá'ís of Japan are charged to revolutionize Japanese closed social relations by being in the forefront of establishing the oneness and wholeness of human relations, the guarantee of the Lesser Peace.<sup>5</sup>

This long discussion allows me to state the third principle of the paradigm in this way: In the advancement of humanity toward a united world, the Bahá'í community in every country must accept the moral challenges the realization of the Oneness of Mankind places upon their nation, and by meeting these challenges within itself act as a catalyst initiating an expansion in their nation's character. By removing within their own individual and collective life the deficiencies they inherit from their nation and replacing them with those universal virtues animating the heart and energizing the very fibers of Bahá'í society, Bahá'í communities advance nations along their particular paths of maturation until all mankind takes on universal qualities and attributes. Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary, put the principle this way.

The Bahá'ís are the leaven of God, which must leaven the lump of their nation. In direct ratio to their success will be the protection vouchsafed, not only to them but to their country. (The Individual and Teaching:40)

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<sup>5</sup> From the Universal House of Justice to the Baha'is of Japan: Ridvan 1986.

Now this general principle takes on more specific form. Within the organic change of present day society toward a new integrated social order, the Bahá'í writings assign the greatest missions and most far-reaching tasks to the most powerful and successful of nations in the passing order. This seems a natural enough choice since their social success equips them materially and intellectually to do it. But Shoghi Effendi states that these nations are actually chosen not because of their social development but because of their moral underdevelopment.<sup>6</sup> That is to say, if the new order "upsets the world's equilibrium" because it "inculcates principles irreconcilable with the accepted standards of the times", then this irreconcilability must show up most clearly when these principles attempt to find expression within those powerful nations, such as the United States, Japan, Germany, Australia and Canada, which set these accepted standards. The organic change in the structure of present-day society turns on our fourth, and perhaps most interesting, principle which I call the principle of inversion. That means that nations with great missions to fulfill and supreme tasks to undertake are given these precisely because among all nations they in their present form exemplify least the moral characteristics that mankind must come to manifest. They are socially the most fit but morally the least fit of nations to enter the new order. The moral deficiencies of great nations are the largest obstacles in the way of fashioning a new global order because they are the best means of preserving the old one. Hence their changes must go deepest, must be the most agonizing, and yet will have the greatest effect upon the life of other peoples.

Kneading the principles of the new order into a national character antipathetic to them on so many points is primarily the unhappy job of the national Bahá'í community, because they are the agent of that new order. Hence this principle of inversion must get worked out within the global Bahá'í community first. Bahá'í communities within great nations lead the moral transformation of the world not because they are best prepared for it, but because the character they've inherited from their nation makes them the least prepared. Hence the power of Bahá'u'llah can be revealed most clearly in their changes.<sup>7</sup> Yet the power of their nation gives them the means to diffuse the changes they have wrought upon themselves across the earth.

The path of redemption each nation must take stems from the specific afflictions it must remedy. But the spiritual revolution has been working itself out in every land. The House of Justice said: "A Bahá'í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will...exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in human evolution."<sup>8</sup> This promise has many implications. I'll discuss one. Here we pick up the thread left dangling at the start and discuss the fifth principle: that the unities of the Faith both foreshadow the integrations of humanity and bring a greater disruption into the world's equilibrium.

The growth of the Faith produces two effects in the world. First, as the Order of Bahá'u'llah spreads out it releases into the world the energy for mankind to accomplish a greater social integration and, also, it provides within its own new forms of growth the

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<sup>6</sup> See The Advent of Divine Justice:15.

<sup>7</sup> See The Advent of Divine Justice:15.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from the message from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the United States: Ridvan 1984.

integrative pattern the world will erect. The social unities that an evolving Faith fashions upon every level of its global society are, then, both the pattern of the next stage of world unification and its crucial first step, for the unfolding Faith of God is the pattern of world order. For example, the process of building a world order will pass through the transitional stage of regional unities. These material bridges connecting nation states, such as free trade zones or, as in Europe, supra-national political associations, are now erecting the administrative machinery that can lead to the creation of a world super-state. But during the Bahá'í Ten Year World Crusade (1953-1963), which placed the globe within a single administrative order for the first time in human history, Shoghi Effendi established the first transitional Bahá'í Regional Spiritual Assemblies whose Bahá'í administrative jurisdiction matched nearly perfectly the geographical borders of these regions. Each of these regions has an economic leader, and it is no coincidence that the Bahá'í communities in these leading nations all have larger than national spiritual destinies.<sup>9</sup> These Bahá'í communities coordinate the spiritual energy of their region. They share certain conditions: they were all brought into being by the hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; He marked out great spiritual destinies for them; their nations are all rich.

But the second effect of the growth of Bahá'u'lláh's Order is to provoke a violent self-destructive reaction from the forces opposing world integration. These dark forces are concentrated most heavily in those same lands. This violent reaction has rebounded upon its perpetrators, however, to become the source of the destructive power of the Major Plan of God. This opposition began with the Shí'ah denial of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. But their opposition only demolished themselves. The Major Plan then crushed Sunni opposition, picked up lethal force from the King's rejection of Bahá'u'lláh's summons, crashed through two world wars, and has entered its final world-devouring stage with the promulgation of The Promise of World Peace. Bahá'u'lláh said His divine Order upsets the equilibrium of the world and revolutionizes its ordered life. This is inevitable. But the fact that this is so violently destructive is due to human perversity.

Let's sum up what has been said of this new paradigm. Its fundamental assumption is that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh will establish the organic and spiritual oneness of Mankind. Humanity has responded to this announcement, which has upset its psychological equilibrium and reordered its social life, and these responses have created two plans of God. These plans have reciprocal relations which are synchronized. This is our first principle. The Major Plan is bringing about the first stages of the organic unity of humanity, the Minor Plan the later stages, for, organically, the Order of Bahá'u'lláh is the nucleus and pattern of a new order of the ages. But the Minor's real goal is to create humanity's spiritual unity through the spiritual aspect of Bahá'u'lláh's Order. This is our second principle. The third principle is that the Bahá'í Community in every land morally advances civilization by remedying the spiritual

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<sup>9</sup> About the United States 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "America will lead all nations spiritually." (Advent:72) Shoghi Effendi called America "the standard-bearer of the New World Order." (Advent:16) About Japan 'Abdu'l-Bahá predicted that: "Japan with . . . (another country) . . . will take the lead in the spiritual re-awakening of the peoples and nations that the world will soon witness." (Japan:58) Concerning Germany He wrote: "The Cause of God will make great progress in Germany. It will surpass other regions." (from an unpublished compilation on Europe printed by The Continental Board of Counsellors in Europe. Shoghi Effendi indicated that by virtue of Germany's "spiritual potentialities and geographical situation" it was destined to take the leading role in Europe. (Advent:2-3).



diseases within its nation's character. This leads to our fourth principle, the principle of inversion, which is that within the community of nations the more materially advanced a nation is the more morally underdeveloped it is. Because of this, the Bahá'ís of these leading nations have currently larger spiritual responsibilities. The fifth principle is that greater integration of the global Bahá'í community foreshadows the larger integrations of humanity, yet these same integrations of the Bahá'í community also throw the world into greater confusion as its displaces further the old order. This final principle brings out the reciprocal relations of the plans.

These have been admittedly broad brushstrokes. They have only outlined not proved this new paradigm of social analysis that Shoghi Effendi fashioned. Much more needs to be done for this to happen.

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