

Relationships with Political and Religious Organizations

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

In a world fraught with problems and difficulties it is natural and normal for people to be moved to organize themselves in favor of, or in opposition to, certain social issues. Movements are created, social and political organizations are founded, protests, marches, referendums, measures and campaigns are organized to fix the wrongs or protect the rights of the people.

It is common for Bahá'ís to feel passionate about certain social wrongs or zealous over specific rights and freedoms, causing us to engage in the betterment of local, national or international conditions. Since Bahá'ís have very high ideals and a vision of how things *could* be that is beyond the expectations of most, they are often targeted for membership or recruited by various groups or political organizations.

These passions, incited by various social conditions, raise questions as to how, with whom, and to what degree should Bahá'ís get involved in the issues and organizations around them. With whom can we associate? With whom can we affiliate? Is it acceptable for Bahá'ís to march on a given issue? Should we be involved in protests? If I like a certain political party's philosophy may I join that party? Some churches believe so much like us; may I attend their services?

Such questions confront the individual Bahá'í on a daily basis. The following study helps the believer identify certain Bahá'í principles that should be employed when trying to answer questions about proper relationships with other organized groups.



Continental Bahá'í House of Worship for the Pacific Islands, near Apia, Western Samoa

OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon...*

Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding appropriate relationships for Bahá'ís with social or political organizations and other religious groups.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*

To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:

 - A. Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then...
 - B. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **appropriate relationships for Bahá'ís with social or political organizations and other religious groups**.

QUOTATIONS: *Within the meadows of Thy nearness...*

1. ...my first admonition is this: Associate most kindly with all; be as one family; pursue this same pathway. Let your intentions be one that your love may permeate and affect the hearts of others so that they may grow to love each other and all attain to this condition of oneness.

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 336-37)

admonition: counsel or warning against fault or oversight
affect: influence the feelings of
attain: succeed in achieving
associate: be closely connected in common interest and activities
condition: set of circumstances
intentions: aims or plans

kindly: with a sympathetic, generous, tenderhearted, gentle and loving nature
one: a single unit
oneness: unity, harmony, and agreement of mind, feeling, and purpose
pathway: way of life or course of action
permeate: penetrate and spread through
pursue: proceed eagerly along

2. Formal affiliation with and acceptance of membership in organizations whose programs or policies are not wholly reconcilable with the Teachings is not permissible to the friends.

(The Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, p. 54, ¶192)

acceptance: receiving willingly and favorably
affiliation: closely connected as a joined member
formal: use of forms, rules or ceremony [for being]
friends: fellow Bahá'ís
membership in: enrollment or belonging as a person [to]
organizations: systematically arranged groups of people
permissible: anything that may be allowed or permitted

policies: courses of action embracing general goals and acceptable procedures
programs: plans or systems under which action may be taken towards a goal
reconcilable: able to be brought into agreement or harmony; compatible
Teachings: specific beliefs, concepts, perceptions, principles, standards, morals, ideals and truths taught [in the Bahá'í Faith]
wholly: to the fullest extent; completely

3. ...no loyal believer should under any circumstances commit himself in any way to a political program or policy formulated and upheld by a political party. For affiliation with such a party necessarily entails repudiation of some principles and teachings of the Cause, or partial recognition of some of its fundamental verities. The friends should, therefore, keep aloof from party politics.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, p. 444, ¶1446)

affiliation: being closely connected as a joined member
aloof: removed or distant either physically or in interest
Cause: Bahá'í Faith
circumstances: accompanying events and conditions
commit: obligate, pledge, or promise
entails: involves as a result
formulated: expressed in a systematic way or statement
friends: fellow Bahá'ís
fundamental: basic and essential
loyal: faithful and true
necessarily: as a logical result or consequence; inevitably; unavoidably
partial: incomplete or fractional
party: group(s) of persons organized for the purpose of promoting shared theories and ↗

principles
policy: course of action embracing general goals and acceptable procedures
political: organization or action of individuals or parties that attempt to control the appointments, decisions or elections of those who manage the affairs of government
politics: [that] attempt to control the appointments, decisions or elections of those who manage the affairs of government
principles: basic governing truths or standards
program: plan or system under which action may be taken toward a goal
recognition: admission to the truth or validity
repudiation: rejection as untrue or unjust; denial
teachings: specific beliefs, concepts, perceptions, principles, standards, morals, ideals and truths
upheld: aided by approval or encouragement
verities: truths and facts

4. Very much the same reasons motivate us in withdrawing from all political movements, however close some of their ideals may be to ours. We Bahá'ís are *one* the world-over, we are seeking to build up a New World Order, Divine in origin. How can we do this if every Bahá'í is a member of a different political party — some of them diametrically opposed to each other? Where is our unity then? We would be divided because of politics, against ourselves, and this is the opposite of our purpose.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Light of Divine Guidance*, A Bahá'í Reference File, p. 123)

diametrically: completely opposite and adversely
divided: disunited in opinion and interest
Divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
ideals: standards of perfection or moral excellence
member: person who belongs to an association
motivate: stimulate active interest in
movements: activities of a person or group of persons
New World Order: future “Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá'í Faith.” (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 3-4)
one: a single unit
opposed: set to resist or be antagonistic
opposite: position or nature completely different
origin: the source of its beginning

party: group of persons organized for the purpose of promoting shared theories and principles
political: organization or action of individuals or parties that attempt to control the appointment or decisions of those who manage the affairs of government
politics: the attempts to control the appointments, decisions or elections of those who manage the affairs of government
purpose: main reason for existing
unity: spiritual condition of harmony, agreement, peace and accord, free of conflict, dissension, contention and strife
withdrawing: removing oneself [from] participation and affiliation

5. ...there is no Christian church today [or, in principle, denomination of any Religion] whose dogmas we, as Bahá'ís, can truthfully say we accept in their entirety — therefore to remain a member of the Church is not proper for us, for we do so under false pretences. We should, therefore, withdraw from our churches but continue to associate, if we wish to, with the church members and ministers.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, p. 159, ¶530)

accept: agree with
associate: be closely connected in common interest and activities
dogmas: authoritative formal doctrines or body of doctrines stating beliefs or principles
entirety: complete state
false pretences: untrue and deceitful representation of facts or events
member(s): person(s) who belong(s) to the ↗

association
ministers: ones authorized or licensed to conduct Christian services
proper: in conformity with suitable standards
remain: stay with the same group [as]
truthfully: with conformity to fact or reality
withdraw: remove oneself from participation in membership

6. ...the Guardian does not see how Bahá'í participation with other organizations and religious bodies in a non-political meeting to promote civic unity and welfare along some line, can be considered political. Much as the friends must guard against in any way ever seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings...

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, p. 535, ¶1815)

accord: agreement and conformity
bodies: groups of individuals functioning as a unit
Cause: Bahá'í Faith
civic: citizen or city affairs, not including military or ecclesiastical [in their]
committees: bodies of persons appointed or elected to consider, investigate, take action upon, and to report, concerning some matter to those to whom they are obligated
conferences: meetings of two or more persons discussing matters of common concern
considered: thought of as
designed: planned with the intention
entire: whole or complete
extreme: opposite position
friends: Bahá'ís
Guardian: One appointed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament to carry on into the future the function of authoritative interpretation of the Sacred Writings and the care and protection of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi.
identify: consider combining or uniting

organizations: systematically arranged groups of people
participation: partaking in common
party: group of persons organized for the purpose of promoting shared theories and principles
political: organization or action of individuals or parties that attempt to control the appointment or decisions of those who manage the affairs of government
progressive: making use of or interested in new ideas, findings, or opportunities; advancing
promote: further or advance
seeming: appearing as though
teachings: specific beliefs, concepts, perceptions, principles, standards, morals, ideals and truths taught [in the Bahá'í Faith]
unity: heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance
welfare: well-being in respect to prosperity, happiness, and good fortune

7. There should be no confusion between the terms affiliation and association. While affiliation with ecclesiastical organizations is not permissible, association with them should not only be tolerated but even encouraged. There is no better way to demonstrate the universality of the Cause than this. Bahá'u'lláh indeed, urges His followers to consort with all religions and nations with utmost, friendliness and love. This constitutes the very spirit of His message to mankind.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, pp. 421-22, ¶1386)

affiliation: closely connected as a joined member
association: joint action in common interests or activities
Cause: Bahá'í Faith
confusion: failure to tell the difference
consort: harmoniously associate or keep company
constitutes: makes up or forms
demonstrate: illustrate and explain, especially with examples
ecclesiastical: the formal organization of a religion, or church related

encouraged: supported and fostered
friendliness: kindly interest and goodwill
indeed: with emphasis
organizations: systematically arranged groups of people
permissible: anything that may be allowed or permitted
tolerated: put up with; allowed
universality: all-inclusive quality or state
urges: advocates or puts pressure on
utmost: the greatest or highest degree of

SHARING EXERCISE: *A breath from the spirit of inspiration...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and what spiritual feelings it enkindled. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

It made me feel _____

Explain _____

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. The Universal House of Justice wrote: "Formal affiliation with and acceptance of membership in organizations whose programs or policies are not wholly reconcilable with the Teachings is not permissible to the friends." What does reconcilable mean? _____
A. Can you think of an organization, other than a political party or religious group, that Bahá'ís **could** join? _____
B. Can you think of an organization, other than a political party or religious group, that Bahá'ís **should not** join? _____
2. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian: "...we, as Bahá'ís, must not have any affiliations with churches or political parties. But he feels certain that when you meditate on this matter you yourselves will see the wisdom of it."¹ What do you think is the wisdom of this basic Bahá'í teaching? _____

3. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated: "Our party is God's party; we do not belong to any party."² When Bahá'ís register to vote in city, state, or national elections they should register as
 a. democrats. d. independents.
 b. non-partisan. e. members of God's party.
 c. republicans. f. other _____
4. We are advised by Bahá'u'lláh to "*Consort ye then with the followers of all religions.*"² Does "*consort*" suggest we "associate" or "affiliate" with people of other religious backgrounds?
 a. associate
 b. affiliate

Continued on next page...

¹ *Lights of Guidance*, A Bahá'í Reference File, p. 159, ¶530

² *Lights of Guidance*, A Bahá'í Reference File, p. 445, ¶1449

² *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 47

5. Which five of the following are true? (not all answers are found in the quotations or introduction)
- a. Holding membership in any other religion is not acceptable for Bahá'ís.
 - b. Bahá'ís must give up all relationships to clergymen and politicians.
 - c. A Bahá'í cannot be a minister, pastor or clergyman for another religion.
 - d. Bahá'ís cannot be involved in community service activities with other religious groups.
 - e. Bahá'ís can attend worship services of other religions.
 - f. Bahá'ís cannot run for public office as a representative of a party.
 - g. Bahá'ís risk losing sacred Bahá'í rights and privileges if they do not eventually give up membership in ecclesiastical organizations or political parties.
6. The Guardian wrote: “Such a rectitude of conduct must ... characterize the attitude of every loyal believer towards nonacceptance of political posts, nonidentification with political parties, nonparticipation in political controversies, and nonmembership in political organizations and ecclesiastical institutions.”¹ How might “nonparticipation in political controversies” play out in your day-to-day life? _____

7. Bahá'ís can work for the government, but not hold a political post. They can work in government to promote programs and policies consistent with the Bahá'í teachings, but not those associated specifically with a political party. Bahá'ís can hold public office, but cannot campaign for civic or governmental positions. Bahá'ís can vote for persons, and on issues, but cannot register themselves with any political party. Which of the following are true?
- a. Bahá'ís just don't like parties!
 - b. Party politics promotes disunity, the very opposite of what the Bahá'ís are working for.
 - c. Bahá'ís do not campaign for positions as it promotes egoism and pride, which are detrimental to spiritual development.
 - d. “Non-involvement in politics” essentially means Bahá'ís avoid promoting disunity.

APPLICATION: Showing forth divine light...

Facilitator

Read through #1 together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action in #2. (these are not shared) When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

1. IMAGINING THE POSSIBILITIES: *Visions of radiant lights...*

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action....” Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: “**One could**....” Suggest as many ideas as you want.

2. DECIDING ACTION: *Mirroring forth a beam of light...*

From your experience in this study class on Relationships with Political and Religious Organizations, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. **I will make conscious efforts to...** _____

My next step will be... _____

¹ *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 26

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

On the subject of politics, from the Universal House of Justice.

7 July 1976

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice received your letter of May 15 conveying your thoughts on the need for Bahá'ís to become involved as may be necessary in political affairs and to participate in activities aimed at the eradication of injustice. The sincerity which prompted you to write such a letter and to candidly express your sentiments deeply touched the Universal House of Justice. We have been asked to convey its comments to you.

The Divine Physician's Remedy

You ask if silence on the part of Bahá'ís will not allow chaos and human humiliation to be a permanent feature on earth, and state that shunning of politics by the Bahá'ís can but weaken the freedom fighters of the world. When viewing the conditions of our society we see a world beset by ills and groaning under the burden of suffering. This suffering, Bahá'u'lláh has Himself testified, is because the "body" of the world, "*though created whole and perfect, has been afflicted, through diverse causes, with grave ills and maladies,*" and "*its sickness waxed more severe, as it fell under the treatment of unskilled physicians who have spurred on the steed of their worldly desires and have erred grievously.*" Bahá'u'lláh's statement in this passage concludes with the assertion that the "*sovereign remedy*" lies in turning and submitting to the "*skilled,*" the "*all-powerful,*" and "*inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth, and all else naught but error.*"¹

This Divine Physician has assured us in His writings that God is All-Seeing and All-Knowing and has willed to establish in this Day and among men His everlasting Kingdom. "*The whole earth,*" Bahá'u'lláh has stated, "*is now in a state of pregnancy. The day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings.*"² In order to achieve this purpose God sent us the spirit and message of the New Day through two successive Manifestations,³ both of Whom the generality of mankind have rejected, and have, alas, preferred to continue in their own blindness and perversity. Commenting on such a world spectacle, Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "*Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.*" "*After a time,*" He further wrote, "*all the governments on earth will change. Oppression will envelop the world. And following a universal convulsion, the sun of justice will rise from the horizon of the unseen realm.*"⁴

When we turn to His other writings to learn more of His warning that this "*present-day order*" is to be "*rolled up,*" we read statements and predictions such as these: "*The time for the destruction of the world and its people hath arrived.*" "*The hour is approaching when the most great convulsion will have appeared.*" "*The promised day is come, the day when tormenting trials will have surged above your heads, and beneath your feet, saying: 'Taste ye what your hands have wrought!'*" "*Soon shall the blasts of His chastisement beat upon you and the dust of hell enshroud you.*" "*And when the*

¹ *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 39-40; *Gleaning from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 254-55.

² *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 169.

³ Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb.

⁴ Quoted in *The Promised Day is Come*, pp. 116-17.

*appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake.” “The day is approaching when its [civilization’s] flame will devour the cities, when the Tongue of Grandeur will proclaim: ‘The Kingdom is God’s, the Almighty, the All-Praised!’” “The day is approaching when the wrathful anger of the Almighty will have taken hold of them. He, verily, is the Omnipotent, the All-Subduing, the Most Powerful. He shall cleanse the earth from the defilement of their corruption, and shall give it for an heritage unto such of His servants as are nigh unto Him.”*⁵

The Hand of Providence at Work

From the above it becomes clear that the Hand of Providence is at work, and is engaged in fulfilling God’s purpose for mankind in this Age. “God’s purpose,” Shoghi Effendi assures us, “is none other than to usher in, in ways He alone can bring about, and the full significance of which He alone can fathom, the Great, the Golden Age of a long-divided, a long-afflicted humanity. Its present state, indeed even its immediate future, is dark, distressingly dark. Its distant future, however, is radiant, gloriously radiant—so radiant that no eye can visualize it.”⁶

Let us consider the First World War, which Shoghi Effendi has described in his writings as “the first stage in a titanic convulsion long predicted by Bahá’u’lláh.”⁷ Although it ended outwardly in a Treaty of Peace, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remarked: “‘Peace! Peace!’ the lips of potentates and peoples unceasingly proclaim, whereas the fire of unquenched hatreds still smolders in their hearts.” And then in 1920, He wrote: “The ills from which the world now suffers will multiply; the gloom which envelops it will deepen.” And again: “another war, fiercer than the last, will assuredly break out.”⁸ After this Second World War broke out in 1939, Shoghi Effendi called it a “tempest, unprecedented in its violence,” and the “great and mighty wind of God invading the remotest and fairest regions of the earth.” After the termination of the War and the creation of the United Nations, the Guardian wrote in 1948, anticipating “still more violent convulsions” and referred to the “wings of yet another conflict” destined to “darken the international Horizon.”⁹ And finally in his last Ridván Message of April 1957, he left for posterity the following analysis of world conditions in the light of the prophecies and predictions recorded in the writings of the Faith:

Indeed, as we gaze in retrospect beyond the immediate past, and survey, in however cursory a manner, the vicissitudes afflicting an increasingly tormented society, and recall the strains and stresses to which the fabric of a dying Order has been increasingly subjected, we cannot but marvel at the sharp contrast presented, on the one hand, by the accumulated evidences of the orderly unfoldment, and the uninterrupted multiplication of the agencies, of an Administrative Order designed to be the harbinger of a world civilization, and, on the other, by the ominous manifestations of acute political conflict, of social unrest, of racial animosity, of class antagonism, of immorality and of irreligion, proclaiming, in no uncertain terms, the corruption and obsolescence of the institutions of a bankrupt Order.

Against the background of these afflictive disturbances—the turmoil and tribulations of a travailing age—we may well ponder the portentous prophecies uttered well-nigh four score years ago, by the Author of our Faith, as well as the dire predictions made by Him Who is the unerring Interpreter of His teachings, all foreshadowing a universal commotion, of a scope and intensity unparalleled in the annals of mankind.

⁵ Quoted in *The Promised Day is Come*, pp. 3.4.

⁶ *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 116.

⁷ *God Passes By*, p. 305.

⁸ Quoted in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 29-30, 46.

⁹ *Citadel of Faith*, p. 58.

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 smoldering 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...¹⁰ Thus we see how the Divine Physician is both the "Judge" of mankind and its "Redeemer."¹¹

Noninterference in Political Affairs

This same Physician, addressing His followers, *"the beloved of the one true God,"* wrote: *"Forbear ye from concerning yourselves with the affairs of this world and all that pertaineth unto it, or from meddling with the activities of those who are its outward leaders. The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath bestowed the government of the earth upon the kings. To none is given the right to act in any manner that would run counter to the considered views of them who are in authority."*¹²

In another Tablet He laid on His followers the obligation to *"behave towards the government of the country in which they reside with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness."*¹³ `Abdu'l-Bahá reaffirmed the same principles. When in America He explained: "The essence of the Bahá'í spirit is that, in order to establish a better social order and economic condition, there must be allegiance to the laws and principles of government." And in a Tablet He referred to the "irrefutable command that the Blessed Perfection hath given" in His Tablets, namely, "that the believers must obey the kings with the utmost sincerity and fidelity, and He hath forbidden them [the believers] to interfere at all with political problems. He hath even prohibited the believers from discussing political affairs."¹⁴

And finally in His last Will and Testament He wrote: "We must obey and be the well-wishers of the government of the land ..."¹⁵

The Role of Bahá'ís in Today's World

We have also been asked to share with you at this juncture the following two extracts from letters written by the Universal House of Justice, and it is hoped these will help you in appreciating the significant and vital role Bahá'ís can and must play in the world today:

We are told by Shoghi Effendi that two great processes are at work in the world: the great Plan of God, tumultuous in its progress, working through mankind as a whole, tearing down barriers to world unity and forging humankind into a unified body in the fires of suffering and experience. This process will produce in God's due time, the Lesser Peace, the political

¹⁰ *Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957*, pp. 102-03.

¹¹ *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 4.

¹² *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 241.

¹³ *God Passes By*, p. 219.

¹⁴ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 238; *Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. 3, p. 498.

¹⁵ *Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 8.

unification of the world. Mankind at that time can be likened to a body that is unified but without life. The second process, the task of breathing life into this unified body — of creating true unity and spirituality culminating in the Most Great Peace — is that of the Bahá'ís, who are laboring consciously, with detailed instructions and continuing divine guidance, to erect the fabric of the Kingdom of God on earth, into which they call their fellowmen, thus conferring upon them eternal life.

The working out of God's Major Plan proceeds mysteriously in ways directed by Him alone, but the Minor Plan that He has given us to execute, as our part in His grand design for the redemption of mankind, is clearly delineated. It is to this work that we must devote all our energies, for there is no one else to do it...¹⁶

...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.

We should also remember that most people have no clear concept of the sort of world they wish to build, nor how to go about building it. Even those who are concerned to improve conditions are therefore reduced to combating every apparent evil that takes their attention. Willingness to fight against evils, whether in the form of conditions or embodied in evil men, has thus become for most people the touchstone by which they judge a person's moral worth. Bahá'ís, on the other hand, know the goal they are working towards and know what they must do, step by step, to attain it. Their whole energy is directed towards the building of the good, a good which has such a positive strength that in the face of it the multitude of evils — which are in essence negative — will fade away and be no more. To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils in the world is, to a Bahá'í, a vain waste of time and effort. His whole life is directed towards proclaiming the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, reviving the spiritual life of his fellowmen, uniting them in a divinely-created World Order, and then, as the Order grows in strength and influence, he will see the power of that Message transforming the whole human society and progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which have so long bedeviled the world.¹⁷

You have asked whether it is possible to have a World Federation when not all countries have attained their independence. The answer is in the negative. Both `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi likened the emergence of the American Republic and the unification of the “diversified and loosely related elements” of its “divided” community into one national entity, to the unity of the world and the incorporation of its federated units into “one coherent system.”¹⁸ Just as the American Constitution does not allow one state to be more autonomous than another, so must the nations of the world enjoy equal status in any form of World Federation. Indeed one of the “candles” of unity anticipated by `Abdu'l-Bahá is “unity in freedom.”¹⁹

Yet another question is whether it is morally right to remain silent when equality is being abused. The beloved Guardian has given us the following guidelines in letters written on his behalf. “Much as the friends must guard against in any way ever seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part with other

¹⁶ Letter dated 8 December 1967 to an individual. See message no. 55.

¹⁷ Letter dated 19 November 1974 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy. See message no. 151.

¹⁸ *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 165.

¹⁹ *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 165.

progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings—such as, for instance, better race relations.”²⁰

The Universal House of Justice hopes that you and your Bahá’í coworkers in that land will steep yourselves in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, endeavor to follow in your personal lives the noble standards set by Him, attract the multitudes to the radiance of His glorious Faith, and enable them to warm their hearts and ignite their souls with the flames of that undying Fire which “*blazeth and rageth in the world of creation.*”²¹

We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to assure you of its prayer on your behalf in the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

(Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age, pp. 330-35)

²⁰ Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 21 November 1948 to an individual.

²¹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Bahá’í Prayers*, p. 53, and *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 76.

ANSWERS: Affirming treasures...

1. reconcilable: able to be brought into agreement or harmony; compatible
 - a. all answers are valuable
 - b. all answers are valuable
2. all answers are valuable
3. b
4. a
5. a, c, e, f, and g
6. all answers are valuable
7. b, c, and d

This study guide and many others are available as free downloads at www.bahaessentials.com