The Prosperity of Humankind

A statement prepared by the Bahá'í International Community Office of Public Information, Haifa

To an extent unimaginable a decade ago, the ideal of world peace is taking on form and substance. Obstacles that long seemed immovable have collapsed in humanity's path; apparently irreconcilable conflicts have begun to surrender to processes of consultation and resolution; a willingness to counter military aggression through unified international action is emerging. The effect has been to awaken in both the masses of humanity and many world leaders a degree of hopefulness about the future of our planet that had been nearly extinguished.

Throughout the world, immense intellectual and spiritual energies are seeking expression, energies whose gathering pressure is in direct proportion to the frustrations of recent decades. Everywhere the signs multiply that the earth's peoples yearn for an end to conflict and to the suffering and ruin from which no land is any longer immune. These rising impulses for change must be seized upon and channeled into overcoming the remaining barriers that block realization of the age-old dream of global peace. The effort of will required for such a task cannot be summoned up merely by appeals for action against the countless ills afflicting society. It must be galvanized by a vision of human prosperity in the fullest sense of the term—an awakening to the possibilities of the spiritual and material well-being now brought within grasp. Its beneficiaries must be all of the planet's inhabitants, without distinction, without the imposition of conditions unrelated to the fundamental goals of such a reorganization of human affairs.

History has thus far recorded principally the experience of tribes, cultures, classes, and nations. With the physical unification of the planet in this century and acknowledgement of the interdependence of all who live on it, the history of humanity as one people is now beginning. The long, slow civilizing of human character has been a sporadic development, uneven and admittedly inequitable in the material advantages it has conferred. Nevertheless, endowed with the wealth of all the genetic and cultural diversity that has evolved through past ages, the earth's inhabitants are now challenged to draw on their collective inheritance to take up, consciously and systematically, the responsibility for the design of their future.

It is unrealistic to imagine that the vision of the next stage in the advancement of civilization can be formulated without a searching reexamination of the attitudes and assumptions that currently underlie approaches to social and economic development. At the most obvious level, such rethinking will have to address practical matters of policy, resource utilization, planning procedures, implementation methodologies, and organization. As it proceeds, however, fundamental issues will quickly emerge, related to the long-term goals to be pursued, the social structures required, the implications for development of principles of social justice, and the nature and role of knowledge in effecting enduring change. Indeed, such a reexamination will be driven to seek a broad consensus of understanding about human nature itself.

Two avenues of discussion open directly onto all of these issues, whether conceptual or practical, and it is along these two avenues that we wish to explore, in the pages that follow, the subject of a strategy of global development. The first is prevailing beliefs about the nature and purpose of the development process; the second is the roles assigned in it to the various protagonists.

The assumptions directing most of current development planning are essentially materialistic. That is to say, the purpose of development is defined in terms of the successful cultivation in all societies of those means for the achievement of material prosperity that have, through trial and error, already come to characterize certain regions of the world. Modifications in development discourse do indeed occur, accommodating differences of culture and political system and responding to the alarming dangers posed by environmental degradation. Yet the underlying materialistic assumptions remain essentially unchallenged.

As the twentieth century draws to a close, it is no longer possible to maintain the belief that the approach to social and economic development to which the materialistic conception of life has given rise is capable of meeting humanity's needs. Optimistic forecasts about the changes it would generate have vanished into the ever-widening abyss that separates the living standards of a small

and relatively diminishing minority of the world's inhabitants from the poverty experienced by the vast majority of the globe's population.

This unprecedented economic crisis, together with the social breakdown it has helped to engender, reflects a profound error of conception about human nature itself. For the levels of response elicited from human beings by the incentives of the prevailing order are not only inadequate, but seem almost irrelevant in the face of world events. We are being shown that, unless the development of society finds a purpose beyond the mere amelioration of material conditions, it will fail of attaining even these goals. That purpose must be sought in spiritual dimensions of life and motivation that transcend a constantly changing economic landscape and an artificially imposed division of human societies into "developed" and "developing".

As the purpose of development is being redefined, it will become necessary also to look again at assumptions about the appropriate roles to be played by the protagonists in the process. The crucial role of government, at whatever level, requires no elaboration. Future generations, however, 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 acknowledgement 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.

This approach is even endorsed, implicitly if not explicitly, by established religion. Burdened by traditions of paternalism, prevailing religious thought seems incapable of translating an expressed faith in the spiritual dimensions of human nature into confidence in humanity's collective capacity to transcend material conditions.

Such an attitude misses the significance of what is likely the most important social phenomenon of our time. If it is true that the governments of the world are striving through the medium of the United Nations system to construct a new global order, it is equally true that the peoples of the world are galvanized by this same vision. Their response has taken the form of a sudden efflorescence of countless movements and organizations of social change at local, regional, and international levels. Human rights, the advance of women, the social requirements of sustainable economic development, the overcoming of prejudices, the moral education of children, literacy, primary health care, and a host of other vital concerns each commands the urgent advocacy of organizations supported by growing numbers in every part of the globe.

This response of the world's people themselves to the crying needs of the age echoes the call that Bahá'u'lláh raised over a hundred years ago: "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements." The transformation in the way that great numbers of ordinary people are coming to see themselves—a change that is dramatically abrupt in the perspective of the history of civilization—raises fundamental questions about the role assigned to the general body of humanity in the planning of our planet's future.

I

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. Deceptively simple in popular discourse, the concept that humanity constitutes a single people presents fundamental challenges to the way that most of the institutions of contemporary society carry out their functions. Whether in the form of the adversarial structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, a glorification of the struggle between classes and other social groups, or the competitive spirit dominating so much of modern life, conflict is accepted as the mainspring of human interaction. It represents yet another expression in social organization of the materialistic interpretation of life that has progressively consolidated itself over the past two centuries.

In a letter addressed to Queen Victoria over a century ago, and employing an analogy that points to the one model holding convincing promise for the organization of a planetary society,

Bahá'u'lláh compared the world to the human body. There is, indeed, no other model in phenomenal existence to which we can reasonably look. Human society is composed not of a mass of merely differentiated cells but of associations of individuals, each one of whom is endowed with intelligence and will; nevertheless, the modes of operation that characterize man's biological nature illustrate fundamental principles of existence. Chief among these is that of unity in diversity. Paradoxically, it is precisely the wholeness and complexity of the order constituting the human body—and the perfect integration into it of the body's cells—that permit the full realization of the distinctive capacities inherent in each of these component elements. No cell lives apart from the body, whether in contributing to its functioning or in deriving its share from the well-being of the whole. The physical well-being thus achieved finds its purpose in making possible the expression of human consciousness; that is to say, the purpose of biological development transcends the mere existence of the body and its parts.

What is true of the life of the individual has its parallels in human society. The human species is an organic whole, the leading edge of the evolutionary process. That human consciousness necessarily operates through an infinite diversity of individual minds and motivations detracts in no way from its essential unity. Indeed, it is precisely an inhering diversity that distinguishes unity from homogeneity or uniformity. What the peoples of the world are today experiencing, Bahá'u'lláh said, is their collective coming- of-age, and it is through this emerging maturity of the race that the principle of unity in diversity will find full expression. From its earliest beginnings in the consolidation of family life, the process of social organization has successively moved from the simple structures of clan and tribe, through multitudinous forms of urban society, to the eventual emergence of the nation-state, each stage opening up a wealth of new opportunities for the exercise of human capacity.

Clearly, the advancement of the race has not occurred at the expense of human individuality. 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.

Laying the groundwork for global civilization calls for the creation of laws and institutions that are universal in both character and authority. The effort can begin only when the concept of the oneness of humanity has been wholeheartedly embraced by those in whose hands the responsibility for decision making rests, and when the related principles are propagated through both educational systems and the media of mass communication. Once this threshold is crossed, a process will have been set in motion through which the peoples of the world can be drawn into the task of formulating common goals and committing themselves to their attainment. Only so fundamental a reorientation can protect them, too, from the age-old demons of ethnic and religious strife. Only through the dawning consciousness that they constitute a single people will the inhabitants of the planet be enabled to turn away from the patterns of conflict that have dominated social organization in the past and begin to learn the ways of collaboration and conciliation. "The well-being of mankind," Bahá'u'lláh writes, "its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."

II

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. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organization. With ever greater frequency, proposals aiming at the development of the planet will have to submit to the candid light of the standards it requires.

At the individual level, justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh avers, justice is "the best beloved of all things" since it permits each individual to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the knowledge of his neighbor or his group. It calls for fair-mindedness in one's judgments, for equity in one's treatment of others, and is thus a constant if demanding companion in the daily occasions of life.

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.

Today, the agency on whom has devolved the task of creating this framework and of liberating the promotion of human rights from those who would exploit it is the system of international institutions born out of the tragedies of two ruinous world wars and the experience of worldwide economic breakdown. Significantly, the term "human rights" has come into general use only since the promulgation of the United Nations Charter in 1945 and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights three years later. In these history-making documents, formal recognition has been given to respect for social justice as a correlative of the establishment of world peace. The fact that the Declaration passed without a dissenting vote in the General Assembly conferred on it from the outset an authority that has grown steadily in the intervening years.

The activity most intimately linked to the consciousness that distinguishes human nature is the individual's exploration of reality for himself or herself. The freedom to investigate the purpose of existence and to develop the endowments of human nature that make it achievable requires protection. Human beings must be free to know. That such freedom is often abused and

such abuse grossly encouraged by features of contemporary society does not detract in any degree from the validity of the impulse itself.

It is this distinguishing impulse of human consciousness that provides the moral imperative for the enunciation of many of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration and the related Covenants. Universal education, freedom of movement, access to information, and the opportunity to participate in political life are all aspects of its operation that require explicit guarantee by the international community. The same is true of freedom of thought and belief, including religious liberty, along with the right to hold opinions and express these opinions appropriately.

Since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This trusteeship constitutes the moral foundation of most of the other rights—principally economic and social—which the instruments of the United Nations are attempting similarly to define. The security of the family and the home, the ownership of property, and the right to privacy are all implied in such a trusteeship. The obligations on the part of the community extend to the provision of employment, mental and physical health care, social security, fair wages, rest and recreation, and a host of other reasonable expectations on the part of the individual members of society.

The principle of collective trusteeship creates also the right of every person to expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy the protection of national and international law. Much like the role played by the gene pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment, the immense wealth of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social and economic development of a human race experiencing its collective coming-of-age. It represents a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global civilization. On the one hand, cultural expressions need to be protected from suffocation by the materialistic influences currently holding sway. On the other, cultures must be enabled to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of civilization, free of manipulation for partisan political ends.

"The light of men", Bahá'u'lláh says, "is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance."

III

In order for the standard of human rights now in the process of formulation by the community of nations to be promoted and established as prevailing international norms, a fundamental redefinition of human relationships is called for. Present-day conceptions of what is natural and appropriate in relationships—among human beings themselves, between human beings and nature, between the individual and society, and between the members of society and its institutions—reflect levels of understanding arrived at by the human race during earlier and less mature stages in its development. If humanity is indeed coming of age, if all the inhabitants of the planet constitute a single people, if justice is to be the ruling principle of social organization—then existing conceptions that were born out of ignorance of these emerging realities have to be recast.

Movement in this direction has barely begun. It will lead, as it unfolds, to a new understanding of the nature of the family and of the rights and responsibilities of each of its members. It will entirely transform the role of women at every level of society. Its effect in reordering people's relation to the work they do and their understanding of the place of economic activity in their lives will be sweeping. It will bring about far-reaching changes in the governance of human affairs and in the institutions created to carry it out. Through its influence, the work of society's rapidly proliferating nongovernmental organizations will be increasingly rationalized. It will ensure the creation of binding legislation that will protect both the environment and the development needs of all peoples. Ultimately, the restructuring or transformation of the United Nations system that this movement is already bringing about will no doubt lead to the establishment of a world federation of nations with its own legislative, judicial, and executive bodies.

Central to the task of reconceptualizing the system of human relationships is the process that Bahá'u'lláh refers to as consultation. "In all things it is necessary to consult," is His advice. "The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation."

The standard of truth seeking this process demands is far beyond the patterns of negotiation and 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.

Viewed in such a light, consultation is the operating expression of justice in human affairs. So vital is it to the success of collective endeavor that it must constitute a basic feature of a viable strategy of social and economic development. Indeed, the participation of the people on whose commitment and efforts the success of such a strategy depends becomes effective only as consultation is made the organizing principle of every project. "No man can attain his true station", is Bahá'u'lláh's counsel, "except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation."

IV

The tasks entailed in the development of a global society call for levels of capacity far beyond anything the human race has so far been able to muster. Reaching these levels will require an enormous expansion in access to knowledge, on the part of individuals and social organizations alike. Universal education will be an indispensable contributor to this process of capacity building, but the effort will succeed only as human affairs are so reorganized as to enable both individuals and groups in every sector of society to acquire knowledge and apply it to the shaping of human affairs.

Throughout recorded history, human consciousness has depended upon two basic knowledge systems through which its potentialities have progressively been expressed: science and religion. Through these two agencies, the race's experience has been organized, its environment interpreted, its latent powers explored, and its moral and intellectual life disciplined. They have acted as the real progenitors of civilization. With the benefit of hindsight, it is evident, moreover, that the effectiveness of this dual structure has been greatest during those periods when, each in its own sphere, religion and science were able to work in concert.

Given the almost universal respect in which science is currently held, its credentials need no elaboration. In the context of a strategy of social and economic development, the issue rather is how scientific and technological activity is to be organized. If the work involved is viewed chiefly as the preserve of established elites living in a small number of nations, it is obvious that the enormous gap which such an arrangement has already created between the world's rich and poor will only continue to widen, with the disastrous consequences for the world's economy already noted. 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".

A central challenge, therefore—and an enormous one—is the expansion of scientific and technological activity. Instruments of social and economic change so powerful must cease to be the

patrimony of advantaged segments of society, and must be so organized as to permit people everywhere to participate in such activity on the basis of capacity. Apart from the creation of programs that make the required education available to all who are able to benefit from it, such reorganization will require the establishment of viable centers of learning throughout the world, institutions that will enhance the capability of the world's peoples to participate in the generation and application of knowledge. Development strategy, while acknowledging the wide differences of individual capacity, must take as a major goal the task of making it possible for all of the earth's inhabitants to approach on an equal basis the processes of science and technology which are their common birthright. Familiar arguments for maintaining the status quo grow daily less compelling as the accelerating revolution in communication technologies now brings information and training within reach of vast numbers of people around the globe, wherever they may be, whatever their cultural backgrounds.

The challenges facing humanity in its religious life, if different in character, are equally daunting. For the vast majority of the world's population, the idea that human nature has a spiritual dimension—indeed that its fundamental identity is spiritual—is a truth requiring no demonstration. It is a perception of reality that can be discovered in the earliest records of civilization and that has been cultivated for several millenia by every one of the great religious traditions of humanity's past. Its enduring achievements in law, the fine arts, and the civilizing of human intercourse are what give substance and meaning to history. In one form or another its promptings are a daily influence in the lives of most people on earth and, as events around the world today dramatically show, the longings it awakens are both inextinguishable and incalculably potent.

It would seem obvious, therefore, that efforts of any kind to promote human progress must seek to tap capacities so universal and so immensely creative. Why, then, have spiritual issues facing humanity not been central to the development discourse? Why have most of the priorities—indeed most of the underlying assumptions—of the international development agenda been determined so far by materialistic world views to which only small minorities of the earth's population subscribe? How much weight can be placed on a professed devotion to the principle of universal participation that denies the validity of the participants' defining cultural experience?

It may be argued that, since spiritual and moral issues have historically been bound up with contending theological doctrines which are not susceptible of objective proof, these issues lie outside the framework of the international community's development concerns. To accord them any significant role would be to open the door to precisely those dogmatic influences that have nurtured social conflict and blocked human progress. There is doubtless a measure of truth in such an argument. Exponents of the world's various theological systems bear a heavy responsibility not only for the disrepute into which faith itself has fallen among many progressive thinkers, but for the inhibitions and distortions produced in humanity's continuing discourse on spiritual meaning. To conclude, however, that the answer lies in discouraging the investigation of spiritual reality and ignoring the deepest roots of human motivation is a self-evident delusion. The sole effect, to the degree that such censorship has been achieved in recent history, has been to deliver the shaping of humanity's future into the hands of a new orthodoxy, one which argues that truth is amoral and facts are independent of values.

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.

Since, then, the challenge is the empowerment of humankind through a vast increase in access to knowledge, the strategy that can make this possible must be constructed around an ongoing and intensifying dialogue between science and religion. It is—or by now should be—a truism that, in every sphere of human activity and at every level, the insights and skills that represent scientific accomplishment must look to the force of spiritual commitment and moral principle to ensure their appropriate application. People need, for example, to learn how to separate fact from conjecture—indeed to distinguish between subjective views and objective reality; the extent to which individuals and institutions so equipped can contribute to human progress, however, will be determined by their devotion to truth and their detachment from the promptings of their own interests and passions. Another capacity that science must cultivate in all people is that of thinking in terms of process, including historical process; however, if this intellectual advancement is to contribute ultimately to promoting development, its perspective must be unclouded by prejudices of race, culture, sex, or sectarian belief. Similarly, the training that can make it possible for the earth's inhabitants to participate in the production of wealth will advance the aims of development only to the extent that such an impulse is illumined by the spiritual insight that service to humankind is the purpose of both individual life and social organization.

V

It is in the context of raising the level of human capacity through the expansion of knowledge at all levels that the economic issues facing humankind need to be addressed. As the experience of recent decades has demonstrated, material benefits and endeavors cannot be regarded as ends in themselves. Their value consists not only in providing for humanity's basic needs in housing, food, health care, and the like, but in extending the reach of human abilities. The most important role that economic efforts must play in development lies, therefore, in equipping people and institutions with the means through which they can achieve the real purpose of development: that is, laying foundations for a new social order that can cultivate the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness.

The challenge to economic thinking is to accept unambiguously this purpose of development —and its own role in fostering creation of the means to achieve it. Only in this way can economics and the related sciences free themselves from the undertow of the materialistic preoccupations that now distract them, and fulfill their potential as tools vital to achieving human well-being in the full sense of the term. Nowhere is the need for a rigorous dialogue between the work of science and the insights of religion more apparent.

The problem of poverty is a case in point. Proposals aimed at addressing it are predicated on the conviction that material resources exist, or can be created by scientific and technological endeavor, which will alleviate and eventually entirely eradicate this age-old condition as a feature of human life. A major reason why such relief is not achieved is that the necessary scientific and technological advances respond to a set of priorities only tangentially related to the real interests of the generality of humankind. A radical reordering of these priorities will be required if the burden of poverty is finally to be lifted from the world. Such an achievement demands a determined quest for appropriate values, a quest that will test profoundly both the spiritual and scientific resources of humankind. Religion will be severely hampered in contributing to this joint undertaking so long as it is held prisoner by sectarian doctrines which cannot distinguish between contentment and mere passivity and which teach that poverty is an inherent feature of earthly life, escape from which lies only in the world beyond. To participate effectively in the struggle to bring material well-being to humanity, the religious spirit must find—in the Source of inspiration from which it flows—new spiritual concepts and principles relevant to an age that seeks to establish unity and justice in human affairs.

Unemployment raises similar issues. In most of contemporary thinking, the concept of work has been largely reduced to that of gainful employment aimed at acquiring the means for the consumption of available goods. The system is circular: acquisition and consumption resulting in the maintenance and expansion of the production of goods and, in consequence, in supporting paid

employment. Taken individually, all of these activities are essential to the well-being of society. The inadequacy of the overall conception, however, can be read in both the apathy that social commentators discern among large numbers of the employed in every land and the demoralization of the growing armies of the unemployed.

Not surprisingly, therefore, there is increasing recognition that the world is in urgent need of a new "work ethic". Here again, nothing less than insights generated by the creative interaction of the scientific and religious systems of knowledge can produce so fundamental a reorientation of habits and attitudes. Unlike animals, which depend for their sustenance on whatever the environment readily affords, human beings are impelled to express the immense capacities latent within them through productive work designed to meet their own needs and those of others. In acting thus they become participants, at however modest a level, in the processes of the advancement of civilization. They fulfill purposes that unite them with others. To the extent that work is consciously undertaken in a spirit of service to humanity, Bahá'u'lláh says, it is a form of prayer, a means of worshiping God. Every individual has the capacity to see himself or herself in this light, and it is to this inalienable capacity of the self that development strategy must appeal, whatever the nature of the plans being pursued, whatever the rewards they promise. No narrower a perspective will ever call up from the people of the world the magnitude of effort and commitment that the economic tasks ahead will require.

A challenge of similar nature faces economic thinking as a result of the environmental crisis. The fallacies in theories based on the belief that there is no limit to nature's capacity to fulfill any demand made on it by human beings have now been coldly exposed. A culture which attaches absolute value to expansion, to acquisition, and to the satisfaction of people's wants is being compelled to recognize that such goals are not, by themselves, realistic guides to policy. Inadequate, too, are approaches to economic issues whose decision-making tools cannot deal with the fact that most of the major challenges are global rather than particular in scope.

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 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.

All people will have sooner or later to recover, for example, the capacity for contentment, the welcoming of moral discipline, and the devotion to duty that, until relatively recently, were considered essential aspects of being human. Repeatedly throughout history, the teachings of the Founders of the great religions have been able to instill these qualities of character in the mass of people who responded to them. The qualities themselves are even more vital today, but their expression must now take a form consistent with humanity's coming-of-age. Here again, 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.

The effect of the persistent denial to women of full equality with men sharpens still further the challenge to science and religion in the economic life of humankind. To any objective observer the principle of the equality of the sexes is fundamental to all realistic thinking about the future well-being of the earth and its people. It represents a truth about human nature that has waited largely unrecognized throughout the long ages of the race's childhood and adolescence. "Women and men", is Bahá'u'lláh's emphatic assertion, "have been and will always be equal in the sight of God." 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. A commitment to the establishment of full equality between men and women, in all departments of life and at every level of society, will be central to the success of efforts to conceive and implement a strategy of global development.

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 millenia of experience have prepared women to make crucial contributions to the common effort.

VI

To contemplate a transformation of society on this scale is to raise both the question of the power that can be harnessed to accomplish it and the issue inextricably linked to it, the authority to exercise that power. As with all other implications of the accelerating integration of the planet and its people, both of these familiar terms stand in urgent need of redefinition.

Throughout history—and despite theologically or ideologically inspired assurances to the contrary—power has been largely interpreted as advantage enjoyed by persons or groups. Often, indeed, it has been expressed simply in terms of means to be used against others. This interpretation of power has become an inherent feature of the culture of division and conflict that has characterized the human race during the past several millenia, regardless of the social, religious, or political orientations that have enjoyed ascendancy in given ages, in given parts of the world. In general, power has been an attribute of individuals, factions, peoples, classes, and nations. It has been an attribute especially associated with men rather than women. Its chief effect has been to confer on its beneficiaries the ability to acquire, to surpass, to dominate, to resist, to win.

The resulting historical processes have been responsible for both ruinous setbacks in human well-being and extraordinary advances in civilization. To appreciate the benefits is to acknowledge also the setbacks, as well as the clear limitations of the behavioral patterns that have produced both. Habits and attitudes related to the use of power which emerged during the long ages of humanity's infancy and adolescence have reached the outer limits of their effectiveness. Today, in an era most of whose pressing problems are global in nature, persistence in the idea that power means advantage for various segments of the human family is profoundly mistaken in theory and of no practical service to the social and economic development of the planet. Those who still adhere to it—and who could in earlier eras have felt confident in such adherence—now find their plans enmeshed in inexplicable frustrations and hindrances. In its traditional, competitive expression, power is as irrelevant to the needs of humanity's future as would be the technologies of railway locomotion to the task of lifting space satellites into orbits around the earth.

The analogy is more than a little apt. The human race is being urged by the requirements of its own maturation to free itself from its inherited understanding and use of power. That it can do so is demonstrated by the fact that, although dominated by the traditional conception, humanity has always been able to conceive of power in other forms critical to its hopes. History provides ample evidence that, however intermittently and ineptly, people of every background, throughout the ages, have tapped a wide range of creative resources within themselves. The most obvious example, perhaps, has been the power of truth itself, an agent of change associated with some of the greatest advances in the philosophical, religious, artistic, and scientific experience of the race. Force of character represents yet another means of mobilizing immense human response, as does the influence of example, whether in the lives of individual human beings or in human societies.

Almost wholly unappreciated is the magnitude of the force that will be generated by the achievement of unity, an influence "so powerful", in Bahá'u'lláh's words, "that it can illuminate the whole Earth."

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.

Clearly, such principles can operate only within a culture that is essentially democratic in spirit and method. To say this, however, is not to endorse the ideology of partisanship that has everywhere boldly assumed democracy's name and which, despite impressive contributions to human progress in the past, today finds itself mired in the cynicism, apathy, and corruption to which it has given rise. In selecting those who are to take collective decisions on its behalf, society does not need and is not well served by the political theater of nominations, candidature, electioneering, and solicitation. It lies within the capacity of all people, as they become progressively educated and convinced that their real development interests are being served by programs proposed to them, to adopt electoral procedures that will gradually refine the selection of their decision-making bodies.

As the integration of humanity gains momentum, those who are thus selected will increasingly have to see all their efforts in a global perspective. Not only at the national, but also at the local level, the elected governors of human affairs should, in Bahá'u'lláh's view, consider themselves responsible for the welfare of all of humankind.

VII

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.

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. 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. "Be united in counsel," is Bahá'u'lláh's appeal,

> be one in thought. May 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.

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