

Conceiving a World Commonwealth — With the Politics of Love

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One of the primary promises of the Baha'i revelation — the establishment of a world commonwealth, a global system of human governance — is now quietly unfolding across the planet. Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha'i Faith, wrote:

A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive.

O ye children of men! The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men.

The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established. ...

Through the power of the words He hath uttered the whole of the human race can be illumined with the light of unity ...

He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body.

So how could Baha'u'llah's promised world commonwealth actually come about, and if it did, how would it work?

Building a World Commonwealth

Building a world commonwealth isn't just a theoretical question. Humanity has already attempted to unify twice on a global level, with the League of Nations after World War I and the United Nations after World War II. At their outset both of these institutions, however, did not possess the democratically-elected characteristics or the sovereign abilities of a true world commonwealth — to prevent war, alleviate poverty, establish a global system of justice, and unify disparate nations into an organic whole.

One other truly global governing institution has formed in recent times. In 1963, the worldwide Baha'i community, in history's first international democratic election, formed the Universal House of Justice. That body, unique in the annals of human self-governance, now leads and guides the millions of Baha'is in all nations. It does so not only because of the consent of the governed, but because Baha'u'llah ordained it:

Unlike any of the Manifestations of God Who preceded Him, Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, made a Covenant with His followers to direct and channel the forces released by His Revelation, guaranteeing the continuity of infallible guidance after His death through institutions to which all of His followers must turn. In His will and testament Baha'u'llah designated His eldest son, Abdu'l-Baha, His successor, the authoritative Interpreter of His Writings, and the Centre of His Covenant. In His own will and testament Abdu'l-Baha perpetuated the Covenant through the Administrative Order ordained in Baha'u'llah's Writings. Abdu'l-Baha appointed as His twin successors the institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. He named His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Cause of God and expounder of the Word of God, while giving the Universal House of Justice the role of legislating on matters not explicitly revealed in the Writings of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha or dealt with by Shoghi Effendi. – *The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986*, p. xxvii.

This institution, of course, limits its jurisdiction to the world's Baha'is — but it also provides a potential model for humanity as a whole, which has not yet had the opportunity to elect its own global leadership body.

In its “Promise of World Peace” letter to all people in 1985, the Universal House of Justice humbly offered this remarkable working Baha'i model — a democratically-elected global government charged with making the world a more peaceful, verdant, and equitable place for every human being — to all people:

Together with the opposing tendency to warfare and self-aggrandizement against which it ceaselessly struggles, the drive towards world unity is one of the dominant, pervasive features of life on the planet ...

The experience of the Baha'i community may be seen as an example of this enlarging unity. It is a community of some three to four million people drawn from many nations, cultures, classes and creeds, engaged in a wide range of activities serving the spiritual, social and economic needs of the peoples of many lands. It is a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family, conducting its affairs through a system

of commonly accepted consultative principles, and cherishing equally all the great outpourings of divine guidance in human history. Its existence is yet another convincing proof of the practicality of its Founder's vision of a united world, another evidence that humanity can live as one global society, equal to whatever challenges its coming of age may entail. If the Baha'i experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study.

Sociologists and other researchers and scholars have studied the Baha'i model of global governance, but a purely academic approach may miss one of its central elements: love.

The Central Element of World Unity: Love

Baha'u'llah's revelation, like the teachings of all of the world's great Faiths, revolves around love — love for others and love for the Creator. Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah and his designated successor, wrote:

Thou dost observe that love among the Baha'is is very great, and that love is the main thing. Just as love's power hath been developed to such a high degree among the Baha'is ... so is it with all else as well; for love is the ground of all things. ... The essence of Baha'u'llah's Teaching is all-embracing love, for love includeth every excellence of humankind. It causeth every soul to go forward. It bestoweth on each one, for a heritage, immortal life. Erelong shalt thou bear witness that His celestial Teachings, the very glory of reality itself, shall light up the skies of the world.

This selfless love for others, especially those we don't know in different parts of the world, forms the essential foundation for a new world polity. Replacing the old, limited forms of ethnic, political, and patriotic identification with a sense of the unity of the global family of humankind, it asks every person to relate to their human cousins with love, caring, and compassion. After all, we're related.