

# Bahá'í Prayers for Good Governance

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## P R E C I S

*Bahá'u'lláh, in his last will and testament, encouraged, if not obliged, Bahá'ís to pray for their respective rulers and governments, which is effectively the same as praying for good governance, peace, and prosperity. This essay presents a newly authorized translation of a Bahá'í prayer, "A Prayer for the confirmation of the American Government"—along with a provisional translation of a prayer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the Ottoman State and Caliphate. Bahá'í prayers for good governance are analyzed and discussed in comparative perspective with Jewish, Catholic, and Islamic prayers for good governance in the American context, introduced as phenomenological parallels. Bahá'u'lláh's injunction to pray for one's rulers is a precept that 'Abdu'l-Bahá put into practice—to good practical effect. Moreover, he revealed several prayers for good governance for use by the Bahá'ís themselves, to offer, wherever they may reside, on behalf of their governments. Several such prayers are presented, with comments as to their respective historical contexts and purpose.*



## Introduction

**B**ahá'í prayers for the good of governments—especially by way of good governance—are part of a longstanding practice in the history of religions. Prayers for good governance are common to most, if not all, world religions. Religious leaders, often on public ceremonial occasions, as well as many adherents themselves, offer prayers to bless their respective governments. Although there is no *quid pro quo*—that is, no transactional expectations of government assistance for religious support for the

government of a given state—the pious hope, if not pragmatic expectation, is that governments will be divinely blessed if they exercise good governance for the commonweal and benefit of all. Bahá'í prayers for governments—and for good governance—are among the latest exemplars of such prayers, which are surveyed and analyzed here.

From a phenomenological perspective, such practice, in a new religious tradition, is part and parcel of a venerable tradition. Before examining such Bahá'í prayers, I offer a few observations about prayer in general by way of prolegomena. Prayers may be read, chanted, or put to music in worship, both privately in personal devotions and publicly in congregational or informal gatherings. Prayers may be piously perfunctory, or they may be incentivizing. That is, prayers may be invoked prior to personal and social actions carried out by petitioners who, by undertaking post-supplicatory actions with prayer-inspired resolve, in a sense, “complete” the prayers they offer. Such a petition/action scenario arises from the perspective that prayer is more than pious worship and hopeful supplication. Supplication implicates application. Put another way, invocation invites implementation. In other words, prayers not only may be prayed, but acted upon as well. Offering up a prayer is not the end of it if that prayer may be followed up as part of its fulfillment. In this sense, prayer may be a call to action, although this may not be a popular conception of prayer. In the petition/action scenario, prayer is seen as a resource for spiritual resolve and volitional empowerment. Or, prayers can simply remain inert, without effect, other than for pious or perfunctory purposes.

Thus, prayers have various functions. Prayers for good governance, superficially at least, are typically recited in the spirit of a “blessing” and an expression of goodwill toward the government, both invoking wisdom imparted by divine guidance in the actions and undertakings of government officials and in the formulation of sound public policy. Prayers for good governance often express sacred ideals and values, which function as human virtues and acts of good citizenship, thereby reinforcing these beliefs in the process of praying itself. Praying for the welfare of one's country presupposes that the petitioner also acts accordingly. Ideally, to ask is also to act. Thus, such prayers may renew and reinvigorate individual and social orientations and outlooks. Whether such prayers can make any difference at all, or otherwise be put to good effect, is an important question, which depends on time and circumstance.

In American Judaism, for instance, there is a longstanding tradition in Jewish liturgy of offering benevolent prayers for the welfare of the American government.<sup>1</sup> This venerable practice dates back to King Solomon's prayer for his own good governance in Psalm 72—the first of only two biblical psalms by Solomon himself (see also Psalm 127). Later on, the prophet Jeremiah advocated the practice of praying for one's government—even under oppressive conditions: "And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jer. 29:7). Jewish prayers for good governance for America serve as an ideal example of the traditional religious practices of offering prayers for good governance for other governments around the world.

Historically, nearly all Jewish prayer books in America have included a prayer for the welfare of the government. This is part of a longstanding Jewish practice around the world, as Gordon M. Freeman explained: "In fact, a prayer for the government is a feature of every type of prayer book of every land of the Jewish diaspora irrespective of the specific religious movement of the community."<sup>2</sup> This is an ancient Jewish obligation and a venerable tradition that has carried over to the Jewish experience in America. In the rabbinic commentary, *Pirke Avot*, Jews are enjoined to "Pray for the welfare of the government, because were it not for the fear it inspires, every man would swallow his neighbor alive" (3:2). This is as pragmatic as it is perhaps cynical.

While prayer does not have scriptural status, it is a conduit of religious ideology. Since there is no Jewish scripture regarding America, one therefore looks to Jewish prayer books for some communal Jewish perspectives on America. Prayer books, after all, are not simply liturgy. They are communal performances of doctrine in a spirit of devotion. "Second only to the

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<sup>1</sup> See Jonathan D. Sarna, "Jewish Prayers for the United States Government: A Study in the Liturgy of Politics and the Politics of Liturgy," in Ruth Langer and Steven Fine, eds., *Liturgy in the Life of the Synagogue: Studies in the History of Jewish Prayer* (Warsaw, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), pp. 205–224.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon M. Freeman, "The Conservative Movement and the Public Square," in Alan Mittleman, Robert A. Licht, and Jonathan D. Sarna, eds., *Jewish Polity and American Civil Society: Communal Agencies and Religious Movements in the American Public Square* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), p. 236.

Torah, the siddur (prayer book),” stated one Reform rabbi, “expresses the ideology of our people.” *As a congregation prays, so it believes.*<sup>3</sup>

Here, the first and immediate benefit of such a prayer redounds to the petitioner himself or herself. In a sense, praying for good governance is a gesture of goodwill on the part of citizens who offer such prayers, where the relationship between “God and country” is optimized at the level of intention. Praying for the welfare of one’s government can be seen as an affirmation of loyal patriotism and, intrinsically, as an affirmative act of good citizenship. Such religiously inspired well-wishes for institutions and individuals in authority are not unlike the healthy, patriotic spirit generated by the singing of national anthems and recitals of pledges of allegiance. Such acts blend and merge sacred and secular identity into an integrated outlook. Other religious traditions also have prayers for good governance. Doing so is encouraged by St. Paul: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” (1Tim. 2:1–3, K.J.V.).

Intention and integrity go hand-in-hand. Sacred “godliness” (that is, a religious virtue) and secular goodliness (for instance, “honesty,” a civic virtue) are intentionally intertwined in synergistic fusion for the commonweal of “all men.” In a similar spirit, the first Catholic prayer for America, “Prayer for Our Government,” was offered in 1791 by Archbishop John Carroll, the first Catholic Bishop for the United States. This prayer reads, in part:

We pray O God of might, wisdom and justice, through whom authority is rightly administered, laws are enacted, and judgment decreed, assist with your Holy Spirit of counsel and fortitude the president of these United States, that his administration may be conducted in righteousness and be eminently useful to your people over whom he presides; by

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Buck, *God & Apple Pie: Religious Myths and Visions of America* (Kingston, NY: Educator’s International Press, 2015), chap. 6: “Jewish Myths and Visions of America,” pp. 126–127, emphasis added (citing Rabbi Elliot L. Stevens, “The Prayer Books, They Are A’Changin’,” *Reform Judaism* [Summer, 2006], <https://www.ccarpress.org/content.asp?tid=471>; accessed April 24, 2021).

encouraging due respect for virtue and religion; by a faithful execution of the laws in justice and mercy; and by restraining vice and immorality.

Let the light of your divine wisdom direct the deliberations of Congress, and shine forth in all the proceedings and laws framed for our rule and government, so that they may tend to the preservation of peace, the promotion of national happiness, the increase of industry, sobriety and useful knowledge; and may perpetuate to us the blessing of equal liberty.

We pray for his excellency, the governor of this state, for the members of the assembly, for all judges, magistrates, and other officers who are appointed to guard our political welfare, that they may be enabled, by your powerful protection, to discharge the duties of their respective stations with honesty and ability.

We recommend likewise, to your unbounded mercy, all our brethren and fellow citizens throughout the United States, that they may be blessed in the knowledge and sanctified in the observance of your most holy law; that they may be preserved in union, and in that peace which the world cannot give; and after enjoying the blessings of this life, be admitted to those which are eternal. . . .

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

Catholic values of universal scope are enshrined in the noble sentiments that this prayer conveys. In keeping with such sacred benedictions upon the secular, this venerable practice can, and does, find a place in the devotional practices of other faith communities as well. In kindred communal practice, Islamic prayers for good governance<sup>5</sup> in America (or in any other country) can be offered, even in legislative chambers, on being invited to do so. For instance, on November 13, 2014, Imam Hamad Ahmad Chebli, of the Islamic Society of Central Jersey in Monmouth Junction, gave the opening prayer in the U.S. House of Representatives, as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Gretchen Filz, “A Prayer for America by John Carroll, First U.S. Bishop” (July 4, 2017), <https://www.catholiccompany.com/magazine/prayer-for-america-by-john-carroll-first-u-s-bishop-6086>; accessed December 13, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> On Islamic principles of good governance, see, e.g., Christopher Buck, “Religion of Peace: Islamic Principles of Good Governance,” in Cyrus Rohani and Behrooz Sabet, eds., *Winds of Change: The Challenge of Modernity in the Middle East and North Africa* (London: Saqi Books, 2019), pp. 87–111; for an Arabic translation of the English original, see Christopher Buck (tr. Gamal Hassan), “Religion of Peace: Islamic Principles of Good Governance,” in Behrooz Sabet and Gamal Hassan, eds., *Winds of Change in the Middle East and North Africa: Crisis, Catharsis, and Renewal* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2018), pp. 133–166.

O God, bless us as we begin a new day. Bless this assembly, bless the people and Nation it represents. O God, at this time in our history, the challenges for our Nation and the world are many. O God, grant these men and women the wisdom, the guidance, and the strength to pursue compassion, justice, and sound judgment. O God, in Your wisdom, You have placed upon them great responsibility and honor. O God, please help them with Your guidance and Your light. O God, grant them the will and the means to improve the well-being of all inhabitants of this great Nation and beyond. Amen.<sup>6</sup>

This prayer demonstrates that being a pious Muslim and a loyal American are compatible, even commendable.

### Good Governance Defined

Good governance matters, both politically and economically. The literature on good governance is extensive. It treats not only of the benign exercise of institutional political authority but also of optimal corporate operations. A natural point of departure is to offer a working definition of “good governance” at the institutional level. One definition offered by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific is as follows: “Good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.”<sup>7</sup> This is only one description, among others, but it is illustrative of how good governance works and the parameters by which governance may be evaluated.

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<sup>6</sup> See video, “Imam Hamad Ahmad Chebli: Opening Prayer,” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmDBF7XRYG4>. See also “Imam Chebli Opening Prayer in Congress, November 13, 2014,” at <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10444838145550307&type=1&l=086607aeb5>; accessed December 13, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Yap Kioe Sheng (Chief, Poverty Reduction Section), “What Is Good Governance?” United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/good-governance.pdf>; accessed July 14, 2019.

Good governance, as often noted, has its own social “dividends.” This payoff is typically a reflex of sound public policy, when implemented reasonably well. Paradigms of good governance vary, as one would expect. Good governance is one of the social requisites of democracy. Bahá’í social principles enrich public discourse on this key topic. For instance, Núr University—the second largest private institution of higher learning in Bolivia—offers a Bahá’í-inspired “Just Governance Program,” which “seeks to promote good governance by exploring the different dimensions of moral leadership, [by] strengthening administrative and decision-making capacities in the public sector, and by promoting dialogue concerning the future development of Bolivian society.”<sup>8</sup> The Bahá’í International Community broadens the operational dimensions of good governance as follows:

While governance is often equated with government, it in fact involves much more. Governance occurs at all levels and encompasses the ways that formal government, non-governmental groups, community organizations and the private sector manage resources and affairs. Three factors that largely determine the efficacy of any system of governance are the quality of leadership, the characteristics of the governed, and the nature of the structures and processes employed to exercise authority and meet human needs.<sup>9</sup>

Here, the dynamic interrelationships among those who govern, the governed, and the processes of government offer a useful framework of analysis for evaluating the quality of governance in a given setting. Elsewhere, the Bahá’í International Community has stressed that good governance is a “moral exercise”:

The administration of material affairs, governance is a moral exercise. It is the expression of a trusteeship—a responsibility to protect and to serve the members of the social polity. Indeed, the exercise of democracy will succeed to the extent that it is governed by the moral principles that are in harmony with the evolving interests of a rapidly maturing human race.

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<sup>8</sup> Bahá’í International Community, “Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Baha’i Perspective,” prepared by and presented at the Intergovernmental Global Forum on Fighting Corruption II, The Hague, Netherlands, May 28, 2001, <https://www.bic.org/statements/overcoming-corruption-and-safeguarding-integrity-public-institutions-bahai-perspective>; accessed July 14, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

These include trustworthiness and integrity needed to win the respect and support of the governed; transparency; consultation with those affected by decisions being arrived at; objective assessment of needs and aspirations of communities being served; and the appropriate use of scientific and moral resources.<sup>10</sup>

Historically, religions have been a primary—if not the principal—wellsprings of individual and social values in societies at large. For better or worse, such religious values demonstrate dynamic interrelationships between the sacred and the secular. Bahá'í prayers for good governance are informed by, or at least presuppose, Bahá'í social principles for the betterment of society.

### Bahá'í Principles of Good Governance

Briefly, Bahá'í sacred texts have called for various social reforms, sometimes referred to as “world reforms.” For instance, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá authored a treatise, known in English as *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, written in 1875 and published anonymously in Bombay in 1882,<sup>11</sup> which is the second Bahá'í book to be published as an authorized text.<sup>12</sup> This volume was followed by *A Treatise on Politics*, published in 1893 or 1896.<sup>13</sup> These texts,

<sup>10</sup> See Bahá'í International Community, “The Search for Values in an Age of Transition: A Statement of the Bahá'í International Community on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the United Nations,” New York, October, 2005, at <https://www.bahai.org/documents/bic/search-values-age-transition>; accessed October 12, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, tr. Marzieh Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957). On the early Bahá'í Bombay lithographs generally, see discussion in Farzin Vejdani, “Transnational Baha'i Print Culture: Community Formation and Religious Authority, 1890–1921,” *Journal of Religious History* 36 (special issue on *Baha'i History*, ed. Todd Lawson) (December, 2012): 499–515; and Christopher Buck, *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1995, 2004), pp. 17–29.

<sup>12</sup> Here, “authorized” means that this publication was commissioned by Bahá'u'lláh, with the first such publication having been the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, *the Book of Certitude*, revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in January, 1861. See Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, tr. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989); and Ahang Rabbani, “The Conversion of the Great-Uncle of the Báb,” *World Order* 30 (Spring, 1999): 34–35, at [https://bahai-library.com/rabbani\\_conversion\\_great-uncle\\_bab](https://bahai-library.com/rabbani_conversion_great-uncle_bab), accessed September 4, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> See Necati Alkan, “The Young Turks and the Bahais in Palestine,” in Eyal Ginio and Yuval Ben Bassat, eds., *Late Ottoman Palestine: The Period of Young Turk Rule* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), especially pp. 261 ff.



which discourse at length on issues of good governance, were preceded by Bahá'u'lláh's general proclamation to the leading kings and rulers of the world, including ecclesiastical authorities, as well as scholars and statespersons.<sup>14</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's series of open epistles directed to the political, diplomatic, religious, and intellectual leaders of the day may be fairly characterized as one of the first, if not the first, international peace missions.<sup>15</sup> This international peace mission was a clarion call to world peace, with its attendant requirements of multilateral disarmament, except for maintaining internal security, along with other principles of good governance necessary to maintain global stability, peace, and prosperity, publicly enunciated and exhorted.

While such Bahá'í-inspired social reforms may or may not be implemented by any existing government, Bahá'ís themselves are systematically incorporating such reforms in developing models of good governance through their administrative and community-building endeavors, where a given reform becomes the norm. Bahá'í administration, which is an original system for the oversight and guidance of Bahá'í affairs through wisdom borne of consultation by elected Bahá'í councils, was described by Shoghi Effendi as follows:

... [T]his vast Administrative Order ... is, both in theory and practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world's recognized religious systems. No form of democratic government; no system of autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or republican; no intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order; nor even any of the recognized types of theocracy, whether it be the Hebrew Commonwealth, or the various

<sup>14</sup> See Christopher Buck and Youli A. Ioannesyan, "Bahá'u'lláh's *Bishárát* (Glad-Tidings): A Proclamation to Scholars and Statesmen," *Bahá'í Studies Review*, vol. 16 (2010), pp. 3–28, at [https://bahai-library.com/buck\\_ioannesyan\\_bisharat\\_proclamation](https://bahai-library.com/buck_ioannesyan_bisharat_proclamation); accessed April 24, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> See Buck, *God & Apple Pie*, chap. 12, "Bahá'í Myths and Visions of America," p. 314, at [https://www.academia.edu/37503635/God\\_and\\_Apple\\_Pie\\_2015\\_Baha\\_i\\_Myths\\_and\\_Visions\\_of\\_America\\_sample\\_chapter\\_released\\_September\\_30\\_2018\\_](https://www.academia.edu/37503635/God_and_Apple_Pie_2015_Baha_i_Myths_and_Visions_of_America_sample_chapter_released_September_30_2018_), accessed April 24, 2021; and Christopher Buck, "The Eschatology of Globalization: Bahá'u'lláh's Multiple-Messiahship Revisited," in Moshe Sharon, ed., *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements, and the Bābī-Bahá'í Faiths*, Numen Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions 104 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), pp. 143–178, at [https://www.academia.edu/30670228/\\_The\\_Eschatology\\_of\\_Globalization\\_Baha\\_u\\_llah\\_s\\_Multiple\\_Messiahship\\_Revisited\\_2004\\_](https://www.academia.edu/30670228/_The_Eschatology_of_Globalization_Baha_u_llah_s_Multiple_Messiahship_Revisited_2004_), accessed April 24, 2021.

Christian ecclesiastical organizations, or the Imamate or the Caliphate in Islám—none of these can be identified or be said to conform with the Administrative Order which the master-hand of its perfect Architect has fashioned.

This new-born Administrative Order incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.<sup>16</sup>

Bahá'í governance is a unique system that is still in its embryonic stage of development by the worldwide Bahá'í community, under the guidance of the international Bahá'í governing body, known as the Universal House of Justice, elected every five years by elected delegates, being the members of the various members of National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís from around the world.

If Bahá'í principles of good governance were faithfully implemented in any given administration, the benefits would redound to society at large. Yet, for any system of good governance to be truly effective, the moral and ethical character of the general population must be such that government policies can truly take hold, so that the goals of sound public policy can thereby be realized to their fullest potential. In the interim, this same principle applies to present-day governance. As one orientation in furtherance of this ideal relationship between the governors and governed, religious prayers for good governance can be an asset, especially for the goodwill that such prayers inculcate and inspire, along with the mindfulness that sacral and civil futures can, and should, coexist in synergistic harmony. In this sense, Bahá'í prayers for good governance, in effect, endow with sacred purpose the secular practice of fair and equitable administrative processes.

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<sup>16</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938, 1991), pp. 152–153.

### “Pray ye on their behalf”

Should Bahá'ís—and good citizens everywhere—pray for their respective governments? If so, for what purpose, and to what end? As a point of departure for this question, one text stands out. In the *Kitáb-i-'Ahd* (Book of the Covenant, c. 1891), Bahá'u'lláh exhorted Bahá'ís to pray for their rulers, who, in the nineteenth century, were principally monarchs, who held absolute sway over their subjects: “O ye the loved ones and the trustees of God! Kings are the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God. Pray ye on their behalf. He hath invested them with the rulership of the earth and hath singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain.”<sup>17</sup> There are many ways to understand Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation, such as a duty to offer prayer, demonstrate respect for authority, and manifest loyalty and obedience to government—among other interpretations. The fact that it was expressed in Bahá'u'lláh's last will and testament may invest this exhortation with an added degree of importance.

In a broader context, the attitude that Bahá'ís should maintain toward governments and governmental officials is one of respect for authority and obedience to the law of the land. Since the watchword of the Bahá'í Faith is unity—and, more specifically, “unity in diversity”—it makes perfect sense that Bahá'ís avoid partisan politics, because the rivalry, rancor, and “gridlock” often generated by “party politics” are held to be quintessentially divisive, that is, “partisan,” as the term itself suggests. The Universal House of Justice has explained the proper Bahá'í attitude toward governments as follows:

As you are no doubt well aware, in discussing the principle of non-involvement in politics, Shoghi Effendi wrote that Bahá'ís are to “refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their

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<sup>17</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, “Kitáb-i-'Ahd (Book of the Covenant),” *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), pp. 220–221. On the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, see Christopher Buck and Youli A. Ioannesyan, “The 1893 Russian Publication of Bahá'u'lláh's Last Will and Testament: An Academic Attestation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Successorship,” *Bahá'í Studies Review* 19 (June, 2013): 3–44 (published May, 2017; DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1386/bsr.19.1.3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/bsr.19.1.3_1)), at [https://www.academia.edu/34197434/\\_The\\_1893\\_Russian\\_Publication\\_of\\_Baha\\_u\\_llah\\_s\\_Last\\_Will\\_and\\_Testament\\_An\\_Academic\\_Attestation\\_of\\_Abdu\\_l-Baha\\_s\\_Successorship\\_2013\\_published\\_in\\_June\\_2017\\_](https://www.academia.edu/34197434/_The_1893_Russian_Publication_of_Baha_u_llah_s_Last_Will_and_Testament_An_Academic_Attestation_of_Abdu_l-Baha_s_Successorship_2013_published_in_June_2017_); accessed December 13, 2018.

governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions.” In political controversies, they “should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests” of their “world-wide Fellowship.” . . . Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions should not take positions on the political decisions of governments, including disputes among governments of different nations; should refrain from becoming involved in debates surrounding any political controversy; and should not react, orally or otherwise, in a manner that could be taken as evidence of support for a partisan political stance. . . .

Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá enjoined Bahá'ís to be obedient to the government of their land. Unity, order, and cooperation are the basis for sound and lasting change. Even civil disobedience, in the form of a conscious decision to violate the law to effect social change, is not acceptable for Bahá'ís—whatever merit it appears to have had in particular political settings. Ultimately, obedience to government has a bearing on the unity of the Bahá'í community itself. . . .

The principles of non-involvement in politics and obedience to government, far from being obstacles to social change, are aspects of an approach set forth in the Bahá'í writings to implement effective remedies for and address the root causes of the ills afflicting society. This approach includes active involvement in the life of society as well as the possibility of influencing and contributing to the social policies of government by all lawful means. Indeed, service to others and to society is a hallmark of the Bahá'í life.<sup>18</sup>

Bahá'í prayers for good governance, without exception, are genuine expressions of the well-wishes of Bahá'ís for any government. Such prayers are by no means transactional. There is no *quid pro quo* here. These prayers should be taken at face value, with no hidden agenda, or even enlightened self-interest. As promoters of unity in society, Bahá'ís pray for the welfare of the government in a spirit of loyalty and altruism.

Such respect for governments and leaders is reflected in the very language of Bahá'u'lláh's writings to the various kings and rulers of the world. For instance, in the “Súriy-i-Mulúk,” one encounters such benevolent speech and courteous appellations as follows:

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<sup>18</sup> Letter dated April 27, 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, to an individual believer, [https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20170427\\_001/20170427\\_001.xhtml](https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20170427_001/20170427_001.xhtml); accessed May 11, 2019.

Hearken, O King [Sulṭán ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz], to the speech of Him that speaketh the truth, Him that doth not ask thee to recompense Him with the things God hath chosen to bestow upon thee, Him Who unerringly treadeth the straight Path. He it is Who summoneth thee unto God, thy Lord, Who showeth thee the right course, the way that leadeth to true felicity, that haply thou mayest be of them with whom it shall be well. . . .

...

Wert thou to incline thine ear unto My speech and observe My counsel, God would exalt thee to so eminent a position that the designs of no man on the whole earth can ever touch or hurt thee. . . .

Render thanks unto God for having chosen thee out of the whole world, and made thee king over them that profess thy faith. It well beseemeth thee to appreciate the wondrous favours with which God hath favoured thee, and to magnify continually His name. Thou canst best praise Him if thou lovest His loved ones, and dost safeguard and protect His servants from the mischief of the treacherous, that none may any longer oppress them. . . .

Shouldst thou cause rivers of justice to spread their waters amongst thy subjects, God would surely aid thee with the hosts of the unseen and of the seen, and would strengthen thee in thine affairs.<sup>19</sup>

Bahá’u’lláh exhorted Sulṭán ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz to rule wisely and equitably, with the assurance that, if he caused “rivers of justice” to spread throughout his realm, this would attract divine blessings and confirmations. The foregoing language is respectful, and sets the tone for the exemplary Bahá’í prayers for good governance that are presented and discussed below.

### Prayers of Bahá’u’lláh for Rulers

There is a prayer for the Iranian (Qajar) emperor, Náṣiri’-d-Dín Sháh (“Helper of the Faith,” r. 1848–96), by Bahá’u’lláh: “Glorified art Thou, O my God, and my Master, and my Mainstay! Aid Thou His Majesty the Sháh to execute Thy laws and Thy commandments, and show forth Thy justice among Thy servants. Thou art, verily, the All-Bounteous, the Lord of grace abounding, the Almighty, the All-Powerful.”<sup>20</sup> And, further,

<sup>19</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, “Súriy-i-Mulúk,” *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2002), pp. 209–211.

<sup>20</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 139; see also Bahá’u’lláh’s prayer “to aid His Majesty the Sháh to render Thy Cause victorious” (p. 105).

“Assist Thou, O My God, His Majesty the Sháh to keep Thy statutes amidst Thy servants and to manifest Thy justice amongst Thy creatures, that he may treat this people [the Bahá'ís] as he treateth others. Thou art, in truth, the God of power, of glory and wisdom.”<sup>21</sup> In offering a prayer for His Majesty, the Sháh of Iran, Bahá'u'lláh demonstrated, in practice, his exhortation to pray for the leaders of one's government, notwithstanding the fact that this ruthless despot—characterized by Shoghi Effendi as “a selfish, capricious, imperious monarch”<sup>22</sup>—in 1852 incarcerated and then in 1853 exiled Bahá'u'lláh to Baghdad, all in the broader context of ordering the relentless persecution, imprisonment, torture, execution, or exile of countless followers of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

Reference to another prayer for good governance, in the Ottoman context, comes by way of this historical anecdote when, on July 4, 1909, 'Abdu'l-Bahá commented on a short prayer that was chanted during “early morning tea”:

4 July 1909

Early morning tea

Munavvar Khánúm chanted a prayer.

Our Lord ['Abdu'l-Bahá]: “In this prayer which we have just read, Bahá'u'lláh meant 'Abdu'l-Hamíd, the Turkish Sultán who has lately been deposed,<sup>23</sup> and the verses are:

‘I implore Thee, O My God and the King of the nations, and ask Thee by the Greatest Name, to change the throne of tyranny into a centre of justice and the seat of pride and iniquity into the chair of humbleness and justice. Thou art free to do whatsoever Thou wishest and Thou art the All-Knowing, the Wise!’”

“A Power above the power of kings,” I whispered to Munavvar.

“And still,” she whispered back, “and still we ask for miracles.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, [Tablet to] “Násiri'd-Dín Sháh,” *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002), p. 106.

<sup>22</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> “This had taken place on 27 April 1909.” This note refers to the overthrow by the Young Turk Revolution of Sultan Abdülhamid, who reigned from 1876 to 1909.

<sup>24</sup> Juliet Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, Preface by Marzieh Gail (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983), p. 39, [http://bahai-library.com/thompson\\_diary&chapter=2](http://bahai-library.com/thompson_diary&chapter=2); accessed April 8, 2020.

The original Arabic text for this short, but poignant prayer has been published and available online,<sup>25</sup> although the above is a provisional translation, as an authorized (officially endorsed) translation has yet to be published. Bahá'u'lláh's prayer, it seems, was uncannily prophetic, in having anticipated the imminent "change" of the current "throne of tyranny" into a "centre of justice." This did not require "regime change" *per se*, yet that was the ultimate outcome, notwithstanding.<sup>26</sup>

While the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh<sup>27</sup> to Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861–76)—who had exiled Bahá'u'lláh from Baghdad to Istanbul, then to Edirne (1863), and finally to 'Akka (1868)—are well-known, there is also an unpublished and undated prayer in Arabic, dated 27 Sha'bán 1309 (March 27, 1892), revealed for Sultan Abdülhamid II, who came to the throne in 1876 (after the short interregnum of Murad V for three months in the same year). During the reign of Abdülaziz, Bahá'u'lláh stigmatized the seat of the Ottoman Empire as being the "throne of tyranny" from where one could hear "the hooting of the owl."<sup>28</sup>

In the privately published prayer, of which the following portions have been provisionally translated by Necati Alkan, Bahá'u'lláh asked God "to protect His majesty, the Sultan [Abdülhamid], and his ministers (*wuzará'*) and state officials (*wukalá'*) from those who have rejected his [the Sultan's] munificence (*ankarú faḍlahu*) and have been inflamed with the fire of jealousy (*ishṭa'álú nár al-ḥasad*) in his days." Bahá'u'lláh further entreated God to "strengthen him with Thy might (*'azzizhu bi-'izzika*) and make him victorious with Thy power (*wa anṣirhu bi-sultánika*)," because "Thou seest

<sup>25</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Nasá'im al-Raḥmán* (Beirut, 1993), <https://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/c/NR1/nr1-33.html>; accessed April 8, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> See the following by Necati Alkan: "The Young Turks and the Bahais in Palestine," pp. 259–278; *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the Late Ottoman Empire: Reformers, Babis, and Bahá'is* (revised Ph.D. thesis) (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 2008); "'The Eternal Enemy of Islám': Abdullah Cevdet and the Bahá'í Religion," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 68, no. 1 (2005), pp. 1–20; and "Ottoman Reform Movements and the Bahá'í Faith, 1860s–1920s," in Sharon, *Studies in Modern Religions*, pp. 253–274.

<sup>27</sup> The first is unfortunately lost, but there are other addresses in Bahá'u'lláh's *Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, available in the Bahá'í Reference Library; see Introduction, pp. v–vi, at <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/SLH/slh-3.html>; and the "Súriy-i-Mulúk," paras. 58–83, at <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/SLH/slh-13.html>; accessed December 13, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/KA/ka-6.html>; accessed December 13, 2018.

him clinging to Thee and holding fast unto Thy luminous hem (*taráhu mutamassikan bi-ka wa mutashabbithan bi-dhaylika al-munír*).” Lastly, Bahá'u'lláh beseeched God to cause the Sultan “to remember and speak of the Cause of God and be steadfast in it at all times” (*thumma 'j'álhu fí kulli 'l-aḥwál náṭiqan dhákiran rásikhan fí amrika*), to “aid him with the visible and invisible hosts” (*anṣirhu bi-junúd al-ghaybi wa al-shaháda*), and “to protect his domains from the rebellious on earth” (*thumma 'hfaz mamálikahu min ṭughát al-bariyya*).<sup>29</sup>

As part of the governor/governed interactional dynamic, Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to “[p]ray . . . on their behalf” implies—and inspires—a willingness on the part of the petitioner who, in offering such a prayer, implicitly agrees to obey the law of the land (a universal requirement for Bahá'ís worldwide). To what extent is this implicated in Bahá'í prayers for good governance?

<sup>29</sup> Provisional translation by Necati Alkan. Brief advice on his provisional translation was given (based on “the Arabic original . . . in the manuscript of the Tablet held in the Archives at the World Centre”), courtesy of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, in a letter dated August 12, 2020, to Alkan and myself). For the published Arabic text, see Kamran Ekbal, ed., *Majmú'iy-i Alváh-i mubárakiy-i Ḥadrat-i Bahá'u'lláh khiṭáb bih Jináb-i Muḥammad Muṣṭafá Baghdádí va farzandánishán Jináb-i Husayn Afandí Iqbál va 'Alí Afandí Iḥsán va Amínu'l-Badí Abú'l-Vafá va Duktur Diyá Mabsút Baghdádí* (private publication, 2015), p. 182. For a review of the Tablets, see Kamran Ekbal, “Murúri bar Alváh-i Ḥadrat-i Bahá'u'lláh khiṭáb bih Muḥammad Mustafá Baghdádí” (“A Review of the Tablets Revealed in Honour of Muhammad Mustafá Baghdádí and His Family”), in *Safíniy-i 'Irfán* 4, pp. 192–202. (Abdülhamid is mentioned on p. 200.) On Mustafa Baghdadi, see <http://bahaisworldwide.blogspot.com/2011/05/mustafa-baghdadi.html>; accessed December 13, 2018: “Mustafa Baghdadi lived for many years in Beirut, Syria. He was one of the earliest followers of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. He provided countless services for the Faith. Throughout his life he was firm and full of zeal. His house was at the disposal of all pilgrims and his services to them were invaluable. Many of the American friends, passing through Beirut to visit 'Abdul-Bahá in Akka and Haifa, bear testimony to the nobility of his spirit and the strength of his character. All loved and revered him and looked up to him as one of the spiritual souls of the earlier days. His winsome manner and gentleness of heart attracted all those who came in contact with him and carried away the sweet fragrance of his life. He had three sons, Hussein Ighbal, Ali Ehsan and Zia Baghdadi, who studied sciences and were active servants in the Cause. Zia Baghdadi was loved and respected by all the American friends for his earnestness and enthusiasm. He studied medicine in the US and assisted with the Persian section of the Star of the West magazine” (adapted from the *Star of the West* 1 [January 19, 1911] : 10–11). On the Baghdadi family, see Kamran Ekbal, “Baḡdádí Family,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bagdad-family>; accessed December 13, 2018.



## Prayer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the Ottoman State and Caliphate

Alkan has provisionally translated the following prayer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the Ottoman State, which, characteristically, is also a prayer for good governance:

He is God!

O my God! O my God!

I ask Thee by Thy invisible confirmations, Thy eternal assistance and merciful bestowals to aid the Sublime Ottoman State and the Muḥammadan Caliphate to be firmly established on earth and on the throne. Protect its domains from disasters and guard the centre of its caliphate [Istanbul] from misfortunes.

O Lord! Preserve it in the shelter of Thy defence and care, guard it with the eye of Thy loving-kindness and extend to it Thy merciful glance, for it safeguards the blessed and luminous Spot [Haifa/Akka], shelters the Vale of Sinai and extends the shade of its protective canopy over the heads of the Loved Ones [Bahá'ís].

Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. Verily, Thou art, the Most Powerful, the Almighty.<sup>30</sup>

This prayer is purely of historical interest, in that the Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate are no longer in existence, both having been summarily abolished under the direct influence of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924—or, more precisely, the Ottoman Empire collapsed as a result of its defeat in World War I. Although this prayer may be seen as an expression of enlightened self-interest on the part of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in petitioning, by implication, for the protection of Bahá'í persons and property within Ottoman domains, it is axiomatic that the litmus test of whether or not a given state has acted with justice and fairness is its treatment of all minorities, religious and otherwise.

While Ottoman protection of Bahá'í holy places went far in securing them and preserving them intact, such safeguards were not always extended to the rights of the Bahá'í religious minority. So, along with the fall of the

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<sup>30</sup>'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Prayer for the Ottoman State and Caliphate," with provisional translation by Alkan. Brief advice on his provisional translation was given, courtesy of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, in a letter dated August 12, 2020, to Alkan and myself. For the original Arabic text, see *az Makátib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 2:31, at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MA2/ma2-312.html>; accessed December 13, 2018.

Ottoman state and the Caliphate, this Bahá'í prayer ceased to be offered on their behalf, which is why this particular Bahá'í prayer for good governance is of historical interest only—not because the rights of Bahá'ís were sometimes not protected. Yet, this prayer's underlying principles may be studied for phenomenological and functional purposes, especially as they reappear and are articulated in other Bahá'í prayers for good governance.

### Prayer for America

After the Young Turk revolution of 1908, all political prisoners in the Ottoman Empire were liberated, including 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Putting into practice the Bahá'í ethic of earning one's own livelihood, 'Abdu'l-Bahá undertook a successful land purchase and farming enterprise in the Jordan Valley, much of which was used to provide food and other resources to the poor and needy in Palestine, especially during World War I.<sup>31</sup> During 1911–13, 'Abdu'l-Bahá traveled abroad to North Africa, Europe, and North America to promulgate Bahá'u'lláh's universal teachings. On May 6, 1912, in Cleveland, Ohio, 'Abdu'l-Bahá made this remarkable prophecy regarding America's future destiny: “The American continent gives signs and evidences of very great advancement; its future is even more promising, for its influence and illumination are far-reaching, and it will lead all nations spiritually.”<sup>32</sup> The best-known Bahá'í prayer for good governance may well be 'Abdu'l-Bahá's “Prayer for America,” as found in standard American Bahá'í prayer books:

O Thou kind Lord! This gathering is turning to Thee. These hearts are radiant with Thy love. These minds and spirits are exhilarated by the message of Thy glad-tidings. O God! Let this American democracy become glorious in spiritual degrees even as it has aspired to material degrees, and render this just government victorious. Confirm this revered nation to upraise the standard of the oneness of humanity, to promulgate the Most Great Peace, to become thereby most glorious and praiseworthy among

<sup>31</sup> Iraj Poostchi, “Adasiyyah: A Study in Agriculture and Rural Development,” *Bahá'í Studies Review*, vol. 16 (2010), pp. 61–105 (reference courtesy of Sen McGlinn, November 23, 2018). See also Roderic Maude and Derwent Maude, *The Servant, the General, & Armageddon* (Oxford, U.K.: George Ronald, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 104.

all the nations of the world. O God! This American nation is worthy of Thy favors and is deserving of Thy mercy. Make it precious and near to Thee through Thy bounty and bestowal.<sup>33</sup>

This prayer is presumed to have been recorded contemporaneously, in the original Persian, by one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s entourage of secretaries, whose practice it was to record, by way of “real time” notes, the exact words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s extemporaneous talks and speeches delivered while traveling. At the same time, stenographic notes were routinely taken of the English translations of the same talks that were simultaneously offered, in the language of the host country. However, no Persian original for this prayer has been found to date, as the Research Department explained in a Memorandum, dated July 20, 2017, to the Universal House of Justice:

Dr. Buck also asks for comment on the authenticity of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s other prayer for America beginning “O Thou kind Lord! This gathering is turning to Thee”. As he mentions, this prayer appears at the end of a talk that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave on 30 April 1912 at the public meeting concluding the Bahá’í Temple Unity Convention in Chicago, Illinois. Mr. Joseph H. Hannen took the notes from which the published version was constructed. The Research Department has not, to date, obtained the original Persian transcript of the talk in question, and the World Centre does not hold a copy of the notes taken by Mr. Hannen. However, in Maḥmúd’s Diary,[1] the entry for 30 April 1912 includes a brief reference to the prayer with which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ended His talk. Moreover, the talk and prayer were published in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s lifetime in “Star of the West”, volume 3, number 3 (April 28, 1912), in an addendum to this issue titled “Wisdom-Talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, given at Chicago, Ill., April 30th to May 5th, 1912”.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup>‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Prayer for America,” in *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdul-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 25. This prayer was revealed on April 30, 1912, during ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s “Talk at Public Meeting Concluding Convention of Bahá’í Temple Unity, Drill Hall, Masonic Temple, Chicago, Illinois,” and “Translated by Dr. Ameen U. Fareed and taken stenographically by Joseph H. Hannen,” in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 67.

<sup>34</sup>Research Department, “Prayers for America,” Memorandum to the Universal House of Justice (July 20, 2017), citing *Maḥmúd’s Diary: The Diary of Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání Chronicling ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey to America*, tr. Mohi Sobhani (Oxford, U.K.: George Ronald, 1998), p. 71.

In the absence of a Persian original for this “Prayer for America,” there is some question, therefore, as to whether ‘Abdu’l-Bahá actually used the word “democracy” or if this was a benign interpolation on the part of the translator.<sup>35</sup> That said, there is no question that the “Most Great Peace” is an important Bahá’í term, used to express the anticipated world commonwealth, which would emerge in due course, ultimately evolving to such degree that it would usher in a future golden age of world civilization. One of the avowed purposes of the Bahá’í Faith is to help establish the conditions necessary for such a world civilization to come about. As a necessary precondition, the consciousness of the oneness of humankind must first be established, as this is the fundamental foundation upon which the world commonwealth can, and must, be based.

In this invocation, there is something of a hoped-for, part-to-whole relationship between the immediate audience and America itself. The idea is that, somehow, “the message of Thy glad-tidings”—by which the “minds and spirits” of those present are “exhilarated”—can and will promote the message of world unity, which is at the heart and soul of the Bahá’í Faith and may be said to characterize the nature and essence of the Bahá’í social gospel and discourse.

When America (or, for that matter, any other nation) endeavors “to upraise the standard of the oneness of humanity” and “to promulgate the Most Great Peace,” this will “thereby” redound to America’s honor and glory by way of international prestige and acclaim. This can occur only if “this American democracy” actually advances “in spiritual degrees even as it has aspired to material degrees.” Once those conditions are met, then America’s “just government” will be rendered “victorious.”

So, it seems clear that the primary function of this prayer for America’s good governance is to promote world unity and, thereby, international

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<sup>35</sup> Shoghi Effendi stated that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prayer for America was “revealed”: “A prayer revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for America was presented by the elected national representatives of the United States Bahá’í Community to President Eisenhower, who acknowledged its receipt in warm terms and above his own signature” (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World: 1950–1957* [Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971], p. 96). For a discussion of “authentication by citation” by Shoghi Effendi, see the brief discussion in Buck, *God & Apple Pie*, p. 327, and n. 101, quoting and commenting on this pronouncement: “The Universal House of Justice has asked us to affirm that the utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá quoted in the writings of the Guardian can be taken as authentic” (letter dated June 15, 2000, to an individual, quoted in a letter by the Universal House of Justice, dated August 20, 2014, to the present writer).

peace and prosperity, which, of course, will also redound to America's enlightened self-interest and goodwill. This is a clear condition for America's spiritual and ultimate success as a nation—if America takes its opportunity to promote and materially advance ideal international relations. In this prayer, America's leadership is not seen as one of dominance but, rather, as a catalyst in hastening the advent of world peace and prosperity.

### Another Prayer for America

Another Bahá'í prayer for America exists—this time, with the original Persian text extant.<sup>36</sup> The English translation is as follows:

O Lord! Bestow Thy gracious aid and confirmation upon this just government. This country lieth beneath the sheltering shadow of Thy protection and this people is in Thy service. O Lord! Confer upon them Thy heavenly bounty and render the outpourings of Thy grace and favor copious and abundant. Suffer this esteemed nation to be held in honor and enable it to be admitted into Thy kingdom.

Thou art the Powerful, the Omnipotent, the Merciful, and Thou art the Generous, the Beneficent, the Lord of grace abounding.<sup>37</sup>

This prayer for America is part of a longer prayer included in the section for “Gatherings” in the standard American Bahá'í prayer book; it has not received a great deal of attention as a prayer for America as such.

Consistent with the previous prayer, divine blessings are invoked for America, presumably for the continued furtherance of “Thy service,” which is not specified here but is clear from the context of the talk that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá delivered on May 26, 1912, at the Mount Morris Baptist Church in New York. The ideal outcomes, in fact, are presented in the text

<sup>36</sup>The original Persian text of the full prayer (in which the prayer for America is embedded) has been published in *Khiṭábát*, vol. 2; see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Majmú’ih-yi Khiṭábát Ḥaḍrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá fī Úrúpa va Ámríká* (“Collected Talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Europe and America”), vol. 2 (Hofheim-Langenhain, Germany: Bahá'í-Verlag, BE 127/1970–71; repr. in one vol., 1984), pp. 96–97. The short prayer for America begins on p. 97, on the middle of the sixth line from the bottom of the page, beginning with “*Khudá*” (“O Lord!”). See <https://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA2/ka2-101.html> and <https://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA2/ka2-102.html> (courtesy of Adib Masumian, personal communication, March 28, 2020).

<sup>37</sup>‘Abdul-Bahá, “26 May 1912, Talk at Mount Morris Baptist Church, Fifth Avenue and 126th Street, New York,” in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 150; and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers*.

of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk in the paragraph immediately preceding the prayer: "Let us endeavor to attain capacity, susceptibility and worthiness that we may hear the call of the glad tidings of the Kingdom, become revived by the breaths of the Holy Spirit, hoist the standard of the oneness of humanity, establish human brotherhood, and under the protection of divine grace attain the everlasting and eternal life."<sup>38</sup>

This prayer is aspirational as well as inspirational. In the conclusion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk, delivered from the pulpit in the Baptist sanctuary on that occasion, the exhortation to "endeavor to attain capacity, susceptibility and worthiness" is to enable listeners to "hear the call of the glad tidings of the Kingdom," which is not the gospel of Jesus Christ (as, we may surmise, most of the listeners understood this religious, even Christian expression) but, rather, as the news of the coming of a new Messenger of God, Bahá'u'lláh, along with the call, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, to "hoist the standard of the oneness of humanity" and to "establish human brotherhood." Whether 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call to "endeavor to attain capacity, susceptibility and worthiness" is seen as a set of preconditions—or equally (and more usefully, perhaps) seen as the logical outcome of a certain course of action—good results may flow from well-intentioned efforts. To what extent any of the listeners may have understood and appreciated this underlying message is even more conditional, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself commented: "Some hearts may be affected, then soon forget; others owing to superstitious ideas and imaginations may even fail to hear and understand; but the blessed souls who are attentive to my exhortation and admonition, listening with the ear of acceptance, allowing my words to penetrate effectively, will advance day by day toward full fruition, yea even to the Supreme Concurrence."<sup>39</sup> The next prayer is of particular importance and interest.

### **"A Prayer for the confirmation of the American Government"**

'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed the first Bahá'í prayer for America sometime around 1900. He later praised the American model of government and said, "Having traveled from coast to coast, I find the United States of America vast

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<sup>38</sup>'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

and progressive, the government just and equitable, the nation noble and independent . . . worthy of raising the flag of brotherhood and international agreement.<sup>40</sup> However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá repeatedly challenged America to fulfill its role of peacemaker in the world, stating, “America has become renowned for her discoveries, inventions and artistic skill, famous for equity of government and stupendous undertakings; now may she also become noted and celebrated as the herald and messenger of Universal Peace.”<sup>41</sup> This prayer for America—for which an authenticated Arabic original exists—was originally published as a provisional translation in *Star of the West*, a Bahá’í periodical.<sup>42</sup> In 2017, the Universal House of Justice released an authorized translation, accompanied by a Memorandum that reads, in part, as follows:

Dr. Buck requests an authorized translation of the prayer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá beginning “*Alláhumma yá mu’ayyid kull-i sultatin ‘ádila(tin)*” and asks whether it was revealed specifically for America. The prayer in question is authentic, and its original Arabic text is held in the Archives at the Bahá’í World Centre. The manuscript includes the following heading in English: “A Prayer for the confirmation of the American Government.” Moreover, in a message dated January 4, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly, the Universal House of Justice stated that the prayer was “specifically revealed for the U.S. Government.” A 2017 authorized translation of the prayer follows:<sup>43</sup>

... O my God! O Thou Who endowest every just power and equitable dominion with abiding glory and everlasting might, with permanence and stability, with constancy and honour! Aid Thou by Thy heavenly grace every government that acteth justly towards its subjects and every sovereign authority, derived from Thee, that shieldeth the poor and the weak under the banner of its protection.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 386–387.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “A Prayer for the confirmation of the American Government: Revealed about the Year 1900,” *Star of the West* 8 (September 27, 1917): 141, at [https://bahai.works/Star\\_of\\_the\\_West/Volume\\_8/Issue\\_11/Text](https://bahai.works/Star_of_the_West/Volume_8/Issue_11/Text); accessed December 13, 2018. See also *Star of the West* 9 (June 24, 1918): 75, at [https://bahai.works/Star\\_of\\_the\\_West/Volume\\_9/Issue\\_6/Text](https://bahai.works/Star_of_the_West/Volume_9/Issue_6/Text); accessed December 13, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Bahá’í World Centre, Research Department, Memorandum, “Prayers for America” (July 20, 2017).

I beseech Thee, by Thy divine grace and surpassing bounty, to aid this just government, the canopy of whose authority is spread over vast and mighty lands and the evidences of whose justice are apparent in its prosperous and flourishing regions. Assist, O my God, its hosts, raise aloft its ensigns, bestow influence upon its word and its utterance, protect its lands, increase its honour, spread its fame, reveal its signs, and unfurl its banner through Thine all-subduing power and Thy resplendent might in the kingdom of creation.

Thou, verily, aidest whomsoever Thou willest, and Thou, verily, art the Almighty, the Most Powerful.<sup>44</sup>

The original Arabic text of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s “A Prayer for the confirmation of the American Government” may be found online; it was previously published in print in *Muntakhabátí az Makátíb-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, vol. 2, p. 313.<sup>45</sup> A transliteration, into Latin characters, of the original Arabic

<sup>44</sup>‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Additional Prayers Revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/additional-prayers-revealed-abdul-baha/190618071/1#764030886>; accessed April 24, 2021. The authorized translation was released by the Universal House of Justice, Bahá’í World Centre, e-mail communication, July 23, 2017, with attachments, in response to a request by Christopher Buck for an authorized translation, May 7, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “A Prayer for the confirmation of the American Government,” Arabic text published at <https://www.bahai.org/fa/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/additional-tablets-talks-abdul-baha/292030620/1#768084884>; <https://www.bahai.org/fa/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/additional-tablets-talks-abdul-baha/additional-tablets-talks-abdul-baha.pdf>, accessed December 13, 2018; and *Muntakhabátí az Makátíb-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, vol. 2, p. 313, at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MA2/ma2-313.html>, accessed December 13, 2018 (reference courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami, personal communication, May 7, 2017, and Adib Masumian, August 25, 2017). See also the following information provided by Bahá’í scholar, Steven Phelps: “AB06000. 130 words, Ara. Mss: None. Pubs: BRL. DAK#53, MKT2.313. Trans: BRL.APAB#17, SW v08#11 p.141, SW v09#06 p.075, SW v24#09 p.258, JHT .A#001. *O my God! O Thou Who endowest every just power and equitable dominion with abiding glory . . .* Notes: Prayer for confirmation of the American Government” (Steven Phelps, *Loom of Reality: A Partial Inventory of the Works of the Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith* [Version 2.02, November 3, 2020], p. 494, <http://blog.loomofreality.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Partial-Inventory-2.02.pdf>; accessed April 24, 2021). As to the manuscript of this prayer, note that “its original Arabic text is held in the Archives at the Bahá’í World Centre” as stated in the Memorandum cited above at n. 43. See <https://www.bahai.org/fa/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/additional-tablets-talks-abdul-baha/292030620/1#768084884>; accessed March 28, 2020. In Phelps’s *Inventory*, the category, “Mss,” refers to “publicly available” manuscripts, of which there are none known at present, such that the manuscript archived in the Bahá’í International Archives is unique and, therefore, exists in “splendid isolation,” as scholars say.



text of this prayer for America is as follows—so that, when read aloud, the reader can approximate the sound of the Arabic original as well:

*Alláhumma, yá mu'ayyidu kulli sulṭatin 'ádilatin wa salṭanatin qásiṭatin 'alá 'l-'izzati 'l-abadiyyati wa 'l-qudrati 's-sarmadiyyati wa 'l-baqá'i wa 'l-istiqrári wa 'th-thabáti wa 'l-iftikhár. Ayyid bi-fayḍi rahmáníyyatika kulla hukúmatin ta'dilu bayna ra'áyáhá wa kulla sulṭatin mamnúḥatin minka taḥ mí al-fuqará'i wa 'd-du'afá'i biráyátihá.*

*As'aluka bi-fayḍi qudsika wa ṣayyibi faḍlika an tu'ayyida hádhihi 'l-húkumata 'l-'ádilata 'llati ḍarabat aṭnába khibá'ihá 'alá mamáliki wási'atin shási'atin wa azharat al-'adálata burháníhá fí aqálimihá 'l-'ámirati 'l-báhirá.*

*Alláhumma, ayyid junúdahá wa ráyátahá wa naffidh kalimatahá wa áyátihá wa aḥmi ḥamahá wa rá'i dhimárahá wa adhi' ṣítahá wa shayyi' áthárahá wa i'la 'alamahá bi-quwwatika 'l-qáhirati 'alá 'l-ashyá'i wa quwwatika 'l-báhirati fí malakúti 'l-inshá'. Innaka anta mu'ayyidu man tashá' wa innaka anta 'l-muqtadiru 'l-qadí.<sup>46</sup>*

Apart from the English note that appears on the original Arabic manuscript, there is no internal evidence that appears to be specific to America itself. That fact may lend a certain universality to this particular prayer, which may commend it for use as a prayer for good governance for other countries as well. That said, what follows are some observations on this prayer, with an American context in mind.

From my perspective, this is a universal statement of principle that ideally applies to every established government throughout the world. Such language is general and certainly not specific to America, as the first paragraph applies to “every government that acteth justly towards its subjects” and to “every sovereign authority . . . that shieldeth the poor and the weak under the banner of its protection.” Such governments will be aided by God, according to this prayer. First and foremost is protecting the poor and weak, as well as extending protections and justice to all subjects within any given country.

The second paragraph of the prayer may concern America, although not by name. The descriptions certainly fit: America is a “just government.” Here, based on Shoghi Effendi’s interpretation of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá meant

<sup>46</sup> Transliteration by Joshua Hall, January, 2017; corrections courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami and Alkan.

by a “just government,” the word “just” really means “duly constituted”: “What the Master’s statement really means is obedience to a duly constituted government, whatever that government may be in form. We are not the ones, as individual Bahá’ís, to judge our government as just or unjust.”<sup>47</sup> That said, the earnest hope that this prayer expresses is that America—duly constituted as a “just government”—will continue to govern with justice for all. The prayer goes on to describe America as having a “canopy of . . . authority” that “is spread over vast and mighty lands” and to praise “the evidences” of its “justice,” which are “apparent in its prosperous and flourishing regions.”

What does this prayer specifically ask God to do when it comes to aiding and assisting America as a nation? Here, God is asked to bless, guide, and empower America in nine distinct ways:

1. *“aid this just government”*: “God bless America!” is a familiar phrase, especially at the end of presidential speeches. Much of this prayer may similarly be recapitulated as, “Behold how God has blessed America!” Regardless of how well (or not so well) America may be doing, this prayer inspires continued faith in America, at least in terms of fulfilling its ideal potential, which Bahá’í authoritative sources variously refer to as “America’s spiritual destiny.” It remains, therefore, for each citizen to ask God to “aid this just government,” by continuing to inspire, ennoble, and enable America’s public policy and the exercise of good governance. So, beseeching God to “aid this just government” is a general invocation for divine assistance to America in every respect, whether as to America’s legislative, judicial, or executive branches; or to America’s state of affairs, domestically and abroad; or to America’s economic, cultural, social, educational, and scientific military capabilities.
2. *“Assist . . . its hosts”*: Here, “hosts” presumably refers to all civil servants, including America’s executive forces, whether police or military. Readers may be familiar with the biblical expression, “the Lord of hosts” (1 Sam. 17:45), where, as here, “hosts” means either the “heavenly host” or earthly forces, principally the military. More broadly, “hosts” can also simply mean a large number of people—such as the people of one country.

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<sup>47</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian* (National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the Hawaiian Islands) (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, India, 1973), p. 56.

3. “*raise aloft its ensigns*”: “Ensigns” typically means “flags,” which can be a symbol for America’s standards, values, and reputation and for America’s influence in the world at large. To “raise aloft” means to exalt, uplift, and otherwise promote. There would be no other reason or purpose for God to do so unless this were meant to further or fulfill a greater social good for the world generally.
4. “*bestow influence upon its word and its utterance*”: The way in which “raise aloft its ensigns” is described above aptly characterizes this invocation as well, which asks God to increase America’s influence for the betterment of the world. Obviously, by “influence” is not meant strengthening America’s ability to align other nations with America’s values and policies merely for America’s own sake. Here, “influence” presupposes a positive influence, as well as earning and enjoying the respect of other nations *vis-à-vis* America, ideally.
5. “*protect its lands*”: America, as every nation, has its own security interests. Protection, first of all, involves domestic peace and tranquility, economic stability, and, ideally, prosperity. There may even be an “environmental” dimension here, as none of this can happen without America’s “lands” remaining in good shape, without serious damage due to environmental pollution, degradation, and climate change—which, to a certain extent, may be regarded as a national security issue, as well as a global environmental crisis of somewhat existential, world-historical proportions. There is, moreover, much to commend the idea that what is best for the world redounds to America’s enlightened self-interest, that is, good for one and all alike.
6. “*increase its honour*”: In the business sense, “honor”—as “goodwill”—is a key intangible asset that can even be quantified in business valuation. To increase America’s honor redounds not only to America’s benefit but also, in theory if not in practice, to those countries under America’s ideally benign influence, if and when economic values are anchored in human values and where humanitarian objectives take precedence over purely material interests.
7. “*spread its fame*”: “Fame” also has to do with reputation, in the sense of having a “good name” and enjoying the “goodwill” of the international community at large. Fame should be well deserved and worthy of honor. Otherwise, fame can turn into infamy.
8. “*reveal its signs*”: Here, “signs” can be understood to mean not only symbols but also intentions, mission and purpose, values, policies, and

alliances and commitments, where good governance, domestically, translates into effective diplomacy and efficacy in the arena of international relations.

9. “*unfurl its banner through Thine all-subduing power and Thy resplendent might in the kingdom of creation*”: “Banner” is likely the equivalent of “signs,” which also might be understood as a dual reference to “evidences.” “Unfurl its banner” may also suggest extending America’s positive influence, if it arises to fulfill its destiny to “lead all nations spiritually.”<sup>48</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s “A Prayer for the confirmation of the American Government,” if widely invoked, has significant potential for inspiring and exerting a leavening social influence—that is, its ability to potentialize and realize ambitious and noble domestic and international initiatives. Although this prayer is optimistic—and emphasizes and encourages a positive world role that America has the opportunity and enhanced potential to exercise—America’s prospective moral and social leadership have been compromised by a number of unresolved issues and social maladies that threaten the very fabric of American society. That said, this is a prayer for blessings that will redound to the greater good of the world. In a letter dated February 25, 2017, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States stated:

At this pivotal juncture in our nation’s history, our foremost responsibility is to everywhere affirm—in the Name of Bahá’u’lláh—the truth of the oneness of humanity in a manner that will have an impact for decades to come. We must accelerate our efforts to remove the stains of prejudice and injustice from the fabric of our society. As you take up this call with courage and zeal, we ask that you keep the following concepts in mind.

The tensions, divisions, and injustices that currently beset America are symptoms of a longstanding illness. The nation is afflicted with a deep spiritual disorder, manifest in rampant materialism, widespread moral decay, and a deeply ingrained racial prejudice. As a result, millions of our fellow Americans, subject to systemic injustices in many facets of life, are prevented from making their full contributions to society and of partaking fully in its benefits. No one is immune to this disorder—we are all

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<sup>48</sup>‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 104.

members of this society and to some degree suffer the effects of its maladies. That we live in a critical time can be seen in the way essential questions of identity, social vision, and global relations are being raised to a degree not seen in decades. Increasing numbers of our fellow-citizens are actively in search of solutions both moral and practical to answer them.

The resolution to these challenges lies in recognizing and embracing the truth at the heart of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation—the incontrovertible truth that humanity is one. Ignorance of this truth—which embodies the very spirit of the Age—is itself a form of oppression, for without it, it is impossible to build a truly just and peaceful world.<sup>49</sup>

Note that this prayer is expressed in an ideal way. In a very real sense, it sets forth certain preconditions for good governance, in that “every government” should act “justly towards its subjects” and “every sovereign authority” should shield “the poor and the weak under the banner of its protection.” Ideally, any government, if acting with good governance, can aspire to better “protect its lands,” “increase its honour,” and “spread its fame”—to thereby “reveal its signs” and “unfurl its banner” by virtue of its just reputation and good name.

Bahá'ís should—and often do—pray for their governments. Praying for one's government also means praying for good governance, for they are one and the same. Shoghi Effendi, after all, stated that “a sane and intelligent patriotism” is perfectly in keeping with the Bahá'í teachings, as well as upholding “the allegiance and loyalty of any individual to his country,” as long as national loyalties give way to a “wider loyalty” to all of humankind.<sup>50</sup> The Bahá'í Faith, explained Shoghi Effendi, subordinates or relativizes patriotism, in particular, within the broader context of world citizenship, in general:

It [the Bahá'í Faith] calls for a wider loyalty, which should not, and indeed does not, conflict with lesser loyalties. It instills a love which, in view of its scope, must include and not exclude the love of one's own country. It lays, through this loyalty which it inspires, and this love which it infuses, the only foundation on which the concept of world citizenship

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<sup>49</sup> See National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, Letter “To the American Bahá'í Community” (February 25, 2017), at <https://www.bahai.us/static/assets/20170225-NSA-on-America-and-the-Five-Year-Plan.pdf>; accessed December 13, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 122.

can thrive, and the structure of world unification can rest. It does insist, however, on the subordination of national considerations and particularistic interests to the imperative and paramount claims of humanity as a whole, inasmuch as in a world of interdependent nations and peoples the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole.<sup>51</sup>

The Bahá'í concept of “a sane and intelligent patriotism” can include praying for the welfare of one’s national government and for divine assistance in its exercise of good governance. Each of us can do our part in helping our respective governments to act “justly towards its subjects” and to shield “the poor and the weak under the banner of its protection”—and to make this world a better world.

Since, internally, “A Prayer for the confirmation of the American Government” appears to have no distinctively specific reference to America, this prayer therefore lends itself as a prayer for good governance for any and all governments. In fact, that title, although appearing in the authorized published Arabic text, is omitted from the authorized English translation itself. Although there is no published guidance on its usage, the fact that the authorized English translation omits the original heading in the authoritative online publication (notwithstanding the fact that the English inscription, “A Prayer for the confirmation of the American Government,” appears in the original Arabic manuscript itself) implies no restriction whatsoever for which government this prayer can be offered—that is, it presumably can be prayed for other governments as well. Obviously, it can be used as a prayer for America, and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States plans on including this prayer for America in the next U.S. edition of *Bahá'í Prayers*. That said, this prayer could just as easily be used as a prayer for good governance for any government across the world since it is quite universal in its intrinsic content. That, of course, is purely a matter of personal preference, and, in so saying, I offer this observation as a purely private interpretation.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this essay, Jewish, Christian (Catholic), and Islamic prayers for good governance in the American context were introduced as

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

phenomenological parallels to Bahá'í prayers for good governance. Several such Bahá'í prayers were then offered as exemplars, along with preliminary phenomenological and functional analyses. Although not a universal Bahá'í practice, Bahá'u'lláh, in his last will and testament, encouraged, if not obliged, Bahá'ís to pray for their rulers, which is effectively the same as praying for good governance.

Bahá'u'lláh's injunction to pray for one's rulers is a precept that 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself put into practice—and to good practical effect, since doing so redounds to the benefit of the state and its citizens alike. Moreover, he revealed several prayers for good governance for use by the Bahá'ís themselves. Several such prayers have been presented here, with some comments as to their respective historical contexts. On analysis, these prayers exhort and encourage governments to assist the poor, to protect the oppressed, and, implicitly, to safeguard religious minority rights—including those of the Bahá'ís, whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá represented. The prayers for good governance that 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed are comparable to prayers for good governance in other religious traditions—both phenomenologically and functionally—in that they offer similar features, such as invoking divine blessings for governments that are just, equitable, and protective of the poor and oppressed. In pursuing such noble undertakings—pursuant to their God-given mission and mandate—governments can attract the divine blessings, that is, “confirmations.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá's "A Prayer for the confirmation of the American Government" expresses the ideal not only that America should champion worldwide peace and prosperity but also that its noble founding ideals and principles would enjoy considerable influence in the global community of nations if America arises to fulfill its spiritual destiny in serving as a catalyst in bringing about world peace and prosperity. The Bahá'í teachings indicate that such influence cannot be won by sheer might or the brutal force of arms but by righting what is wrong in the world—that is, addressing and redressing injustices, inequities, inequalities, imbalances, and impoverishment internationally—even if done so out of enlightened self-interest. Ideally, all of this can come true if America, for its part, is true to its founding principles, by way of proactive leadership in such ways as championing human rights, respecting national self-determination, recognizing and protecting territorial sovereignty, encouraging democratic representation,

and promoting international cooperation and unity—scientific as well as political. That said, note (as previously stated) that there is nothing distinctively or quintessentially or exclusively “American” about this particular prayer. Indeed, it is a universal prayer for the spiritual and moral support of any “just and equitable sovereignty”—which includes every duly constituted government that strives to govern in the public interest, for the commonweal, and for the welfare of one and all.

The Bahá'í “Prayer for America” is universal, egalitarian, cosmopolitan—and, most importantly, nonpartisan. This unique prayer renders the venerable presidential benediction—“God bless America!”—more possible, more plausible, more immediate, and more realizable, by encouraging each of us to do our part to heal the racial, religious, class, gender, and other divisions, barriers, and inequities that the United States of America and many other nations have yet to address fully. The Bahá'í teachings universalize nationalisms into universalisms, wherein “God bless America!” expands, in scope and with sincere hope, into a global benediction of “God bless Earth!” Or, as Bahá'í philosopher, Alain Locke (1885–1954), stated so succinctly, yet eloquently, “Eventually, however, just as world-mindedness must dominate and remould [sic] nation-mindedness, so we must transform eventually race-mindedness into human-mindedness.”<sup>52</sup>

Bahá'í prayers for good governance orient those offering such prayers to be mindful of their own roles as good citizens, whereby good citizenship—in pursuit of progressive social transformation—ideally complements, aids, and advances the exercise of good governance by respective governments around the world and serves as a reminder of the desirability and need for all citizens, in all nations, to manifest civic virtues, that is, personal qualities that contribute to the effective functioning of civil and political order, in furtherance of its values and principles.

Meanwhile, Bahá'ís are presently engaged in “community building” efforts worldwide to edify their respective societies by offering spiritual and moral education for children, youth, and adults through children’s classes,

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<sup>52</sup> Alain Locke, “Stretching Our Social Mind” (1944), in “Alain Locke: Four Talks Redefining Democracy, Education, and World Citizenship,” ed. and intro. Christopher Buck and Betty J. Fisher, *World Order*, vol. 38, no. 3 (2006/2007), p. 30, [https://www.academia.edu/29901174/\\_Alain\\_Locke\\_Four\\_Talks\\_Redefining\\_Democracy\\_Education\\_and\\_World\\_Citizenship\\_2008\\_](https://www.academia.edu/29901174/_Alain_Locke_Four_Talks_Redefining_Democracy_Education_and_World_Citizenship_2008_); accessed April 24, 2021.



junior youth groups, devotional gatherings, and study circles.<sup>53</sup> While the collective efficacy and impact of Bahá'í prayers for good governance may be difficult, if not impossible, to determine, such prayers have intrinsic merit and extrinsic outcomes: the positive social actions that such prayers inspire. They are ecumenical and interfaith in nature, universal in scope, altruistic in their intentions, optimistic in their outlook, auspicious in their endeavors, and constructive in their ideal outcomes, for such Bahá'í prayers wish the very best for all of humankind.

In closing, Bahá'u'lláh's injunction, "Pray ye on their behalf"<sup>54</sup>—enjoined in the *Kitáb-i-'Ahd* (Book of the Covenant)—is a "covenantal" obligation on the part of all Bahá'ís. Bahá'u'lláh's solemn exhortation was extended by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the education of children, by recommending "the repeating of prayers for the well-being of ruler and ruled."<sup>55</sup> In the Tablet of Glad-Tidings, Bahá'u'lláh closed with this prayer for rulers: "We earnestly beseech God—exalted be His glory—to aid the rulers and sovereigns, who are the exponents of power and the daysprings of glory, to enforce His laws and ordinances. He is in truth the Omnipotent, the All-Powerful, He Who is wont to answer the call of men."<sup>56</sup> This is essentially a prayer for good governance since the "laws and ordinances" of Bahá'u'lláh embody universal principles and practices of good governance. Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation, "Pray ye on their behalf," is not only for the benefit of the governing elite but for their respective citizens and denizens as well—all of whom, collectively and ultimately, are "world citizens" in their shared, one-planet destiny.

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<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., "The Development of a Worldwide Community," at <https://www.bahai.org/action/response-call-bahaullah/development-worldwide-community>; accessed December 13, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, "*Kitáb-i-'Ahd* (Book of the Covenant)," *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 220.

<sup>55</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet, translated from the Persian, *A Compilation on Bahá'í Education*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, August, 1976), p. 33.

<sup>56</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, "Bishárát (Glad-Tidings)," *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 29.

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