

# Altruism and Extensivity in the Bahá'í Religion\*

Wendy M. Heller and Hoda Mahmoudi

## **Abstract**

*This article examines the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith in relation to recent research on altruism and prosocial behavior. It discusses the interaction between spiritual and social transformation through Bahá'í beliefs and practices that encourage the development of altruistic personalities in individuals within a social framework whose norms are intrinsically altruistic. The Bahá'í teachings on the relationship of the individual and society, the unity of religion, and the unity of humanity are discussed and linked with values and attitudes that recent research suggests foster the development of an altruistic orientation. The role of child socialization and parental discipline is also examined, as well as ethical principles of justice and caring as motivators of altruism, and Bahá'í administrative principles, which provide a social framework for the institutionalization of unity in diversity.*

## **Résumé**

*Cet article examine les enseignements de la Foi bahá'íe par rapport aux recherches récentes sur l'altruisme et les comportements prosociaux. Il traite de l'interaction entre la transformation spirituelle et sociale à travers les croyances et pratiques bahá'íes qui encouragent chez l'individu le développement d'une personnalité altruiste, dans un cadre social dont les normes elles-mêmes sont intrinsèquement de nature altruiste. Les enseignements bahá'ís sur la relation entre l'individu et la société, l'unité des religions et l'unité de l'humanité sont abordés et mis en lien avec les valeurs et les attitudes qui, selon des recherches récentes, favoriseraient le développement d'une orientation altruiste. Le rôle de la socialisation de l'enfant et de la discipline parentale sont examinés dans cet article, de même que les principes éthiques de l'équité et de la compassion, qui sont des motivateurs de l'altruisme, et les principes de l'administration bahá'íe, qui fournissent un cadre social pour l'institutionnalisation de l'unité dans la diversité.*

## **Resumen**

*Esta disertación examina las enseñanzas de la Fe Bahá'í relativo a investigaciones recientes sobre el altruismo y el comportamiento pro social. Discute la interacción entre la transformación espiritual y social mediante creencias y prácticas bahá'ís que animan el desarrollo de una personalidad altruista en el individuo dentro de un margen social cuyas normas son intrínsecamente altruistas. Las enseñanzas bahá'ís sobre la relación*

\* This paper was originally presented at an international conference, "Theoretical and Social Implications of Rescuing People in Extreme Situations: Another Look at Altruism," held in Radziejowice, Poland, June 12-15, 1989. A version of the paper has been published in *Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological, and Historical Perspectives on Altruism* (New York University Press, 1992).

*del individuo y la sociedad, la unidad de la religión, y la unidad de la humanidad, se discuten y vinculan con valores y posturas que según investigación reciente sugieren la promoción de una orientación altruista. El rol de la socialización del niño y la disciplina paternal también se examina, así como los principios éticos del cuidado y de la justicia como motivadores del altruismo, junto con los principios administrativos bahá'ís que proveen un marco social para institucionalizar la unidad con diversidad.*

Human history abounds with examples of oppression and injustice inflicted by one group on another. Over the centuries, ideologically sanctioned patterns of distrust, prejudice, and suspicion have given rise to norms of exclusiveness, aggression, and violence toward those outside one's own social group. Ironically, religion, which has the potential to transcend other group affiliations in uniting people into a community, has itself been the cause of some of the most bitter, violent, and seemingly unsolvable conflicts between peoples. Yet, even while religion has often been used to justify prejudice and hostility against other groups, religious scriptures have furnished inspiring appeals to altruism and enduring exhortations to embrace the "other."

Despite the pattern of group divisiveness, human history also contains examples of acts that defy this pattern: individuals who risk their lives to save others, who refuse to collaborate in acts of oppression even though in doing so they set themselves apart and risk ostracism or even death. Yet, in spite of the high cultural regard for valiant individual examples of moral heroism, societies have generally been slow to promote altruistic behavior as a model to be emulated; they have not deliberately encouraged the development of "altruistic personalities" able to transcend self-interest and group affiliation. However, it is precisely in those examples of altruistic acts that a glimmer of hope can be discerned for a solution to the monumental dysfunction that plagues human societies today, as well as solid evidence that human nature is not innately and incorrigibly aggressive and egocentric—that human beings are genuinely capable of selflessness and extensive behavior toward all people, regardless of the group to which they belong. This article will examine some of the ways in which the Bahá'í Faith combines the unifying function of religion with altruism in its aspiration to develop an altruistically oriented global society.

Located in over two-hundred countries, the Bahá'í Faith has recently been identified as the second most widely distributed religion (geographically) after Christianity (Barrett, "World Religious Statistics" 303). Although the Bahá'í Faith originated in nineteenth-century Iran, the vast majority of its multiracial and multicultural membership is now located in other countries, especially in the Third World, with the largest national community being in India. The Bahá'í religion has no clergy; its community administration is conducted by elected councils of nine members at the local, national, and international levels. The Bahá'í teachings are contained in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'ís accept these works as authoritative texts and

the definitive model for belief and behavior, as well as the blueprint for social transformation and for the global social order that is the religion's ultimate goal (see Universal House of Justice, *The Promise*).

Bahá'ís aim to transform civilization by transforming themselves and their own social institutions on the basis of principles contained in the Bahá'í scriptures. Both altruism and extensivity—a pattern of personal commitment and responsibility that embraces diverse groups of people (see Oliner and Oliner, “Promoting”)—are fundamental components of Bahá'í belief and practice, a factor that has important implications for the global society Bahá'ís are attempting to construct.

The social change envisioned by Bahá'ís involves interrelated and interactive processes of individual and structural transformation. Individual transformation embodies more than a profession of belief; it is viewed as a process of acquiring distinctive personal characteristics and demonstrating them in social interactions as well as in working, together with other Bahá'ís, to develop the emerging Bahá'í social institutions.

In the Bahá'í view, spiritual life is not separated from the realm of social relations but integrated with it. The Bahá'í teachings shift the primary focus of religious practice from individual salvation or enlightenment to the collective progress of humanity as a whole (Arbab, “Process” 10). Those teachings address social conditions and global problems as directly related to the individual's spiritual life: issues of world peace, the equality of men and women, harmony between science and religion, the equitable distribution of wealth and resources, and the elimination of prejudice are, for Bahá'ís, inseparable from religious belief and practice.

Such an emphasis on collective progress has important implications for the relationship of individual entities—whether individual persons, nations, or other groups—to the larger society of which they form a part. As Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1936, that relationship is essentially based on the principle of the subordination of “every particularistic interest, be it personal, regional, or national, to the paramount interests of humanity. . . .” This principle, in turn, is based on the idea that

in a world of inter-dependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected. (*The World Order* 198).

Yet, the interests of humanity as a whole are not conceptualized in terms of a vague abstraction that could be appropriated by a particular dominant group and interpreted as identical with its own interests, but rather as a complex dynamic relationship between the parts and the whole, in which the viability of the whole is served by ensuring the well-being of all its individual parts, an enterprise for which all share responsibility.

This conception is demonstrated at its most basic in the relationship of the individual person and society. Although that relationship is, as Shoghi Effendi has stated, "essentially based on the principle of the subordination of the individual will to that of society," a complex balance is sought between individual freedom and responsibility, in which the individual is neither suppressed nor excessively exalted. Cooperation between society and the individual is stressed, as is the fostering of "a climate in which the untold potentialities of the individual members of society can develop . . ." (Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights* 20). Such a relationship, as it is envisioned, "must allow 'free scope' for 'individuality to assert itself' through modes of spontaneity, initiative and diversity that ensure the viability of society." Thus, even while the will of the individual is subordinated to that of society, "the individual is not lost in the mass but becomes the focus of primary development . . ." (Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights* 20–21). The fulfillment of individual potential is to be sought not in pursuing self-centered desires but in contributing to the benefit and well-being of others, and "the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 2).

As Farzam Arbab, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors, has noted, such a shift of emphasis to the progress of humanity is also reflected in the importance given to the specific qualities that Bahá'ís are enjoined to acquire, qualities that promote prosocial behavior and lead to unity: for example, justice is stressed more than charity, and the acquisition of attitudes conducive to human solidarity is valued over simple tolerance. Even the qualities of love and of detachment from the material world are conceived of as active and social rather than passive and inwardly directed:

. . . the social dimension is also enhanced through the expansion of the meaning of most qualities to include a social vision. Love includes the abolition of social prejudices and the realization of the beauty of diversity in the human race. Detachment from the world is not taught in a way that leads to idleness and to the acceptance of oppression; it is acquired to free us from our own material interests in order to dedicate ourselves to the well-being of others. To this expansion of the meaning of almost all qualities is also added a constant endeavor to acquire social skills, to participate in meetings of consultation, to work in groups, . . . to reach and carry out collective decisions. (Arbab, "Process" 11)

Thus, he concludes, the Bahá'í path of spiritualization "should not be confused with one that defines goodness passively and produces a human being whose greatest virtue is not to harm anyone; it is a path to create social activists and agents of change" (11).

Altruism is a major component of that desired social change and figures prominently in the Bahá'í texts. Many scriptural exhortations delineate

altruistic norms explicitly, holding in high regard those who “nurture altruistic aims and plans for the well-being of their fellow men . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 72) and urging individuals to “be ready to lay down your lives one for the other, and not only for those who are dear to you, but for all humanity” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 170).

Other teachings reflect values and attitudes that, as Oliner and Oliner report in *The Altruistic Personality*, are conducive to an altruistic orientation. These include a sense of unity with and responsibility toward others beyond one’s own social group, a strong family orientation, emphasis on relationship rather than status, generosity, trustworthiness, appreciation of diversity, as well as ethical values of justice and caring.

Unity and interdependence, and their link to helping behavior, are prominent themes in the Bahá’í texts, often expressed through organic metaphors, as in this passage from the writings of Bahá’u’lláh:

The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light is these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony. . . . So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth. (*Gleanings* 288)

Explaining this metaphorical reference, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that because all humans are interconnected and mutually dependent, they must “powerfully sustain one another” by caring for each other:

Let them at all times concern themselves with doing a kindly thing for one of their fellows, offering to someone love, consideration, thoughtful help. Let them see no one as their enemy, or as wishing them ill, but think of all humankind as their friends; regarding the alien as an intimate, the stranger as a companion, staying free of prejudice, drawing no lines. (*Selections* 1–2)

The theme of inclusiveness is emphasized in every aspect of Bahá’í individual and community life, beginning with the fundamental teachings of the oneness of humanity and the unity of religion. The Bahá’í teachings view divine revelation not as a static, unique event, but as a continuing process that is the central feature of human history. The spirit that inspired all the founders of the great religions of the past, the Manifestations of God, is recognized as one and the same. Their original teachings contain the same basic, unchanging spiritual and ethical precepts, prominent among which are the teachings that promote altruism. The tenets that change from one religious dispensation to another are the social laws and practices, which apply those precepts in specific forms. Thus, religious truth is understood to be relative, progressive, and developmental.

Such a perspective implies more than tolerance for the equality of individual religions as separate entities to be respected in a pluralistic society. It redefines

the nature of their relationship to one another and thus sets new terms for a definition of identity based on connection rather than separation. Unlike religious groups who define themselves by their distinction from other groups based on the claim that their founder was the sole or the final source of truth or that their practices are the only correct form of worship, the Bahá'í religious tradition accepts all the great spiritual teachers as equals. Bahá'ís are expected to revere Buddha, Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad, as well as Bahá'u'lláh, recognizing in them all the same spirit of the mediator between God and humanity. Thus, although the body of teachings composing the Bahá'í religion itself cannot accurately be called eclectic, the Bahá'í religious *tradition* includes all of the previous dispensations, which are viewed as "different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion, Divine and indivisible, of which it [the Bahá'í Faith] itself forms but an integral part (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order* 114).

From the Bahá'í perspective, the principle of the unity of religion and progressive revelation restores the unific role of religion in society, providing a basis for resolving long-standing, apparently unbridgeable divisions among religious communities as well as a resolution of the dilemma posed by the existence of numerous religions, each claiming divine origin. For Bahá'ís, the principle removes any pretext for disunity deriving from religious affiliation; in fact, all religious conflict is forbidden. The Bahá'í writings direct Bahá'ís to "love . . . all religions and all races with a love that is true and sincere and show that love through deeds . . ." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 69); to exert their efforts so that "the tumult of religious dissension and strife that agitateth the peoples of the earth may be stilled, that every trace of it may be completely obliterated" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 288). "That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief," Bahá'u'lláh writes, "should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion" (*Gleanings* 287). Affirming the preeminence of the principle of religious inclusiveness and unity, the Bahá'í writings go so far as to state that if religion becomes the cause of division and disunity, it is better to have no religion at all ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 117).

Closely linked to the principle of the unity of religion is the distinguishing feature of the Bahá'í dispensation: the principle of the oneness and wholeness of humanity. The full equality of all members of the human species and their close relationship to one another requires that Bahá'ís regard people from all racial, religious, ethnic, class, and national backgrounds as members of one global human family. Rather than offering mere "symbols of internationalism" in the hope that these might, as Allport suggested, "provide mental anchorage points around which the idea of world-loyalty may develop" (*Nature* 44), the Bahá'í religion begins with the underlying principle of world loyalty and human unity, which is itself the anchorage point, "the pivot," according to Shoghi

Effendi, "round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve . . ." (*The World Order* 42). The extension of the individual's personal commitments and relationships to include the diverse groups composing humanity is repeatedly urged in Bahá'í texts in the strongest terms possible—that is, as no less than a divine commandment:

In every dispensation, there hath been the commandment of fellowship and love, but it was a commandment limited to the community of those in mutual agreement, not to the dissident foe. In this wondrous age, however, praised be God, the commandments of God are not delimited, not restricted to any one group of people, rather have all the friends been commanded to show forth fellowship and love, consideration and generosity and loving-kindness to every community on earth. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 20–21)

Far from being an abstract principle removed from real social conditions, the unity of humankind must be lived in practice, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá told a gathering in Europe in 1912:

Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone. . . . When you meet a [stranger] . . . , speak to him as a friend; if he seems to be lonely try to help him, give him of your willing service; if he be sad console him, if poor succour him, if oppressed rescue him. . . .

What profit is there in agreeing that universal friendship is good, and talking of the solidarity of the human race as a grand ideal? Unless these thoughts are translated into the world of action, they are useless. (*Paris Talks* 16)

Although the Bahá'í writings speak of the absolute equality of all, the intent is not sameness or conformity to a dominant culture, nation, race, class, or any other group. In theory and in practice, cultural and racial diversity is valued in the Bahá'í community. Along with the expression of the ideal, a conscious awareness exists that effort is necessary to break down age-old barriers of prejudice and separation. The cultivation of friendships with people of different backgrounds is repeatedly encouraged, but perhaps the most notable evidence of the Bahá'í commitment to interracial unity is the attitude toward interracial marriage, which is actively welcomed and encouraged in the Bahá'í writings.

In consonance with the prosocial orientation of the Bahá'í teachings, the ideal Bahá'í personality, as implied in the Bahá'í scriptures, is other centered, extensive, and altruistic. In one passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes altruism itself the touchstone for a new definition of true human nature:

. . . man should be willing to accept hardships for himself in order that others may enjoy wealth; he should enjoy trouble for himself that others may enjoy happiness and well-being. This is the attribute of man. . . .

. . . He who is so hard-hearted as to think only of his own comfort, such an one will not be called man.

Man is he who forgets his own interests for the sake of others. His own comfort he forfeits for the well-being of all. Nay, rather, his own life must he be willing to forfeit for the life of mankind. (*Foundations* 42)

Although personal transformation is seen as a lifelong process, according to the Bahá'í texts the foundations of altruistic behavior can be developed in childhood. Children are believed to be born with the capacity for good or bad behavior; during the course of their development they can be influenced by their social interactions, especially in the family. Thus, the development of the prosocial individual begins with the training and socialization of children. The Bahá'í writings urge parents to "teach [children] to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 129). So crucial is the teaching of prosocial behavior that "training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 135).

However, teaching children lofty ideas is not considered sufficient on its own. Emphasis is repeatedly placed upon behavior rather than professions of belief—on deeds, not words. Thus, the most powerful method by which children can be taught a prosocial orientation is the model of parents whose actions reflect the ideal personality characteristics.

The impact of modeling on children has received significant support in the literature on altruism and prosocial behavior. According to Mussen and Eisenberg-Berg, "A substantial proportion of the individual's helping and sharing responses is acquired through observation and imitation of a model's behavior without direct reinforcements" (*Roots* 31). Yarrow, Scott, and Waxler conclude that "generalized altruism would appear to be best learned from parents who do not only try to inculcate the principles of altruism, but who also manifest altruism in everyday interactions" ("Learning Concern" 256). The role of parental influence in fostering the development of the altruistic personality has been further underscored by Oliner and Oliner in *The Altruistic Personality*, their study of rescuers of Jews during World War II.

Another area of related emphasis is parental discipline. The Bahá'í writings state that "it is incumbent upon every father and mother to counsel their children over a long period, and guide them unto those things which lead to everlasting honour" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 134). The development of good character and behavior in children, however, is to be encouraged through the love, understanding, and wise guidance of the parents, using reason rather than force. Bahá'í texts strongly discourage the use of physical punishment or verbal abuse of children, stating that "it is not . . . permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 125).

The Bahá'í view on parental discipline is supported by contemporary social psychologists. Hoffman, as well as others, suggests that the use of physical



power or material resources to control the child's behavior (power assertion) is least effective in developing consideration for others. Power-assertion techniques of discipline promote in children aggressive behavior, self-centered values, and an unwillingness to share with other children. In contrast, the disciplinary technique of induction—reasoning and explanation based on the impact of the child's behavior on others—encourages prosocial behavior (Mussen and Eisenberg-Berg, *Roots*).

Bahá'í child socialization aims to develop a prosocial orientation in children, who are encouraged to recognize themselves as members of a community that begins with the family and extends to include all of humanity. They are encouraged to develop a sense of personal spiritual responsibility to act toward others with empathy and compassion as well as justice and equity, and to sacrifice their own material self-interests for others in need. As adults, Bahá'ís are expected to make a commitment to continue internalizing such patterns until they become the foundation of the personality itself. Spiritual development is seen as an infinite process of self-transformation—that is, a continual, conscious refining of one's behavior in the crucible of social interaction. The cultivation of spiritual, altruistic qualities remains the aim and central focus of life for the adult Bahá'í.

In light of recent research, it is noteworthy that both the ethical principles of justice and of caring, important motivators of altruistic behavior (see Oliner and Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*), are emphasized in the Bahá'í writings, where they are not viewed as contradictory or exclusive but as inseparably connected. Even when the ethic of justice is enjoined, it is usually as a practice to be performed out of concern for others. Justice is presented as the practice of equity, often linked with "safeguard[ing] the rights of the downtrodden . . ." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 247). The Bahá'í conception of justice means that all have a right to receive care.

Well over half a century before Carol Gilligan called attention to the complementarity of the "masculine" ethic of justice and the "feminine" ethic of caring, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had written: "The Kingdom of God is founded upon equity and justice, and also upon mercy, compassion, and kindness to every living soul. Strive ye then with all your heart to treat compassionately all humankind. . . ." He then qualified this statement, asserting that oppression must be opposed: "Kindness cannot be shown the tyrant, the deceiver, or the thief, because, far from awakening them to the error of their ways, it maketh them to continue in their perversity as before" (*Selections* 158).

The Bahá'í teachings recognize that the transformation of individuals into altruistic persons cannot take place outside the social context, which must provide a matrix for that transformation. Recent research has drawn attention to the importance of group norms in motivating moral behavior, whether directly, as a response to the social expectations as such, or indirectly, as

internalized personal norms (Reykowski, "Motivation" 359). The findings of Oliner and Oliner, outlined in *The Altruistic Personality*, further emphasize the importance of the "normocentric" orientation in motivating the altruism of rescuers of Jews during World War II.

Such findings imply that, while altruistic qualities must be fostered in individuals, a social framework must also be provided within which extensivity and altruism are valued and represent the norms of the group itself. The creation of such a society is inseparable from the development of individual altruistic personalities, for, so long as groups value egocentrism, unfettered individualism, status seeking, dominance, and a materialistic orientation, altruism will remain an exception to the rule, and the altruistic personality will appear as deviant in comparison to the rest of the group. In Bahá'í society, this situation is reversed: altruism is not an aberrant behavior contrary to convention because the normative expectations (which individuals are ultimately expected to internalize) are altruistic.

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to describe in its entirety the social order Bahá'ís envision and to which they are committed. However, they believe that

much of it will be the fruit of the process of integration of now isolated or even hostile races, groups, and nations who, as they come together and unite in the same cause, become transformed and help transform each other, and bring to the rising institutions of a new World Order the richness of different cultures and of different social thought and experience. (Arbab, "Process" 11)

Thus, in the Bahá'í view, it is through the individual practice as well as the institutionalization of the principle of unity in diversity that human society can evolve to an unprecedented level of cohesion and cooperation, and transcend the limitations implicit in the current state of separation and competitiveness. While the Bahá'í conception of unity in diversity should not be construed as merely a version of liberal pluralism, the safeguarding and encouraging of diverse elements within the Bahá'í community is a major institutional principle. It is embedded within Bahá'í institutions through practices that require the participation and support of the entire Bahá'í community because they apply at all levels of administrative and community functioning—local, national, and international.

Most prominent of these practices is consultation, a group decision-making process whose goal is to reach solutions to problems by consensus. Bahá'í consultation encourages the open and frank expression of diverse views on the topic under discussion in an atmosphere of love and respect that also allows the "clash of differing opinions" that can strike the "shining spark of truth" (Shoghi Effendí, *Bahá'í Administration* 21). Each member of the consultative group has an equal right of expression, and no blocs, factions, or any subdivisions of the group are permitted. Inseparable from the Bahá'í consultative process is the

development of sensitivity and respect for the different voices whose expressions of opinion may not fit into conventional or dominant cultural modes of communication. Since the group attempts to work toward consensus on an issue, voting only as a last resort, the process does not necessarily require reduction to duality: alternatives need not be narrowed down to the two poles "for" and "against." Instead, the consultative process itself, drawing on the interactive contributions of all its diverse members, is looked to as the creative source of new solutions.

Consultation is regarded both as a method for generative decision making and conflict resolution as well as an instrument for reinforcing the unity of a diverse group. It is the method by which the Bahá'í administrative institutions conduct the affairs of the Bahá'í community, but Bahá'ís are also encouraged to use consultation in all aspects of their lives, whether in the family, neighborhood, or workplace.

Another way in which Bahá'í administrative institutions are structured to implement unity in diversity involves practices intended to ensure the participation of minority ethnic populations. (The definition of what constitutes a "minority" is left to the discretion of the national institution in each country.) "To discriminate against any race, on the ground of its being socially backward, politically immature, and numerically in a minority," is considered to be "a flagrant violation of the spirit" of the Bahá'í teachings (Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 35). In principle, protecting the "just interests of any minority element within the Bahá'í community," and ensuring that all have the opportunity to contribute their perspectives to the collaborative efforts of the group, is considered so important that representatives of minority populations "are not only enabled to enjoy equal rights and privileges, but they are even favored and accorded priority" (Universal House of Justice, *Messages* 49). Bahá'í communities are instructed that it is their duty to ensure that "Bahá'í representative institutions, be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these divers elements, racial or otherwise, as possible" (Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 36).

One way in which this principle is practiced is the minority tie rule of Bahá'í elections. In the course of elections for Bahá'í administrative institutional membership—elections conducted without nominations or campaigning and decided by plurality vote—if voting results in a tie between persons, one of whom represents a minority, "priority should unhesitatingly be accorded the party representing the minority, and this for no other reason except to stimulate and encourage it, and afford it an opportunity to further the interests of the community" (Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 35). In addition to its direct effect in increasing minority representation on Bahá'í administrative institutions, the practice of this rule heightens the sensitivity of the group to its minority membership and reaffirms the group commitment to valuing and encouraging

minority participation. For the individual believer, conceding a tie vote to the minority representative becomes a concrete opportunity to practice sacrifice of self-interest for the other within a context of social approval.

Whether applied in community administration, in the family, in education, or in the economy, the Bahá'í principles and practices are viewed as catalysts whose application will ultimately bring about social transformation leading to the development of an altruistic global society. Such a society, in the Bahá'í context, begins with the individual striving daily toward personal transformation—the deliberate internalization of spiritual teachings incorporating altruistic, extensive values as personal norms. The Bahá'í teachings strive to imbue individuals with an inclusive orientation transcending, though not suppressing, other group loyalties and valuing the well-being of the entire planet and all its inhabitants. Throughout the Bahá'í writings, the vision imparted to the individual is that of a peaceful, just, and caring civilization whose foundation rests on the cornerstone of the unity of all human beings, a unity that is to be consolidated and protected by institutions which reflect and promote the principles of unity, equity, and altruistic service as normative expectations.

### Works Cited

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Foundations of World Unity*. 4th ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979.
- . *Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911*. 11th ed. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969.
- . *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*. Comp. Howard MacNutt. 2d ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982.
- . *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. Trans. M. Gail with Ali-Kuli Khan. 3d ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975.
- . *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. Comp. Research Dept. Bahá'í World Centre. Trans. Marzieh Gail et al. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978.
- Allport, Gordon W. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954.
- Arbab, Farzam. "The Process of Social Transformation." In *The Bahá'í Faith and Marxism: Proceedings of a Conference Held January 1986*. Ottawa: Association for Bahá'í Studies, 1987: 9–20.
- Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. Trans. Shoghi Effendi. 2d ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976.
- Barrett, D. B. "World Religious Statistics." *Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year*. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1988.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Hoffman, Martin. "Moral Internalization, Parental Power, and the Nature of Parent-Child Interaction." *Developmental Psychology* 11 (1975): 228–39.

- Mussen, P., and N. Eisenberg-Berg. *Roots of Caring, Sharing, and Helping: The Development of Prosocial Behavior in Children*. San Francisco: Freeman, 1977.
- Oliner, Samuel P., and Pearl M. Oliner. *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe*. New York: Free Press, 1988.
- . "Promoting Extensive Altruistic Bonds: A Conceptual Elaboration and Some Pragmatic Implications." In *Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological, and Historical Perspectives on Altruism*, edited by Pearl M. Oliner, et al. New York: New York University Press, 1992.
- Reykowski, Janusz. "Motivation of Prosocial Behavior." In *Cooperation and Helping Behavior: Theories and Research*, edited by V. J. Derlaga and J. Grizelak. New York: Academic Press, 1982: 355–75.
- Shoghi Effendi. *The Advent of Divine Justice*. 4th ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984.
- . *Bahá'í Administration*. 5th ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968.
- . *The World Order of Bahá' u'lláh: Selected Letters*. 2d ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974.
- Universal House of Justice. *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá' u'lláh: A Statement by the Universal House of Justice*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989.
- . *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968–1973*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976.
- . *The Promise of World Peace*. Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985. Also published as "To the Peoples of the World: The Promise of World Peace." *Bahá'í Studies* 14. Ottawa: Association for Bahá'í Studies, 1986.
- Yarrow, M. R., P. Scott, and C. Z. Waxler. "Learning Concern for Others." *Developmental Psychology* 8 (1973): 240–60.