An Individual Bahá'í Perspective on Spiritual
Aspects of Cultural Diversity and Sustainable
Development: Towards a Second Enlightenment

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Abstract: This paper attempts to encourage a broad discourse on the spiritual value of cultural diversity and how such reflection can impact development policy on the local, national and international levels. It will be suggested that the fundamental principle that underpins the maturation of sustainable development policy is a spiritually and materially integrated understanding of the value of humans, their cultures and the environment in which they live. Assessment will be made of the current understandings of the spiritual value of cultural diversity as seen in key international documents. Spiritually based development indicators suggested by the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) will also be examined and then related to personal experience of the author in work with Indigenous communities. It is suggested that successfully reintegrating the spiritual and the material in a framework of humanity as one diverse loving family empowers a release of unbridled human creativity of greater significance to the development of human civilisation than the enlightenment itself.

Keywords: Spiritual Value of Cultural Diversity, Sustainable Development Policy, Bahá'í Faith

…every Faith has given rise to a culture which flowered in different forms…[1]
The fundamental principle of the oneness of mankind, and the aim of the Faith to promote unity in diversity, underlie the Bahá'í approach to indigenous peoples. Their rights are inseparable from human rights for all, and the Bahá'í Faith upholds the right of indigenous peoples to develop and take pride in their own identity, culture and language.[2]

Introduction[3],[4]

THIS PAPER IS offered from an individual Bahá'í perspective that by no means claims to be comprehensive or authoritative. It offers an attempt to explore selected spiritual issues in development theory through the interface of personal experience, individual reflection on some of the Writings of Baha'u'llah, policy statements of the Bahá'í International Community, International Legislation and Policy in the field of development. Perhaps most importantly, fundamental to this reflection is the experience of practical engagement of consultation, in an attempted spirit of humility with many Indigenous communities and individuals over more than 35 years that continue to transform and 'develop' the author's consciousness. Much of my view about the nature of social and economic development is thus a reflection of this inward journey. My understanding of what it means to be a Bahá'í has been inestimably enriched through such sacred and beautiful relationships. It is with profound gratitude that I offer my humble thanks to the holders of Indigenous knowledge who have with such integrity, generosity, trust and compassion shared with me a few drops from the oceans of their ancient but still thriving spiritual wisdom.

Let me begin by relating a tale:

> Once there was a development expert who was a professor of many disciplines including economics. He represented the best in human thought that western capitalism had yet produced. One day he was traveling through an island village and saw a middle-aged Indigenous person sitting against a tree resting in the shade from the heat of the mid-day sun. The ocean waves lapped at the shore near his feet and his small fishing boat lay nearby. His children played about him while he instructed his eldest child who sat next to him. The professor ex-

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[1] From a letter, *23 December 1942, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual Bahá'í.*
[2] *25 July 1995, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer*
[3] This paper arises from the first half of a co-presentation with Melanie Lotfali at the FECCA 'Transformations' Conference, Feb 2005 in Canberra, Australia, entitled "Two Baha'i Perspectives on Sustainable Development: Spiritual Aspects of Cultural Diversity and Empowering Men to Foster Sexual Equality".
[4] This paper cannot serve as an introduction to the Baha'i Faith, however valuable resources for such an overview can be found at http://www.bahai.org.au or at http://www.bahai.org

pertly assessed the situation and in his kindest voice said, "Excuse me, is that your boat?" The man looked up, pausing, and said "Yes, that is my boat." The professor then said, "You should improve your methods of fishing, work slightly longer hours and increase your fishing catch." The man with a bemused expression said, "Why would I want to do that?" "Well, if you increase your catch you can save money from the excess catch and then buy another boat." Again the man said, "Why would I want to do that?" "Well, its called capacity building, but in practical terms if you buy another boat and use your son to help you fish even more hours you can eventually save enough to buy a whole fleet of fine fishing boats and become a very wealthy man." Again the man said, "Why would I want to do that?" The professor paused, slightly irritated that this man would not immediately see the benefits of becoming wealthy, "Well, if you became wealthier you could move to a big city, buy a nice house, let experts teach your children in English, have a nice car and many other luxuries." Again the man said, "Why would I want to do that?" Exasperated, the professor blurted out, "Because if you became wealthy you could then pay off your debts, retire, move to a lovely island, sit in the sun each day and relax while you fished with your family!" The man laughed and just looked at the professor. "I already do that."

Unfortunately, that expert would have probably then returned to his institution in Geneva or New York and drafted a development proposal of new schools and training programs for that mans Island. In that proposal he would probably indicate that he had already "Thoroughly consulted with the local community" to lend his theory validity. If the situation were to be improved, he would have recognised the encounter as an opportunity for him to learn and spent much more time listening than talking. Of course most people who are in the development field are much more sensitive than this to the need for genuine consultation, but that story still speaks an important truth.

My purpose in this paper is to contribute to a discourse on some of the tools necessary for a shift in consciousness that will empower us to recognise the unique gifts of spirit in each others cultures and reli-

gions and foster humility, respect, affection and genuine equality as members of one diverse but common loving family.

Acknowledging the Spiritual Value of Culture for Development in the International Discourse

I refer to two elements of the term 'spiritual' here. One refers to the spiritual value systems of differing cultures that lie at the source of guidance and inspiration in the civilising virtues they inculcate such as tolerance, compassion, trustworthiness, kindness, willingness to sacrifice for the common good, humility and others. The second meaning of spiritual I refer to is the intrinsic spiritual value of culture itself. In other words the essentially unique gifts that each culture carries in what they offer of preserving and expressing different truths of what it means to be a human being. Essentially these are really both the same, but one is on the level of faith and belief and the other is the level of being and becoming. These elements of spirituality are at the heart of development but often lack the explicit and conscious attention they deserve in policy and legislation.

From my own point of view, a central feature of culture is that it is the social manifestation of unique sets of spiritual virtues formed in the long-term relationship between a specific community and the ecological context in which they exist. On one level, our relationship with the land in which we dwell forms our culture[5]. This is not to say there are not many other elements of culture, but the relationship of both land and religion in forming diverse cultures that have a unique intrinsic value is an important aspect often neglected in discussions.

All of us are co-participants in a transformative relationship. We are all 'spiritual beings having a physical experience' engaged in a growth process that forms a collective spiritual and physical evolution of being[6]. My intention is not to criticise a process for not being spiritual, rather it is to express my firm conviction that the process IS already spiritual, but by becoming conscious of our spiritual nature, and the spiritual repercussions of that consciousness we are offered the key to the greatest capacity for transformation.

While spiritual issues in culture have traditionally been considered almost taboo in the international discourse of development, the past 15 years has seen

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[5] "We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions." Shoghi Effendi, through his Secretary, from a letter dated 17 February 1933 to an individual believer, in unity, quoted in *Valuing Spirituality in Development*, Bahá'í International Community, 1998 Feb 18

[6] I discuss this co-evolution in greater detail, albeit still tentatively, in chapter 6 of *An Examination of the Environmental Crisis: With a Specific Focus on the Balance Between Instrumental and Intrinsic Value of Nature from a Bahá'í perspective*. Master of Theology Honors Thesis, University of Sydney, 2001. Mirrored at: http://bahai-library.com/?file=jones_environmental_crisis

a considerable rise in discussions acknowledging its importance. The growing acceptance of the spiritual value of culture sometimes stated as celebrating the unique intrinsic value of every culture, is most recently reflected in both the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity,

> Reaffirming that culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs,[7] Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence."[8]

and the most recent UNDP Human Development Report 2004.

> This year's Report …provides a powerful argument for finding ways to "delight in our differences", as Archbishop Desmond Tutu has put it[9].

While one of the most positive collective campaigns of international development this century, the UN Millennium Development Project states in its 2005 progress report:

> Another special aspect of the Project is the rare and powerful opportunity to help give voice to the hopes, aspirations, and vital needs of the world's poorest and most voiceless people. We have met countless heroes and heroines of development in the three years of our work—in the villages and slums of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and other parts of the developing world. We have seen people preserving their spirit, integrity, commitment, and hope for the future even when they have little else, when tragic circumstances have left them bereft of health, education, possessions, and a means of livelihood. The human spirit, we have seen on innumerable occasions, is truly indomitable. This triumph of the human spirit gives us the hope and confidence that extreme poverty can be cut by half by the year 2015, and indeed ended altogether within the coming years. The

world community has at its disposal the proven technologies, policies, financial resources, and most importantly, the human courage and compassion to make it happen[10].

This represents a collective growth in consciousness that is indeed heartening in its positive capacity for growth in human capacity and united but diverse relationships. Yet in spite of these growing acknowledgements of the importance of spiritual values that can be harnessed in valuing cultural diversity, there still remain clear gaps in explicitly or systematically engaging in a discourse on how this practically impacts on required transformations in ethics, policy and law in the field of international development. More importantly, this discourse has yet to significantly include the regional and local levels of practical applications and case studies, or in standard education curricula.

A powerful example that this discourse on the intrinsic value of cultures needs more serious engagement was brought to my attention only a few weeks ago. In March, 2005 I attended an inter-departmental seminar at Macquarie University showcasing the preliminary outline of a course on sustainable development, created by some overseas academics, catering to professionals, primarily in the private sector, already working in the field from a European background. Most responses from academics in the room indicated that the proposed breadth of content in the course was ambitious and almost too comprehensive. Yet within this detailed outline there appeared to be no reflection on spiritual issues of culture, or how it is important to include different cultural perspectives about the nature of development in such a course.[11] There was one mention of how a well building project in Africa was slowed due to encountering intractable superstitions associated with witchcraft. There did not seem to be any recognition of possibly valid beliefs, concealed by the 'developers' superficial perceptions, clashing with inappropriate development policy. Clearly, until education policy in sustainable development policy consistently encourages consultation about spiritual issues associated with cultural diversity, significant positive transformation empowering local expressions of development will remain problematic.

Development from a Bahá'í Perspective

The Bahá'í International Community (BIC) writes:

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[7] UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, Preamble
[8] Ibid, article 3
[9] UNDP *Human Development Report* 2004, p.v
[10] UN Millennium Project, *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*. 2005, P. xi
[11] One would imagine that spiritual dimensions may be considered in the course when considering Indigenous issues associated with intellectual property, yet it was not mentioned and certainly it was not mentioned that there may be significant spiritual indicators of development.

Development, in the Bahá'í view, is an organic process in which "the spiritual is expressed and carried out in the material."[12] Meaningful development requires that the seemingly antithetical processes of individual progress and social advancement, of globalisation and decentralisation, and of promoting universal standards and fostering cultural diversity, be harmonised. In our increasingly interdependent world, development efforts must be guided by a vision of the type of world community we wish to create and be animated by a set of universal values. Just institutions, from the local to the planetary level, and systems of governance in which people can assume responsibility for the institutions and processes that affect their lives, are also essential.[13]

From a Baha'i perspective, the primary principles governing development is a combination of this organic understanding of the co-evolution of the spiritual and the material combined with a consciousness of the oneness of humanity. I like to think of this consciousness as a genuine, personal recognition of humanity as one, diverse gathering of my own loving family.

Baha'u'llah teaches that recognition of the fundamental spiritual principle of our age, the oneness of humanity, must be at the heart of a new civilisation. Universal acceptance of this principle will both necessitate and make possible major restructuring of the world's educational, social, agricultural, industrial, economic, legal and political systems. This restructuring, which must be ordered by an ongoing and intensive dialogue between the two systems of knowledge available to humankind -- science and religion -- will facilitate the emergence of peace and justice throughout the world.[14]

Continuing its exploration, the BIC suggests an initial five spiritual indicators for development. These five are:

- unity in diversity;
- equity and justice;
- equality of the sexes[15];
- trustworthiness and moral leadership; and
- independent investigation of truth.

They then identify five, often interdependent, policy areas in which these indicators can be applied:

- economic development;
- education;
- environmental stewardship;
- meeting basic needs in food, nutrition, health and shelter; and
- governance and participation.

Recently the Baha'i International Community has begun collaboration with a research institution, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity which primarily focuses on facilitating a global discourse on science, religion and development through a continued consultation through conferences and publications involving many NGO's, governmental agencies, educational institutions and community level participants. One of the areas of discourse is to further explore these spiritual indicators for sustainable development.[16]

On a practical level the BIC has offered a regular newsletter offering summaries of successful and thriving examples of local and regional efforts at sustainable development that often reflect these spiritual indicators.[17]

Some Personal Reflections

I want to offer some personal reflections on how wrestling with some of these issues continues to develop my own consciousness as well as provide some examples of how this has affected development work I am engaged in on a local and regional level.

Perhaps the central principle of importance to me is recognising for myself the need for humility in how I approach and respond to the developmental discourse. This begins by acknowledging the limita-

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[12] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks (twelfth edition) (London, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995, page 9)

[13] Baha'i International Community, 1998 Feb 18, Valuing Spirituality in Development. This document can be found in the BIC statement library at: http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/

[14] ibid

[15] Each of these indicators is elaborated in the BIC document and space does not permit further systematic reflection here. However I wish to comment on the great importance of this particular indicator in my own thinking: The inequality between women and men represents the most explicit and pervasive form of oppressive injustice in human social networks. The same principles in such oppressive contexts are intimately related to all the other forms of oppressive relationships such as white over black, civilisation over culture, and humanity over nature. But because these forms of oppression are not as universally experienced, (i.e. over half of humanity) and explicitly conscious in our daily lives, it is imperative that the spiritual threshold of justice is crossed in empowering women in equality of relationships. This will provide both an invisible and visible impetus to the deep restoration of relationships on all other levels. It is not just that mothers will prevent their sons from going to war, but that humanity will have come to terms with understanding and responding to the principles of justice in an embrace of respect, love, empowerment and equality.

[16] See *Discourse: Efforts Worldwide to Promote a Discourse on Science, Religion and Development*, Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, New York

[17] http://www.onecountry.org

tions of my own cultural position. I am a white American (born in New York no less) male. Yet none of these things define essential aspects of my being, and I hope that I have transcended these labels in certain ways. Indeed all of us are more than such labels. Yet personally I feel it essential to begin any discourse by acknowledging my own blindness, or rather an acquired visual impairment that I must address. Yet, ironically perhaps, to the degree that one is successful in attempts of genuine humility in being aware of ones limitations, this correspondingly gives access to a kind of positive and creative power of growth. Let me explain.

Historically scientists acknowledged the limitations of their vision. "We know there must be invisible things in the world we cannot see due to spectrums of light, frequencies of sound and the size of objects". Through such humility they were enabled to develop tools of investigation such as the microscope, telescope, radioscope and many other instruments that revealed new previously unimagined layers of reality. In this new discourse, by embracing such humility about spiritual issues as well, we are offered the chance to develop new tools for seeing the spiritual truths of many cultures.

This is not just about improving the capacity of western culture to appreciate Indigenous cultures. This is also about justice. Many Indigenous people, through generations of colonisation processes, have become marginalised and 'invisible' to the capacity to experience relationships with us characterised by common virtues of human dignity and justice.

> I am an invisible man...I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...It is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination-- indeed everything and anything except me....That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes.[18]

The principles associated with the visual impairment of western civilisation (to see the intrinsic value of the human being in contexts of cultural diversity currently afflicted by oppressive relationships of in-

justice) also extends to being able to see the intrinsic value of natural elements of biodiversity.

'Seeing' Spiritual Biodiversity:

> Many Indigenous communities see the biodiversity of their ecological contexts as representing forms of spiritual diversity. Each creature reflects an attribute of the ultimate sacred reality, sometimes referred to as the Creator[19]. These infinite sets of attributes, such as patience, nobility or courage are manifested by each individual plant and animal in an entirely unique way. The spiritual realities of these creatures exist in a completely interdependent web of relationships that form our environments. From such a web of spiritual interdependence our own being is formed, and evolves. In that sense, we are the land. This is why you hear many Indigenous voices say that we do not own the land, the land owns us.

This is a relational understanding of culture that has been largely lost in the west. In western theories, often culture is seen as the subjective experience of collections of individuals, and therefore the value of such culture is objectified as the domain of personal opinion. The value of culture is therefore degraded to having no real value in itself other than it's aesthetic value, as if it were a piece of artwork that can be bought, sold, or destroyed if its value is not recognised.

The imbalanced and fractured perspective of culture and civilisation, spirit and matter in western consciousness can be traced historically back to the enlightenment period in which European philosophers, politicians and scientists developed what has often been called a dualistic metaphysics or worldview. This period has often been caricatured as a war between science and religion, with science the ultimate victor. However this fracturing of metaphysics is due to a somewhat more complex history. Such a fractured worldview was largely the product of overreactions to the tyranny of knowledge enforced by both political and religious leaders at the time. Such tyrannical assertions of absolute truth resulted in such great injustices as the Thirty-year War and the Grand Inquisition. The philosophies and political reactions to this injustice that were largely perpetuated by religious institutions, resulted in the removal of the "tyrant God" from the centre of modern

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[18] Ellison, R. *Invisible Man*, Random House, New York, 1952, 7. Quoted by Dodson, Michael, "The Wentworth Lecture. The end in the beginning: re(de)finding Aboriginality" (1994) 1 *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2-13

[19] This is also reflected in the Bahá'í sacred writings: "Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light." Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 100

thought. This process of the removal of the Divine was gradual but insidiously effective. [20] 'The willful separation of the intellect from spirituality reached its apotheosis under the preeminently evil sociopolitical systems of the twentieth century, fascism and communism.' [21]

This 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater' has left our culture with a handicap in appreciating an integrated vision of spiritual and material reality. This situation has begun to be healed in various ways in many areas of academia but needs to be taken to a more conscious and explicit level of engagement so that we can effectively empower our collective capacity for integrated vision and action.

Throughout the UNDP HDR religion is most often mentioned as one variable associated with the formation of unique identities as well as a right to practice ones religions as long as it does not interfere with the basic rights of others. The State is therefore obligated to make 'accommodation' for the practices and unique needs of those religious groups within it. While it is suggested that such protectionist/individualistic/rights based frameworks represent an advance in human understanding, they will ultimately be powerless in themselves to facilitate true fellowship and authentic models of inter-related diversity.

While a systematic discussion of appropriate tools to encourage such loving relationships is beyond the capacity of this paper, two suggestions are appropriate. A discourse on a positive syllabus in schools to promote inter-religious and inter-cultural affection and an International Convention that promotes positive instruments to encourage such religious and cultural understanding on a global level would both go a long way towards such goals. There are many working on such issues and I encourage others to join this vital enterprise.

The 'filtering' out of the spiritual in development:

> Regarding the IDRC report by William Ryan: "One of the interesting findings of his study was that, almost invariably, those interviewed felt that development strategies and planning had not taken into account the culture and spirituality of the people of the world. There seemed to be uniform agreement that development had been too materialistic in its approach. But they had something else interesting to say. They confessed that, within their own organisations and in their own lives, they recognised the importance of spirituality and tried to incorporate it into their actions; however, knowing that

such words and concepts were not welcomed by international aid agencies in project proposals and reports, they had developed two languages – one internal for their own work and the other external, used in making presentations to their donors so that they could get support. This is quite an interesting confession, and it came not from ten or twenty, but from many of those who are running large development programmes around the world."[22]

Clearly, there are many implications of this acknowledgement. The least of which is recognising we need even more to engage local communities in the consultation process in all stages of development, including the *initial* formulation of purpose and methodology. Ideally such processes should lead to facilitating grass roots initiatives that can flourish because of the receptive and empowering capacity of international co-coordinating agencies.

The link between biodiversity and cultural diversity:

- "Cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature." (Article 1, UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity)
- More than this: for over 15 years it has almost become a mantra of anthropologists and scientists around the world that biological diversity and cultural diversity are "inextricably linked." (Declaration of Belem 1988)[23]
- Indigenous peoples are often bemused by this 'discovery' we have made.
- For many, many generations Indigenous people have known this. '*When the land is sick the people are sick. When the people are sick the land is sick*.'

The areas of the planet which are considered 'megadiverse' in the levels of biodiversity are correspondingly megadiverse in Indigenous cultures. The majority of the worlds cultural biodiversity is representative of Indigenous populations. Of the 6000 or so languages spoken on the planet, up to 5000 are Indigenous. Of these 5000 languages, nearly 2500 are under threat of immediate extinction within the current generation. Is this correlation between Indigenous diversity and biodiversity merely a "geographic" coincidence? This link is considered an "inextricable one", which would lead one to think that the relationship is more substantial than coincidence. But why?

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[20] John Hunter & Chris Jones, *Bioprospecting and Indigenous Knowledge in Australia Valuing Indigenous Spiritual Knowledge and its Implications for Integrated Legal Regimes*, University of Washington, 2003. Paper mirrored at http://bahai-library.com/file.php5?file=hunter_jones_bioprospecting
[21] Suheil Bushrui, 'The Opening of the Academic Mind', *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 14 1/2 2004, p 17-18
[22] Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, paper on file with author.
[23] For resources of knowledge in this area see www.terralingua.com

Biodiversity and cultural diversity are mutually reinforcing contexts. Returning to the proposed theory of culture – biodiverse ecological contexts provide rich spiritual contexts which evoke equally diverse human responses. Such is the role of biodiversity in facilitating cultural diversity. Alternatively, Indigenous culture recognises and respects its origins in the land and this facilitates a form of custodianship where a sense of responsibility for caring for and preserving their local ecosystem is created. Thus biodiversity is mutually sustained by the cultures it fosters.

We must also return to the western metaphysics developed since the enlightenment that suffers from spiritual neurosis. Such is the western world view that nature is separated, objectified and denigrated as a commodity to be processed for consumption. To put it in a nutshell, western metaphysics treats the earth as a business in liquidation. As this metaphysics of liquidation is by far the major power in the world, it has the most influence on human and environmental relations. Thus it is no coincidence that the planet is seeing the greatest rate of extinction since the dinosaurs, in terms of biodiversity, with similar rates of extinction occurring in Indigenous cultures.

Tragically, those cultures that have some of the most potent solutions to the environmental crisis embedded in their community life are increasingly facing challenges of survival. Indigenous peoples often thoroughly embody the principles of spiritual interdependence with their ecosystems, to the point where their self-identity IS their ecosystem. The truth of such self-identification is given significant testimony when one reflects on the coincidence between the extinction of great numbers of ecosystems and the Indigenous cultures that are interwoven with them.

The injustice of the extremes of wealth and poverty, cultural genocide, access and inclusion issues in education, health, etc, is a kind of spiritual illness in the body politic of humanity. Just as an imbalance in the human body leads to illness, these spiritually based imbalances are the cause of both the loss of cultural and biological diversity.

This truth of the interdependence of cultural and biological diversity has many implications for supporting significant shifts in legislation, policy development and education.

Some perceive that the biggest obstacle in development is the communities having ownership and motivation for their own development. Externally imposed models that only instrumentally consider religion/culture in order to find 'ways in' will not work. We must acknowledge the intrinsic value of a person/culture/religion. Only then when they are approached with humility, in the faith that they pos-

sess unique gifts will the sense of nobility arise that inspires self-actualisation. The barriers to this in our western culture are often unconscious, although the barriers philosophically/metaphysically have most recently arisen during the "enlightenment".

In the spirit of service let me make a frank statement. If we took seriously the importance of engaging the cultural/spiritual element of developmental theory as fundamental to our work, the very structure of this conference would look different. At the very least the community level of consultation needs to be actively funded and solicited, with a goal of equal levels of participation and capacity in order for the grass roots Indigenous level of discourse to be included. Otherwise no matter how fantastic the technical solutions developed here, they will lack the power that would have come from such solutions being generated by/with the very people such a discourse wishes to serve.

The assumptions of cultural inferiority need to be critically reexamined to the extent that we see our education systems needing significant reform. If we look at how we judge the success of a civilisation, its sustainability and the degree of its technological achievements, particularly in medicine, Indigenous cultures stand up to the test on both counts. 80% of the world's populations rely on Indigenous Medical Knowledge (Including 25% of western pharmaceuticals and 77% of herbal remedies and averaging

about 50% of therapeutic treatment used in the West). While the most enduring civilisation in the world is the Aboriginal peoples of Australia: perhaps the development discourse needs to be flipped on its head and we should start consulting Indigenous peoples to see how WE can survive.

Within this context the still common implicit proposition in educational curricula that Aboriginal peoples never achieved certain technological developments, for instance 'they never invented the wheel' is catering to racist or patronising undercurrents.

The limitations of space in this paper do not allow a discussion here, but it should be indicated that even the most basic of investigations of Indigenous metaphysics demonstrate sophistication on par with Einstein's metaphysics, again flipping on its head the popular notions of the sophistication of Indigenous thought.

The power of the developmental discourse for self-esteem and self-actualisation:

- Never invented the wheel? Or
- Custodians of one of the most advanced civilisations on earth?

These two choices of discourse are symbolic of a range of inner choices we can make in how we relate to each other. An entirely instrumental or materialistic focus will not result in such deep engagement and

transformation. Nor is it possible to resolve all metaphysical and theological differences as a prerequisite to working together. I would like to suggest that combining a focus of service to humanity and genuine engagement with the spiritual value of all cultures and Indigenous peoples offers humanity an opportunity for a second enlightenment in not just the development field but in all fields of human thought.

The feeling of true fellowship necessary for authentic relationships between faiths and cultures will not be gained by asserting a need to 'sort out' the tensions of value systems between religious traditions or value systems between cultures first. If the absolute resolution of metaphysical tensions between two people into a homogenous agreement were a pre-requisite for marriage, no one would ever get married. Marriages and families are based first on the love that arises from the appreciation of the unique gifts that each person brings to the partnership and then working together to use those gifts to achieve growth in the relationships of the family.[24]

We cannot half-heartedly continue to allow an instrumental/materialistic relationship to culture/religion and spirituality in development. Such a lazy relativistic stance is untenable when the potential global conflagration of religious and cultural prejudice stands before us. Equally so we must be thoroughly scientific, understand the reasons for our metaphysical schizophrenic neurosis and directly address the breaches of human thought in a methodical, united fashion that allows us to embrace an enlightened discourse of development that once again harness the most positive synergy of religion and science and give birth to a new and unparalleled epoch of development.

In my own work[25] facilitating ethical relationships between Indigenous communities and universities engaged in development work I am attempting to incorporate these principles in an increasingly conscious and explicit manner.[26] Most recently, I have been working with a team on a community guide to assist Aboriginal communities and universities in

having resources that generate equity in research relationships and reinforce capacity building for infrastructures supportive of Indigenous self-determination. The law currently possesses serious limitations in how it can encourage cultural preservation and expression. Therefore we must heavily rely upon maintaining ethical relationships ourselves until such time as the social momentum of such ethical evolution organically crystalises into more appropriate expressions in education, law and policy. Fundamental to this has been trying to internalise the question: What does the principle of us all being one family truly signify for such work? This has meant establishing guidelines for both the community and academic partners that facilitate genuine equality of research relationships; that promote effective consultation processes throughout; that result in the community owning the knowledge and retaining control of that knowledge at all times in the process of research; that enhance capacity building in the community in response to genuine needs voiced by the community[27]; that encourage transformation of the academic communities in response to the spiritual wisdom and needs of the Indigenous community's involved; that raise the ethical standard so that academics actively seek to repatriate Indigenous knowledge in the public sphere to communities when such knowledge is encountered; and that ensure the researchers are conscious of unity building processes in research relationships between members of the Indigenous communities. This last issue is important because often the research methods may involve inappropriate consultation processes. These include the seeking of approval for research in ways that undermine the relationships within and between Indigenous communities. Sensitivity to such issues can see the researchers become further aware of the need to reinforce self-determination processes through the way they conduct their research.

This is just a small example of taking seriously spiritual issues of culture in development theory. There are a great many other principles, approaches

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[24] Chris Jones, *Towards the Elimination of Religious Prejudice: Potential Christian Contributions from a Baha'i perspective*, Interreligious Insight, V2 N2, October 2004, p. 27.
Mirrored at http://bahai-library.com/?file=jones_elimination_religious_prejudice.html
[25] There are many people involved from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds in the project described here, so on one level it is entirely inappropriate to use the word "I" or "my" here. In particular I wish to thank the abiding and profound contributions of John Hunter, Terry Widders, Sam Altman, Bevan Cassady, Donna Craig, Jim Kohen, Subra Velumapad, Joanne Jamie, David Harrington, Thomas Dzeha and many others, particularly from the indigenous communities for insights and relationships that continue to transform my consciousness, particularly in the process of this project. I also have to cite the thoughts, spirit and wisdom of Henrietta Marrie as having a particular positive influence on my development in this area.
[26] See a summery of one such project at: http://www.law.mq.edu.au/MUCEL/news/grant.htm
[27] This has included holding science educational workshops for Aboriginal children and youth with the university scientists on the team (known as the 'Indigenous Bioresources Research Group') and assisting communities in the commercialisation and complete ownership of their own 'bush tucker' and herbal remedies. There are projects underway to help communities have their traditional knowledge recorded in a format more accessible to children and youth and that can be used by local public schools as part of their curriculum. A long-term goal of this process is the establishment of a centre of research in this area that is Indigenous directed and managed, that works in collaboration with the university. These are only some examples of the ways the members of the research team are attempting to practically respond to the voiced needs of the communities they work with.

and contributions necessary to even begin to have an appropriate global consultation about these issues. Let me conclude with another symbolic story:

> There once was a wise old woman in the mountains. Every person who met her was transformed and her reputation as a great being spread far and wide. One day a young man climbed the mountain to meet her. When he reached the dwelling of the wise woman who was tending her garden he waited patiently until he was asked to speak. "What is your question son?", She asked. The young man replied, "I want to know what your secret is. Do you have magical powers, are you a god or a prophet?" The holy woman paused, and slowly said, "I am not a god, nor a prophet. I am a human being just as you are." The young man said, "How can this be? You have transformed everyone you meet, you have uplifted our entire country, how can one person have such effect?" Slowly the woman smiled and merely said, "I am awake."

This is primarily an issue of consciousness: consciousness that must then be translated into actions of loving service to others. While this in turn continually and reciprocally develops our own consciousness further and increases our own capacities for such service to others. In this discussion I hope to have given support to the process of becoming conscious of the unity of spiritual and material reality as well as the unity and diversity of the human family and some of its implications for such actions of service in development policy and practice.

The development realm is complex, but is a fundamentally spiritual process that we may not be fully conscious of. We are all 'half awake'. Ironically, I think it is by genuinely consulting in equality with the diverse Indigenous communities whom we seek to 'develop', informed by a consciousness of their unique intrinsic spiritual value, yet as members of our own loving family that we can best continue to 'awake' in the developmental discourse to what true capacity building is all about. Such a new model means we all participate in a learning culture where we are all simultaneously teachers and students in development and capacity building together.

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Chris Jones is a lecturer in the Bachelor of Community Management, Warawara Department of Indigenous Studies. He is the convener of both Indigenous Leadership and Business Communication Skills in that Degree. He is the convener of the colloquia 'Spirituality and Social Transformation' in the Global Leadership Program at Macquarie University. He has also taught Intellectual Property Law for three years in the Law faculty. He recently completed his Doctoral thesis in Law on 'The Protection of Indigenous Medical Knowledge: Towards the Transformation of Law to Engage Indigenous Spiritual Concerns'. His masters thesis was on Bahá'í environmental theology. His greatest interest is to facilitate the recognition in others that each person, culture and religion has a unique intrinsic form of spiritual genius that is a source of humility for us and inspires a genuine affection for all members of our common human family.

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