The 34th Hasan M. Balyuzi Memorial Lecture

The Intellectual Life of the Bahá'í Community

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It is a great honor for me to be presenting the Balyuzi Lecture at this year's ABS Conference.[1] The presence of Douglas Martin in this gathering is a source of immense joy. I hope I am not mistaken in thinking that, on such an occasion, I might take advantage of the kind and forgiving mood of the audience and allow myself the luxury of disorder. What you are about to hear is not a well-organized lecture but a series of scattered thoughts—my own musings on the nature and challenges of the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community.

To begin, I should say that a part of me tends to dismiss my concern with the intellectual life of the community as unnecessary. "Why belabor an obvious and straightforward matter?" insists a voice within me. It is in the very nature of the Bahá'í community for its members to pursue education. Look at our history. Well established Bahá'í communities tend to enjoy a notably high level of educational achievement. Bahá'í families give the highest priority to the education of their children, and as the community grows in size, Bahá'ís will move to the forefront of every imaginable field of human endeavor. The clarity of mind they have acquired from a profound knowledge of the Writings, their own upright characters, and their love for truth will enable them to gain unprecedented insights into reality. Gradually, more and more talented Bahá'ís in each field will begin to collaborate with one other and together will advance the frontiers of knowledge in their areas of expertise.

I should hasten to say that actually I have no problem with this narrative. I am certain that the process as described has been unfolding for some time and will continue to gain momentum. But the question I feel impelled to pose is: Shouldn't there be more to the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community than what this simple narrative depicts? Are we not supposed to do something more?

On the long road from obscurity to the establishment of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, we have reached the point at which the Bahá'í Faith is being accepted as a world religion alongside other major religions. What is more, in country after country, a growing number of people have formed a high opinion of us as good people with admirable ideals, and—much to the credit of the approach we are taking

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to community building—they are even beginning to appreciate our contributions to the life of society. This is a truly great accomplishment, one of which we should all be proud. Looking at the small and rather obscure community that we were not long ago and then at what we are today, we cannot but bow our heads in gratitude before Bahá'u'lláh and praise His handiwork.

But we know that this is not the end. The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is not intended to culminate in some kind of friendly competition with other religious movements and reach a prestigious place alongside them. And as far as our intellectual accomplishments are concerned, we cannot ignore the fact that if we were to follow the ways of the world we would be far behind everyone else for the longest time. We will certainly be justified in celebrating the accomplishment of any Bahá'í who reaches prominence in a given field, but we will have to remember that for each such individual, many religious communities, as well as agnostics and atheists, will have hundreds, if not thousands, of people at the same or higher level of prominence. So it really does not make sense for us to engage in a game of numbers and prestige; we need to look deeper into the dynamics of the Bahá'í community's intellectual pursuits. For me, the real issues have to do with the content of our thoughts, the nature of our questions, and the validity and relevance of our answers to the profound challenges facing humanity as it emerges from adolescence. Prominent or not, what do those of us engaged in intellectual pursuits have to say that deserves to be heard? Clearly we have a great deal to say when we present the Faith to various audiences, but what I am asking is not about our presentations of the Faith and its ideals; my concern is with our contributions to the advancement of knowledge in the many fields of human endeavor and, finally, to the advancement of civilization itself.

I would like to suggest that such a fundamental question can only receive reasonable answers when examined in light of the mission of the Faith and the nature of the transformation that humanity is to undergo as envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. Statements in the Writings vividly describing the magnitude of this change cannot be set aside, no matter how uncomfortable they might make those who occupy the intellectual circles with which we associate—and sometimes, perhaps, ourselves. No doubt, we need to be wise in the way we discuss with others the kind of change we predict both for the individual and for society as humanity passes from childhood to maturity, but we cannot be forgetful of what our Writings have to say about the transformation that is bound to occur when we are reflecting on ourselves, on our own pursuits, and on the characteristics of our own communities. The direction of our thoughts has to be set by an ever-growing appreciation of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous vision of human civilization and a clear understanding of the forces operating in the present deficient and moribund

order. There is no need to quote extensively from the many passages relevant to this theme—not to this audience, for you know them well. "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order," Bahá'u'lláh states in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. "Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed" (¶ 181). 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that we "must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities. New bounties, perfect bestowals, are awaiting and already descending" upon us. "The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity" (*Foundations* 9).

And as to the present world, Shoghi Effendi has written:

> A world, dimmed by the steadily dying-out light of religion, heaving with the explosive forces of a blind and triumphant nationalism; scorched with the fires of pitiless persecution, whether racial or religious; deluded by the false theories and doctrines that threaten to supplant the worship of God and the sanctification of His laws; enervated by a rampant and brutal materialism; disintegrating through the corrosive influence of moral and spiritual decadence; and enmeshed in the coils of economic anarchy and strife—such is the spectacle presented to men's eyes, as a result of the sweeping changes which this revolutionizing Force, as yet in the initial stage of its operation, is now producing in the life of the entire planet. (*Advent* 47)

It seems to me that one of the first sets of questions we need to ask when we contemplate the future evolution of the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community is this: Bahá'u'lláh refers to the present order as "lamentably defective" (*Tablets* 11:26)—how defective do we think "lamentably defective" actually is? Which constituents of the present order are defective, and which ones are not? Which parts are we to keep, and which are we to reject completely? How deep into the foundations of the present order do we have to go to find the real causes of its defective ways? I would like to explore a little this last question.

That there is much wrong with this world is something acknowledged by a vast number of people today. It is not difficult to reach agreement, particularly in progressive circles, on a list of problems that humanity has to face and overcome if a better world is to emerge: large numbers of people have no access to education; unemployment is rampant; dictatorships oppress people, and so on. Therefore, education for all, employment for all, freedom to live in a democratic culture for all are the kinds of objectives to be pursued.

So long is the list of all the ills of present-day society, and so visible are they near the surface, that we certainly are justified to reach the conclusion that a sizeable portion of the growing intellectual resources of the Bahá'í community should be directed toward seeking effective remedies for them. In other words, it seems reasonable to think that we should engage with other like-minded people in endeavors that seek solutions to the problems of humanity and, in the process, pursue knowledge and develop and exercise our intellectual capacity. We would, of course, go further than many progressive movements, in both thought and action, and assert that solutions cannot be found merely on the plane of the material; the human heart has to change. Any effort to overcome the huge problems facing humanity will have to rely on spiritual as well as material forces. We know that, as the Universal House of Justice has stated, "Behind so much of the turbulence and commotion of contemporary life are the fits and starts of a humanity struggling to come of age. Widely accepted practices and conventions, cherished attitudes and habits, are one by one being rendered obsolete, as the imperatives of maturity begin to assert themselves" (letter dated 2 March 2013).

What we need to accept, then, is the necessity to dedicate a great deal of our intellectual resources to look into these practices and conventions, attitudes and habits, and help replace them with spiritually sound equivalents. Such an intention, if it is to be more than the expression of pious belief, creates formidable challenges for the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community. Bringing spiritual and material forces to bear coherently on the life of humanity requires an intellectuality that is not easy to come by. Much needs to be done to develop it through the exertions of the Bahá'í community and other like-minded people. This is certainly something we can and should do.

Yet this aspect of the development of our intellectual capacity addresses only the readily identifiable problems in the defective character of the present order. As Bahá'ís we know well that we have to go deeper. We cannot, for example, subscribe to a view that the basic structures of today's society are essentially sound, that the problem is that their control has fallen into the hands of the wrong people, and that only if spiritualized people—the kind we are trying to become—were in charge, peace and prosperity would emerge. Clearly, as we look to the Writings, we see that this cannot be the case; the challenges facing humanity as it moves from collective childhood to collective maturity cannot be explained away so easily. The moment we remember that the principle of the oneness of humankind implies organic change in the structure of society, we are obliged to go deeper and face the challenge of identifying defective structures and figuring out what has to take their place. We cannot just look at structures close to the surface;

we must examine *all* the structures holding together the present order. We cannot simply implement arrangements that enable universal education; the entire worldwide system of education has to be transformed. It is not enough to create more jobs or fund credit in order to provide employment for all; there has to be a restructuring of economic life according to a delicate interplay between the principle of the oneness of humanity and the exigencies of justice. We cannot simply adapt democratic culture as it is defined today; we have to foster a culture that deals with such concepts as freedom, authority, and governance in a way that is different from any that humanity has tried so far.

It is clear that when we move from engaging in social action to thinking about the structure of society, the demands on the intellectual life of our community grow enormously. Establishing some kind of educational program for a given population in some part of the world, offering quality health care to another, or helping improve the agricultural practices of a group of farmers certainly constitute fields of action in which we develop and exercise the kind of intellectuality we are seeking. But it is far more demanding intellectually to identify in what ways the underlying structures of society need to be fundamentally revolutionized. To that end, the intellectual life of our community has to develop in such a way that a reasonable number of us are able to identify the structural defects of the present order and participate in those discourses of society that permit deep deliberation on alternatives. I hope it is clear that what I am proposing here is serious and meticulous work. It is not an endorsement of the habit of repeating, "The problem is structural" whenever we face one of the many ills afflicting humankind and then continuing doing business as usual. That things will be better when the structure of society has changed for the better is an obvious truth, as is the statement that things will be better when people are more spiritual. The question is: What should the structures of a future society be like, and how do we build them?

Let me mention here that the Bahá'í community has taken decisive steps toward the development of the kind of intellectual capacity I am trying to describe—for example, through the programs of the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity. The enthusiasm with which the community has responded to these programs is heartwarming indeed. Although these are only initial advances, by helping a growing number of young Bahá'ís engaged in university studies reflect deeply on the nature of their studies, they are without a doubt contributing to the intellectual life of the community and shaping its future. So my remarks on the intellectual challenges before us are made here in a spirit of optimism and hopefulness—in fact, with a good deal of heartfelt joy. But what I hope you will agree with me on at this point is that concern with the development of the intellectual

life of the Bahá'í community is not unreasonable. The simple narrative I presented at the beginning describes only the obvious. Much has to be said and done if a community that claims to be establishing the pattern of the future society is to fulfill its mission. Hoping that you share with me this sense of optimistic concern, I would like to go ahead and present to you further challenges still.

What if we go deeper than the question of the structures of society and ask ourselves questions about the knowledge systems that have given shape to the present order? Is it possible that the intellectual foundations of the present civilization—the ideas, the assumptions, the methods, and the assertions that underpin individual and collective thought—are entirely sound and yet, somehow, give rise to such a defective order? Could it just be that the wrong people have taken hold of sound knowledge and are applying it to create inadequate structures, processes, and behaviors? Should we not also look for fundamental defects in the knowledge system that defines today's world? If civilization is the fruit of a tree and we accept that the fruit is so different from what it should be, doesn't it make sense for us to look at the roots of the tree and find out if something is wrong there as well?

I realize that the kind of questions I am now asking can be somewhat dangerous. Over the decades I have heard extreme answers to these questions, the kinds of emotional responses that amount to saying, "All of it should be thrown away"—or the opposite: "It is anti-intellectual to pose such questions." But the questions I am asking are not meant to elicit an emotional response; they are an appeal for careful and rational analysis, in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, of today's reality and the historical forces at work. All that is being suggested is that such a careful examination should go beyond behavior and sociopolitical structure and should also include the intellectual foundations of the present order—at least the intellectual foundations of social, economic, and political thought, and, let me be so bold as to say, the intellectual foundations of culture. I believe this is something that has to be done, and if it is done with scientific and philosophical rigor, by minds shaped by an intellectuality endowed with spiritual perception, the intellectual foundation for a new civilization will gradually emerge. This new foundation will not be built out of thin air. The intellectual accomplishments of humanity during its long journey through childhood will not be ignored. The child learns a great deal that is essential for the life of the adult. When we leave childhood behind, we do not throw away our ability to read and write, our mastery of arithmetic and basic geometry, or the moral code we have been taught. Yet it is difficult to see how we can ever be responsible adults if we insist on carrying with us our fascination with the fairy tales that stimulated our imagination and brought us so much joy when we were children. "The playthings of

childhood and infancy," 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, "no longer satisfy or interest the adult mind" (*Promulgation* 439).

It is evident that a decision to acquire the capacity to engage in a rigorous examination of the intellectual foundations of our civilization places formidable demands on how the intellectual life of the community needs to develop. Sifting through the habits of thought, the principles, the methods, and the conceptions that underlie civilization today and deciding which can be retained and expanded upon and which need to be cast away is not a trivial pursuit. Which of our societies' cherished conceptions of human psyche, which elements of today's elaborate theories of social progress, which methods of education, which conceptions of work, wealth, love, justice, freedom and authority are the playthings of childhood and infancy? And what is to replace them? One thing is for sure: we cannot stand to the side and say, "Everything will be made new" and then take pride in moving to the forefront of processes belonging to a world that we believe is collapsing. I have no answers to the kind of questions I am now asking; I am only expressing my hope that if we create the right kind of conditions, we will be able to identify and rigorously describe some of the elements, both old and new, of the intellectual foundation of a new civilization. What I would like to do, then, is to mention a few of the conditions we should seek to establish. But before that, allow me to state some of my own prejudices.

Returning to my previous analogy, I think the advances humanity has made—and is making at a remarkable pace—in the natural sciences are far more like reading and writing skills than like the fantasies of childhood. We may say, of course, that today's science is still in its infancy. We may be confident that it will advance a great deal, that new discoveries will revolutionize many fields of scientific inquiry, and that existing insights will be refined again and again. We can also readily accept that minds illumined by the light of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings—working within systems of research uncorrupted by competitiveness and desire for personal prestige and in the context of a culture that venerates knowledge rather than treating it like a commodity—will open new horizons toward which science can move, strengthening its contribution to the advancement of spiritual and material civilization. But it is my conviction that this thing we call science will not be thrown away and replaced by something else called "Bahá'í science." Grand theories like Newtonian mechanics, quantum mechanics, relativity, and evolution are here to stay. They are valid within the parameters of the physical phenomena that they were constructed to explain. And it is this science that will advance and lead to extraordinary new discoveries and elegant theories to explain them. However, what I believe will happen is that physicalism—the effort to explain everything, including life, consciousness, reason, and morality, using the content

and methods set forth by these grand theories—will fall into disrepute as breakthroughs in the understanding of the interactions between the subjective and the objective will occur.

When I move away from the modern natural sciences into other components of the intellectual basis of, say, Western civilization—the civilization that appears to have had the most vitality in modern times—I cannot help but become more skeptical. I still hold in great regard the social sciences and philosophy that uphold this civilization, but I see too many of the fantasies of childhood in them. Something much better has to emerge, albeit well informed by some of the greatest philosophical thinking of the past, something new upon which social, political, and economic thought appropriate for the age of the maturity of the human race can be built. The light of the Enlightenment appears too dim to me when I compare it with the light shining from Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

If I have managed to convince you, even momentarily, that the development of the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community is an enormously challenging task, it may be helpful to say a few words about some of the conditions that enable us to meet this challenge. I will mention three without any claim that they are the most important.

The first condition, I believe, is courage. Those who began the thought processes that led to the Enlightenment were courageous people. They lived and worked within a religious orthodoxy that had a total grip on the intellectual life of the West. They had the courage to question that orthodoxy and propose alternatives. And they were able to present enough evidence and to argue with sufficient clarity to change the tide of history. Is there not another orthodoxy today, we may ask, with a similar grip on the human mind that, for lack of a better word, we usually call materialism? Does it not have its priests—some of whom actually pretend to be religious? Does it not have immense power? Does it not have access to enormous economic resources—all to advance its views of human nature and society? It will also take courage to question the assumptions and the theories of this orthodoxy, not just by labeling as materialistic whatever one doesn't like, but by engaging in painstaking, spiritually illumined scientific and philosophical inquiry.

Mustering up courage, of course, has to be accompanied by the elaboration of a sound methodology. One of the features of the present orthodoxy and the power structures on which it relies is that they incorporate criticism into their schemes. Yet too often it is the kind of criticism that achieves little. Criticism for the sake of criticism is wasteful, to say the least; by politely, or impolitely, listening to the voices of opposition and accommodating them superficially, power perpetuates itself. Western democracy has understood well the role of criticism as an escape valve. Meanwhile, power and money keep accumulating in the hands of the few, who relentlessly pursue

their aims. It is necessary to change our very conception of criticism, by which I don't mean just to make sure it is constructive. It seems to me that if we develop and learn the process of Bahá'í consultation as a form of collective investigation of reality, we will achieve much higher aims than if we just voice criticism of the world as it is.

A second condition that is conducive to the flourishing of the kind of intellectual life being proposed has to do with the fact that our community can't afford to be elitist. I am using the word in a special sense that I will explain. Breakthroughs clearly need brilliant minds, so the culture we are developing does and should recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of the individual. Talent should be acknowledged and nurtured. But a culture that respects knowledge, in which the voices of the knowledgeable are heard, and where great ideas and great works of art are admired, is not necessarily elitist. To be an elitist implies a sense of entitlement, aloofness, or superiority. It is privilege demanding more privilege. Let me assure you that not for a moment do I believe that the Bahá'í community has been, is, or ever will be elitist. The Bahá'í teachings in general, and the Administrative Order in particular, protect it from such a future. What I think we should do is to recognize the features of a culture that is not elitist but that nurtures talent and encourages intellectual and artistic accomplishment, and then promote that culture against the forces of an elitist society. In such a culture, knowledge is not the property of a few; it is accessible to all, with the result that large sections of humanity are not left in ignorance and the oppression that results from depriving people of knowledge is never allowed to establish itself. And what are some of the mechanisms through which such a culture is strengthened? A look at the institute process, which has been playing such a crucial role in our community-building efforts in recent times, may lead to valuable insights into this question.

A community with the kind of culture we are envisioning needs a worldwide, intellectually and spiritually sound conversation at its grassroots. In a world so fragmented by historical forces, the Bahá'í community has to nurture the habit of speaking in a language that transcends parochial patterns of thought so that words begin to acquire the same meaning for people coming from totally different backgrounds. The conversation, it seems reasonable to say, has to be about the application of the Bahá'í teachings to individual and collective life. Much of it has to be about practical matters raised to proper spiritual heights and analyzed in light of spiritual truths. It has to be profound but not so pointlessly difficult as to scare away most people. It has to allow everyone to enter the conversation at the most accessible levels and then build capacity for increasingly more complex thought—no one is to be left out. The institute process that has been unfolding in the Bahá'í community now

for about two decades, although still in its initial stages, is clearly making significant contributions to the establishment of such a worldwide conversation. It is organized around a path of service upon which multitudes are invited to walk—a path on which people learn together how to fulfill their twofold moral purpose of attending to their own spiritual and intellectual development and contributing to the transformation of society. Learning accumulates through a combination of study of the text and systematized experience. This is an important habit of mind that could help shape an intellectuality free from certain false dichotomies, such as the one between the spiritual and the material or the one between knowledge that wells up in the human heart as it connects to the ocean of Revelation and knowledge that is acquired through experience. It is a habit of mind that acknowledges the importance of evidence and uses it to separate knowledge from fancy.

I do not intend here to analyze the present form of the institute process and its future possibilities; I am only mentioning it in order to illustrate the nature of a conversation at the grassroots of the Bahá'í world community that can cultivate an intellectuality capable of addressing the challenges mentioned earlier. At this general level, intellectual powers are not focused on specific areas of scholarship. As the sea swells up, as individuals develop the capabilities of advanced fields of human knowledge, individual waves, and collection of waves, some powerful enough to break through formidable intellectual barriers, are bound to rise. Furthermore, because the relationship created among those who walk the path of service is one of accompanying each other—not competing with each other, not managing each other, not manipulating each other, and not gaining power over each other—it becomes easier to avoid the dangers of elitism.

The third condition I would like to discuss has to do with harmony between science and religion. It seems to me that an essential condition for the kind of intellectual life we are imagining for the Bahá'í community is a rigorous understanding of the relation between science and religion—at least as far as their function as sources of knowledge for the advancement of civilization is concerned. This is a vast subject that is not possible to treat briefly so I would like to point out only one or two ideas relevant to the theme of this talk.

In recent years, and in the context of the rise of a new civilization, in the Bahá'í community science and religion increasingly have been identified as two complementary, overlapping systems of knowledge and practice. Now a firm materialist would reject the description outright because it is against his "religion" to consider religious belief a form of knowledge. But I also realize that the idea of religion as a system of knowledge and practice makes some religious people, including some Bahá'ís, a little uncomfortable. This is unfortunate because the discomfort

arises from a misunderstanding of the intention of the phrase. I assure you that when I think of my Faith, the first thing that comes to my mind is not a system of knowledge and practice. I think of the dazzling light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation; I think of the Greatness of this Day, the power of the Covenant, the joy of turning to the Most Great Beauty. But when it comes to our efforts to advance civilization, I am reminded that according to Shoghi Effendi, the Cause is scientific in its method, and that a spiritual and material civilization has to be built with knowledge from both religion and science. In this context, examining the two as complementary systems of knowledge and practice proves quite useful.

Just giving names to things, of course, does not take us very far. A rigorous process of inquiry is needed to understand the nature of harmony between science and religion and the ways in which they complement each other in the civilization-building process. I would like to suggest that the more attention we give to such an inquiry, and the sooner we begin doing so, the greater the progress we will achieve in the development of the intellectual life of our community. Allow me to say a few words, then, about one of the implications of the statement that science and religion constitute complementary systems of knowledge.

This innocent-sounding statement rules out certain other possible relations between science and religion. It rejects the position that religious belief is largely speculative knowledge about reality, a stop-gap measure we employ while we wait for real scientific knowledge to appear as science finds definitive answers to the questions that give rise to the religious impulse in the human being in the first place. It is a fact of history that the positivist project—a project that attempted to banish religious belief as a feature of an underdeveloped humanity and replace it with sound scientific knowledge based on experience—has failed. Interestingly, its bravest and probably most exacting manifestation (logical positivism) imploded, and not only because of the advances in the philosophy of science resulting from analysis of real historical evidence.

The statement also closes the door to expressions, sincere and enticing as they may be, that real science will be the result of correct and imaginative readings of the Scriptures. This apparent expression of faith, it seems to me, arises from a confusion in the usage of the word *religion*, which sometimes refers to what God has revealed and sometimes to the beliefs and practices of a specific religious community. In the Bahá'í community, we try to ensure that the latter—our system of knowledge and practice—corresponds as closely as possible to the revealed Word. The assurance that it will be so is a unique feature of the Bahá'í Faith, a feature Bahá'u'lláh Himself incorporated into His Teachings through the establishment of the Covenant. Because God is all-knowing and all

knowledge emanates from Him, it seems legitimate to believe that the Revelation contains scientific knowledge, but it would be unwarranted to infer from it that real science will be discovered by our reading of the Text. Science is a faculty of the human soul. The powers of perception and reasoning are thus gifts from God that allow humanity to construct the extremely powerful system of knowledge and practice we also call "science." Trying to conflate scientific knowledge with religious knowledge takes us back to the time of Galileo. Trying to conflate spiritual and moral knowledge with something that the methods of science would be capable of producing is equally fruitless, as the efforts of the positivists have already proven. And yet how tempting it is to resort to such reductionism ourselves! Elements of knowledge elaborated in science and elements of knowledge elaborated in the process of religious study and practice should be used together in specific efforts. Such a clarity, it seems to me, is an indispensable characteristic of the intellectual life we are trying to develop.

Never in my life have I doubted that the most sacred and urgent task before the Bahá'í community is the teaching of the Faith. Humanity needs to see the light of Bahá'u'lláh. At the same time, albeit with less feeling of urgency, I have felt that the growing Bahá'í community needs to increase its understanding of science. Not scientism. Not those popular versions of science that cannot distinguish it from magic. Not the mere knowledge of technology. What the Bahá'í community needs to grasp is the nature of scientific knowledge in all its power, science as the "first emanation from God toward man" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 49) illuminating human understanding and enabling it to penetrate the mysteries of the universe and life on this earthly plane; science as complementing religious faith and knowledge so filled with spiritual insights that can help humanity raise this world of dust to the heaven of glory.

Friends, I have shared with you some of the thoughts on the intellectual life of the community that have occupied my mind over the years. As I mentioned at the beginning, this has not been a systematic treatment of the subject. I hope I have shown how challenging the road ahead of us is, both for those who are engaged in scholarly work and those who bear the responsibility of promoting the intellectual life of the community. I hope I conveyed my optimism about the prospect of meaningful intellectual progress. This optimism is not the result of wishful thinking. For the longest time, I have hoped for the rise of a distinctive intellectuality that would integrate the spiritual and the material, the practical and the theoretical—an intellectuality that would have roots in the civilization-building efforts of the Bahá'í community. Today, tens of thousands of people, particularly youth, are fully engaged in such efforts, and to a person like me who is very familiar with

their work, it seems clear that the light of the desired intellectual life of the community has dawned.

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