

# Fifty Baha'i Principles of Unity: A Paradigm of Social Salvation<sup>1</sup>

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*No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united. The evidences of discord and malice are apparent everywhere, though all were made for harmony and union.*

— Bahá'u'lláh, 'Tablet of Maqṣúd', *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, 163–64.

*The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established. This unity can never be achieved so long as the counsels which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed are suffered to pass unheeded.*

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, 186.

## Abstract

*The Baha'i Faith, a young world religion, offers principles of unity – from family relations to international relations – as a paradigm for social salvation. These principles may be studied within the analytic prism of an 'illness/cure' approach to religious soteriologies – a conceptual model in the phenomenology of religions popularized by Stephen Prothero. World religions are systems of salvation, liberation or harmony. Their respective offers of salvation, liberation or harmony respond directly to the human predicament, as defined by each religion. If humanity is plagued by sin, then Christianity's redemptive offer of salvation from sin makes perfect sense. Early Buddhism's offer of liberation – from the fundamental problem of suffering – also fits perfectly in this model. In the Baha'i religion, the plight facing the world is profound estrangement at all levels of society. Therefore the social salvation that the Baha'i religion offers are precepts and practices that augment unity and harmony, as Baha'u'llah proclaims: 'The distinguishing feature that marketh the pre-eminent character of this Supreme Revelation consisteth in that We have ... blotted out from the pages of God's holy Book whatsoever hath been the cause of strife, of malice and*

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*mischievous amongst the children of men, and have ... laid down the essential prerequisites of concord, of understanding, of complete and enduring unity'. After reviewing Raymond Piper's typology, fifty (50) Baha'i principles of unity are enumerated and briefly described: types of unity propounded by Baha'u'llah in the Tablet of Unity (Lawḥ-i Ittīḥād); types of unity forecast by 'Abdu'l-Baha in the 'The Seven Candles of Unity'; and types of unity articulated by Shoghi Effendi – a splendid array of understudied elements of the Baha'i social gospel. Since the present study is a first extended survey, based squarely on authenticated primary sources, of the notion of unity vis-à-vis the Baha'i Faith, results are preliminary, not definitive.*

Widely acknowledged as the youngest independent world religion, the Baha'i Faith offers an ideology, theory, modality and model of social harmony, or 'unity', for bringing about an ideal world order, from family relations to international relations. Any first-order (i.e. descriptive) phenomenology of the Baha'i religion must therefore appreciate its paradigmatic focus on 'unity and concord' which, for Baha'is, entails harmonizing pluralities in order to advance civilization. A social solution presupposes its opposite, the problem. In the Baha'i worldview, such descriptors as disunity/unity, discord/concord, disharmony/harmony, estrangement/engagement, enmity/amity and so forth, are meaningful concepts for understanding Baha'i belief and its social dynamic in action. These binary opposites can metaphorically be expressed as an 'illness/cure' model of social reality, which model offers a useful phenomenological approach to the study of religions in general, and the study of the Baha'i Faith in particular.

The present study is therefore contextualized within a broader discussion of the illness/cure soteriological analytical model in the phenomenology of religions, as popularized by the best-selling author, Stephen Prothero, professor of religion at Boston University, who specializes in American religions. Then follows a discussion of how the Baha'i religion frames the human predicament and its resolution, with unity acclaimed as social salvation. As for the history of ideas within Baha'i thought concerning unity, Raymond Frank Piper's typology of Baha'i principles of unity is reviewed. The methodology of the present study is then presented, followed by a discussion of unity as paramount in the Baha'i value system. Some fifty (50) distinct Baha'i principles of unity are then enumerated and briefly described, including, *inter alia*, types of unity as propounded by Baha'u'llah in the Tablet of Unity (*Lawḥ-i Ittīḥād*); other types of unity; types of unity as defined by 'Abdu'l-Baha, beginning with the 'Tablet' of 'The Seven Candles of

Unity’; other types of unity; types of unity articulated by Shoghi Effendi as foundational to Baha’i administration and the future World Commonwealth; other unities – a splendid array of understudied elements of the Baha’i social gospel and the social laboratories of their coordinated application in Baha’i communal life.

As to primary sources, every effort has been made to select only exemplars from the Baha’i writings that are authenticated as to the original and authorized as to their English translations. In several cases, when authorized English translations are not available, professional translations have been given instead. (Where a non-authoritative text has been cited, the status of that text has been indicated as such.) All transliterations, unless otherwise indicated, have been supplied by the present writer (who takes responsibility for any errors), after consulting the relevant original Persian and Arabic texts, with online links provided so that the reader has access to these primary sources.

Since the present study is a first extended survey, based squarely on authenticated primary sources, of the notion of unity vis-à-vis the Baha’i Faith,<sup>2</sup> the results are preliminary, not definitive. No doubt additional Baha’i principles of unity will be found that may significantly expand and enrich this list. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for further study are offered.

## **I. The Illness/Cure Soteriological Model in the Phenomenology of Religions**

World religions are systems of salvation, liberation or harmony. Their respective offers of salvation, liberation or harmony are in direct response to what is defined as the human predicament. If humanity’s fundamental problem is sin, as in Christianity generally, then Christianity’s redemptive offer is that of salvation from sin. Similarly, in early Buddhism, the principal difficulty affecting the world is suffering. Thus early Buddhism offered liberation from

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<sup>2</sup> The author published a preliminary study in ‘Paradise and World Unity in the Baha’i Writings’, *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha’i Faith*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, 288–311, identifying twenty-two (22 – i.e. 23 less one that was repeated) Baha’i principles of unity. The present study more than doubles that number at fifty (50).

suffering. In the Baha'i Faith, the most recent independent world religion, the human predicament is profound estrangement at all levels of society. Thus the social salvation that the Baha'i religion offers is that of unity, from family relations to international relations.

Universally, the root of all moral and societal problems, and their eventual redemption, may be problematized as the 'human predicament'. Generally, the concept of the human predicament operates as a meaningful category of comparison within the phenomenology of religions. In 'The Human Predicament as Illness: The Medical Model as a Tool for Comparison', John J. Thatamanil proposes a 'standard fourfold medical model or therapeutic paradigm' of the human predicament: (1) diagnosis, (2) etiology (origin or cause), (3) prognosis and (4) therapy.<sup>3</sup> The Buddha's Four Noble Truths, for instance, can be mapped out onto this medical model: 'All is suffering (diagnosis); (2) Suffering has a cause, namely craving (etiology); (3) Suffering can be brought to cessation (prognosis); (4) The eightfold path is [the] way to bring an end to suffering (therapy)'.<sup>4</sup> Thus the medical model is a 'promising tool for comparative religion' since it allows for commensurable comparisons across traditions.<sup>5</sup>

Stephen Prothero adopts a similar illness/cure approach, but reduces the analysis to diagnosis and prognosis. In *God Is Not One* Prothero argues that the world's religions each responds to the 'human predicament' as defined by each religion. Prothero offers this 'admittedly simplistic' four-part approach to his illness/cure model of religious offers of salvation, liberation or harmony: 'Each religion articulates: a problem; a solution to this problem, which also serves as the religious goal; a technique (or techniques) for moving from this problem to this solution; and an exemplar (or exemplars) who chart this path from problem to solution'.<sup>6</sup> This is an

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<sup>3</sup> John J. Thatamanil, 'The Immanent Divine and the Human Predicament', *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament: An East-West Conversation*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, 16–17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 17.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World – and Why Their Differences Matter*, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2010, 14.

excellent answer to the problem of ‘how’ to teach world religions in a public school setting. Here are the problem/solution paradigms that Prothero presents for the eight religions he covers in his book:

- Yoruba (West African): The problem is disconnection/the solution is connection with our destinies, to one another, and to sacred power.<sup>7</sup>
- Hinduism: The problem is the perpetual cycle of birth, death, rebirth/the solution is liberation.<sup>8</sup>
- Buddhism: The problem is suffering/the solution is awakening.<sup>9</sup>
- Confucianism: The problem is chaos/the solution is proper social order.<sup>10</sup>
- Taoism: The problem is lifelessness/the solution is flourishing, to live life to its fullest.<sup>11</sup>
- Judaism: The problem is exile/the solution is to return to God.<sup>12</sup>
- Christianity: The problem is sin/the solution is salvation.<sup>13</sup>
- Islam: The problem is pride/the solution is submission.<sup>14</sup>

This approach has much to commend it, although one may differ as to the problem/solution formulas. In a nutshell, one can say that the Irano-Semitic religions (i.e. Zoroastrianism and the ‘Abrahamic religions’, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Baha’i Faith) offer types of ‘salvation’, variously defined, while South Asian religions (i.e. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid 203.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 148.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 169.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 101, 113.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 279, 285.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid 243.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 65, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 25, 62.

and Sikhism) offer forms of ‘liberation’, while East Asian religions (i.e. Confucianism and Taoism), along with some indigenous religions (such as the Yoruba tradition referenced above) emphasize the restoration of ‘harmony’ in the cosmic and social order. These promises of salvation, liberation or harmony are offered in direct response to how the human predicament is variously defined in the world’s religious traditions.

## II. The Baha’i Problematic of the Human Predicament

As signalled in the epigraph above, Baha’u’llah (1817–92, prophet-founder of the Baha’i Faith), has formulated the human predicament in this striking statement: ‘No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united. The evidences of discord and malice (*naḡāq*) are apparent everywhere, though all were made for harmony (*ittifāq*) and union (*ittiḡād*)’.<sup>15</sup> The solution to the human predicament is unity: ‘The well-being of mankind, its peace and security (*īn iṡlāḡ va rāḡat*) are unattainable unless and until its unity (*ittifāq va ittiḡād*) is firmly established. This unity can never be achieved so long as the counsels (*naṡā’ih*) which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed are suffered to pass unheeded’.<sup>16</sup>

The Baha’i doctrine of unity offers a powerful explanatory account of the human predicament and its way out. The central problematic in the Baha’i worldview is estrangement, i.e. ‘disunity’, according to the Universal House of Justice (the democratically elected international Baha’i council that oversees the affairs of the Baha’i world): ‘Few will disagree that the universal disease sapping the health of the body of humankind is that of disunity’.<sup>17</sup>

The Baha’i writings use a variety of terms for this basic and pervasive disease of disunity. One example is ‘estrangement’, an example of which is this: ‘The word of God which the

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<sup>15</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Tablet of Maḡsúd’ (*Lawḡ-i Maḡsúd*), *Tablets*, 163–4. Original Persian/Arabic Tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/TB/tb-11.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990, 186. Original Persian/Arabic Tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/GWB/gwb-131.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Century of Light*, Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2006, 42.

Supreme Pen hath recorded on the seventh leaf of the Most Exalted Paradise is this: O ye men of wisdom among nations! Shut your eyes to estrangement (*bīgānigī*), then fix your gaze upon unity (*yigānigī*).<sup>18</sup>

If the disease is disunity, what are its symptoms? They range from problems in family relations all the way up to international relations, from divorce to war. Indeed, the Universal House of Justice writes of ‘these other ills’ which ‘are but various symptoms and side effects of the basic disease – disunity’.<sup>19</sup> This calls for a remedy capable of ‘healing the countless ills which, in the final analysis, are the consequences of the disunity afflicting the human family’,<sup>20</sup> as the Baha’i International Community has likewise framed the Baha’i remedy/cure analysis. ‘As unity is the remedy for the world’s ills’, the Universal House of Justice further states, pointing to the primary source for this panacea, ‘its one certain source lies in the restoration of religion’s influence in human affairs. The laws and principles revealed by God, in this day, Bahá’u’lláh declares, “are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men”’.<sup>21</sup>

### III. The Baha’i Response to the Human Predicament: Unity

What, then, does the Baha’i religion offer as a response to the human predicament, as formulated in the previous section? The illness/cure soteriological model in the phenomenology of religions offers a useful approach to understanding the Baha’i paradigm of social salvation. In a number of passages, Baha’u’llah likens the founders of the world religions to skilful physicians who, with their fingers on the pulse of humanity, can diagnose the disease and prescribe the remedy, which will be different from age to age:

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<sup>18</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, ‘*Kalímát-i-Firdawsíyyih* (Words of Paradise)’, *Tablets*, 67. Original Persian/Arabic Tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/TB/tb-6.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963–1968*, 1st rev. edn., Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976, 70 (letter dated 8 December 1967).

<sup>20</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Century of Light* 95.

<sup>21</sup> Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith*, Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2005, 43.

The Prophets of God (*payāambarān*) should be regarded as physicians (*pizishkān*) whose task is to foster the well-being of the world and its peoples (*parvarish-i gītī va kisān-i ān*), that, through the spirit of oneness (*bi-darmān-i yigānigī*), they may heal (*chārih*) the sickness of a divided humanity (*bīmārī-yi bīgānigī*). To none is given the right to question their words or disparage their conduct, for they are the only ones who can claim to have understood the patient (*kālbād*) and to have correctly diagnosed its ailments (*bīmārīhā*). ... The whole of mankind (*mardumān*) is in the grip of manifold ills (*bīmārī*). Strive, therefore, to save its life through the wholesome medicine (*darmān*) which the almighty hand of the unerring Physician (*pizishk-i yazdān*) hath prepared.<sup>22</sup>

Here, the ‘spirit of oneness’ is the equivalent of ‘unity’, as Baha’u’llah clearly states in this exhortation: ‘The Great Being saith: O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity (*yigānigī*) hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers (*bīgānagān*). Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.’<sup>23</sup> ‘Unity’ (*yigānigī*) and ‘estrangement’ (*bīgānigī*) provide a contrasting and rhyming pair of antonyms often used for poetic effect:

The first utterance of Him Who is the All-Wise is this: O children of dust! Turn your faces from the darkness of estrangement (*bīgānigī*) to the effulgent light of the daystar of unity (*yigānigī*). This is that which above all else will benefit the peoples of the earth. O friend! Upon the tree of utterance there hath never been, nor shall there ever be, a fairer leaf, and beneath the ocean of knowledge no pearl more wondrous can ever be found.<sup>24</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Baha (1844–1921), successor to, interpreter and exemplar of the teachings of his father, Baha’u’llah (1817–92), prophet-founder of the Baha’i Faith, wrote: ‘O ye beloved of

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<sup>22</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Tablet to Fath-i A‘zam’, *Gleanings* 80. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/GWB/gwb-34.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Tablet of Maqṣūd’. *Tablets* 164. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/TB/tb-11.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Tablet to Mánikchí Şáhib’ (*Lawḥ-i-Mānikchī-Şāhib*), *The Tabernacle of Unity*, Haifa: Bahá’i World Centre, 2006, 7. Original Persian tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/c/YP/yp-27.html>. For یگانگی *yigānigī*, see Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977 (1892), 1535, and for بیگانگی *bīgānigī*, see 223.



God! Know ye, verily, that the happiness of mankind (*sa'ādat-i 'ālam-i insānī*) lieth in the unity and the harmony (*dar vaḥdat va yigānigī*) of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity (*ulfat va maḥabbat*) among all men.<sup>25</sup> Here, 'unity' (*vaḥdat*), 'harmony' (*yigānigī*), 'amity' (*ulfat*) and 'love' (*maḥabbat*) are roughly synonymous. In another passage, 'Abdu'l-Baha writes of the overriding need of this day and age:

Today (*imrūz*) the one overriding need (*aḥamm-i umūr*, lit. 'most important affairs') is unity and harmony (*ittihād va ittifāq*) among the beloved of the Lord, for they should have among them but one heart and soul (*bā yik dīgar yik dil*) and should, so far as in them lieth, unitedly withstand the hostility of all the peoples of the world; they must bring to an end the benighted prejudices of all nations and religions and must make known to every member of the human race that all are the leaves of one branch, the fruits of one bough.<sup>26</sup>

Consistent with the prescriptions propounded by Baha'u'llah as the divine physician for this day and age, 'Abdu'l-Baha, in a tablet revealed in January 1920 for the acclaimed Baha'i journalist and teacher, Martha Root, likens religion to a medicine that can cure the disease of fanaticism, or prejudice, in its various forms. But if religion itself becomes fanatical, then it has ceased to be a remedy, having now become part of the disease that afflicts humanity. In such a state, it would be better to be rid of the religion that is fuelling such turmoil:

For religion (*dīn*) is like unto a remedy (*'alāj*).<sup>27</sup> If the remedy (*'alāj*) causes disease (*sabab-i maraḍ*), it is better to abandon it (*tark-i 'alāj aḥsan ast*).

Similarly, religious fanaticism (*ta'aṣṣub-i dīnī*), racial fanaticism (*ta'aṣṣub-i jinsī*), national fanaticism (*ta'aṣṣub-i vaṭanī*), political fanaticism (*ta'aṣṣub-i siyāsī*) – all such

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<sup>25</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Trans. Marzieh Gail, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982, 286. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-291.html>.

<sup>26</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, 277. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-283.html#pg267>.

<sup>27</sup> Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, 861, lexicalizes this word as '*ilāj*'. Contemporary Tehrani pronunciation is '*alāj*'.

prejudices destroy the foundation of humanity (*bunyān-i insānī*) and all these lead to bloodshed and the destruction of mankind (*vīrānī-yi 'ālam-i insānī*). Consequently, as long as those prejudices persist, hideous warfare will continue.

The remedy of this disease is Universal Peace (*'alāj-i īn ṣulḥ-i 'umūmī ast*), and such peace must be organized on behalf of all the powers and nations in a Supreme Tribunal (*maḥkamih-yi kubrā*) and all national and political questions be referred to it for solution.<sup>28</sup>

Applying the illness/cure soteriological analytical model in the phenomenology of religions to the Baha'i Faith, it is clear that, from the Baha'i perspective, the human predicament, i.e. the metaphorical 'illness' and 'disease' of society – is pervasive 'estrangement' and 'disunity' at all levels of human society – from family relations to race relations to international relations – and that the metaphorical 'cure' or 'remedy' is the promotion and implementation of Baha'i principles of unity.

#### IV. Piper's Typology of Baha'i Principles of Unity

In 1943–4, Raymond Frank Piper attempted a typology of Baha'i principles of unity that was quite well received and widely disseminated. A typology involves typification of a discrete set of data, that is, imposing a classification system on that data set and structuring it by means of categorical types. Probably the most well-known typology published by a Baha'i academic is Alessandro Bausani's 'Notes for a typology of monotheism', published in 1957.<sup>29</sup> Methods for generating typologies are generally underdeveloped, and may appear, more often than not, as a rather arbitrary imposition of categories in order to organize and reduce a body of data, so that it

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<sup>28</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha, 'Letter to Martha Root', translated by Ali Kuli Khan, 1920. Online at [http://bahai-library.com/abdulbaha\\_martha\\_root\\_1920](http://bahai-library.com/abdulbaha_martha_root_1920). See [http://bahai-library.com/abdulbaha\\_martha\\_root\\_1920](http://bahai-library.com/abdulbaha_martha_root_1920). Persian text in 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Makātīb-i Ḥadrat-i 'Abdu'l-Baha*, Cairo: Faraj'u'llāh Zakī al-Kurdī, 1921, vol. 3, 67–68. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MA3/ma3-67.html> and <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MA3/ma3-68.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Alessandro Bausani, 'Note per una tipologia del monoteismo' ('Notes for a typology of monotheism'), *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* ('Studies and Documents of History of Religions') 28, 1957, 67–88. See <http://cisadu2.let.uniroma1.it/smstr/issues/1957/pages/#page/2.67/mode/2up>.

may be more readily comprehended and compared with other sets of commensurable data. Such is the case with Piper's typology of Baha'i principles of unity.

Piper (1888–1962) was professor of philosophy, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York.<sup>30</sup> In 1920, Piper received his PhD in Philosophy from Boston University after defending his dissertation, *The Metaphysics of Personality in the Light of Recent American Philosophy*.<sup>31</sup> Since 1920, Piper had been teaching and writing on aesthetics, philosophy and comparative religions. Prior to 5 October 1935, when he spoke on 'The Quest for a Universal Religion', it was reported that Piper had travelled some 45,000 miles over 17 months and 'interviewed 550 people, including such teachers as Krishnamurti, Rabindranath Tagore, Shoghi Effendi and visited the birthplaces of various religions'.<sup>32</sup> The purpose of this trip was to prepare 'a philosophical study of government, religion and art'.<sup>33</sup> Some anecdotes surrounding that trip are recounted in the biography of Piper's second wife, Lila, which, oddly enough, is silent as to Piper's Baha'i affiliation, perhaps because Lila, as a missionary who taught in India for nine years, was a committed Methodist. Both were active in the University United Methodist Church.<sup>34</sup>

Piper's last work, *Cosmic Art*, was completed by Lila and published in 1975.<sup>35</sup> This was preceded by his book, *The Hungry Eye: An Introduction to Cosmic Art*, which appeared in

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<sup>30</sup> Theodore C. Denise, 'Raymond F. Piper (1888–1962)', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 36, 1962–3, 120.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond Frank Piper, 'The Metaphysics of Personality in the Light of Recent American Philosophy', Boston University Graduate School, 1920. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT).

<sup>32</sup> 'Garnett House Lists Speaker on Religions', *Rochester Journal*, 5 October 1935, 12.

<sup>33</sup> 'Professor to Visit Leaders of the World', *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, 25 February 1932, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Kitty Katzell, *Lila: A Biography*, iUniverse, 2006, 57–60.

<sup>35</sup> Raymond F. Piper and Lila K. Piper, *Cosmic Art*, edited, with foreword, by Ingo Swann, New York: Hawthorn Books, 1975.

1956.<sup>36</sup> It is not clear when Piper became a Baha'i, but it was likely in 1936 or shortly before, judging from the date of his first two Baha'i publications.<sup>37</sup> His papers, archived by Syracuse University, provide ample evidence of his wide-ranging research interests, including the subject of the Baha'i Faith itself.<sup>38</sup>

Piper was a systematic thinker, as evidenced by the ambitious college textbook that he co-authored in 1929: *The Fields and Methods of Knowledge: A Textbook in Orientation and Logic*.<sup>39</sup> In like systematic fashion, Piper formulated a typology of Baha'i principles of unity. Piper's paradigm, 'Ways to Wholeness', was published in two instalments in *World Order* magazine.<sup>40</sup> He later wrote: 'My article on "Ways to Wholeness" (*World Order*, Dec., 1943; Jan., 1944) ... specified a dozen kinds of fruitful ethical unities which remain empty abstractions until individual persons actualize, organize, embody them in action'.<sup>41</sup> Piper specified 16 Baha'i principles of unity, actually. They are:

### THREE CLASSIFICATIONS OF UNITIES

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<sup>36</sup> Raymond Frank Piper, *The Hungry Eye: An Introduction to Cosmic Art*, Los Angeles: DeVorss, 1956.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond Frank Piper, 'A Path to Permanent Peace: Book Review'. *World Order* 2(2), 1936, 79–80; idem, 'Spiritual Perspectives', *World Order* 1(10), 1936, 363–72.

<sup>38</sup> 'The Papers of Dr. Raymond Piper' (finding aid), Archives and Records Management, Syracuse University. See Box 15 (Speeches), folder 5 (Bahai Faith). There are three documents in this folder. On receiving digital copies from the Syracuse University Archives on 28 September 2012, it quickly became evident that these documents were written in shorthand. There was no evidence, moreover, that two of these documents were, in fact, 'Speeches'. But on one document is clearly written, 'Speech, Bahais', with the title, 'The Spiritual Life'. Courtesy of Meg Mason, Assistant Archivist, Archives & Records Management, Syracuse University.

<sup>39</sup> Raymond F. Piper and Paul W. Ward, *The Fields and Methods of Knowledge: A Textbook in Orientation and Logic*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929.

<sup>40</sup> Raymond Frank Piper, 'Ways to Wholeness: Part One', *World Order* 9(9), December 1943, 291–9; idem, 'Ways to Wholeness: Part Two'. *World Order* 9(10), January 1944, 339–50.

<sup>41</sup> Piper, *The Bahá'í World* 9 (1940–1944), 670.

## I. FOUNDATION UNITIES

### A. Spiritual Unities

1. Divine Unity.
2. Prophetic Unity.
3. Religious Unity.
4. Historic Unity.
5. Universal Unity.

### B. Human Unities

6. Biological or Racial Unity.
7. Psychological, Mental, or Selfic Unity.

### C. Social Aids to Unity

8. Political Unity.
9. Juridical Unity.
10. Economic Unity.
11. Educational Unity.
12. Linguistic Unity.
13. Social Unity.

### D. Some Spiritual Aids to Unity

14. Scientific Unity.
15. Aesthetic Unity.
16. Ethical Unity.

The two instalments of 'Ways to Wholeness', enumerating and explicating some 'sixteen unities', were evidently well received, as a special reprint of 'Ways to Wholeness' was prepared: 'A special reprint of Dr. R. F. Piper's 'Ways to Wholeness' was prepared for the Bureau, and over

200 copies were mailed out with a personal letter to educators.<sup>42</sup> An abridged version of ‘Ways to Wholeness’ subsequently appeared in *The Bahá’i World* in 1945.<sup>43</sup> The inclusion of Piper’s article was significant in that *The Bahá’i World* volumes were the most important Baha’i publications next to the authorized translations of Baha’i scriptures. Piper’s paradigm must not only have gained the respect of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United States and Canada, but also must have earned the approval of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Baha’i Faith (1921–57), since he personally oversaw the publication of the *Bahá’i World* volumes.

## V. Methodology of the Present Study

A typology of Baha’i principles of unity implicates an inchoate Baha’i theory of social cohesion, which broadly may be defined as the solidarity, or ‘unity’, of a group. The Baha’i unity paradigm aims at cultivating social cohesion at all levels of human society, from family relations to international relations. Although there is no agreed definition of social cohesion, social cohesion theories do, however, have three elements in common: (1) shared vision (universal values, mutual respect and common aspirations or identity); (2) well-functioning of a group or community (shared goals and responsibilities and readiness to cooperate with fellow members); and (3) a process (an ongoing dynamic of achieving social harmony).<sup>44</sup>

Although Dr Piper’s typology enjoyed high-level approbation and was published widely within the Baha’i context, it has all but been forgotten in the contemporary Baha’i world. Perhaps it is not the substance of Piper’s typology itself that is of significance, but the fact that

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<sup>42</sup> ‘A special reprint of Dr. R. F. Piper’s ‘Ways to Wholeness’ was prepared for the Bureau, and over 200 copies were mailed out with a personal letter to educators’, *The Bahá’i World* 9 (1940–1944), 84.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond Frank Piper, ‘Ways to Wholeness’, *The Bahá’i World* 9 (1940–1944), National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, 1945, 776–88.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion*, Victoria, Australia: Monash University, 2011, 12.

he perceived the pervasive nature of the Baha'i principles of unity and their profound potential for world reform.

As a preliminary investigation into the Baha'i illness/cure soteriology, with its paradigm of unity, the methodology pursued in the present study is simply to inventory those Baha'i principles that are directly presented as 'unity of' or 'oneness of' formulations, as indicated by selected genitive constructions, or 'of-constructions' (i.e. the Persian/Arabic *'idāfa*) involving the Persian/Arabic terms of *ittihād*, *ittifāq*, *yigānigī*, *vaḥdat*, *ulfat*, *vaḥīd*, etc.<sup>45</sup>

There are, in fact, numerous Baha'i ethical and social teachings. Unlike Piper's selections, however, the principles inventoried here are narrowly restricted to explicit principles of unity, and further delimited to those that are authenticated in the original source languages, where translated texts are marshalled as proof-texts.

Primary sources will therefore be consulted in the original Persian and Arabic source languages (texts by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha) and, where applicable, in English (texts by Shoghi Effendi). The relatively few texts in Ottoman Turkish (texts by 'Abdu'l-Baha) are not surveyed, however. Thus a typology of Baha'i principles of unity is arguably premature, unless and until such principles are properly inventoried.

## **VI. Unity as Paramount in the Baha'i Value System**

An inventory of Baha'i principles of unity should first be contextualized. These principles spring from the premise that unity is paramount in the Baha'i value system. A single passage (with transliteration of the original Persian text supplied by the present writer), should suffice in underscoring the paramount importance of unity within the Baha'i hierarchy of values:

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<sup>45</sup> In the Arabic linguistic tradition, the *'idāfa* ('annexation'/'relation', often referred to as a 'genitive relation' or 'construct state') is a grammatical construction that links two Arabic nouns in a noun phrase (*tarkīb ismī*), such that the second noun (definite) amplifies the first (indefinite). See Karen Ryding and Kees Versteegh, 'Idāfa', *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, Leiden: Brill, 2005, vol. 2, 43. In the Persian linguistic tradition, the *'idāfa* compound is represented with the postfix *-i* (except that when a word ends with a vowel, the postfix becomes *-yi*).

The utterance of God is a lamp (*mishkāt-i bayān*), whose light (*miṣbāh*) is these words (*īn kalima*): [‘O peoples of the world! (*ay ahl-i ‘ālam*)’ – missing in translation.] Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch (*hama bār-i yik dārīd va barg-i yik shākhsār*). Deal ye one with another with the utmost love (*bi-kamāl-i mahabbat*) and harmony (*ittihād*), with friendliness (*mavaddat*) and fellowship (*ittifāq*). He Who is the Day-Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity (*nūr-i ittifāq*) that it can illuminate the whole earth (*āfāq*). ... This goal excelleth every other goal (*īn qaṣd sulṭān-i maqāsid*, lit. ‘this goal [is] the king of all goals’), and this aspiration is the monarch of all aspirations (*īn amal malik-i āmāl*).<sup>46</sup>

The superlative expressions in this passage are not just rhetorical. They are quite literally true insofar as they represent what may be regarded as not only the paramount Baha’i ideals, but the fundamental orientation and organizing principles of Baha’i precept and praxis.

## VII. Baha’i Principles of Unity

Piper’s ‘Ways to Wholeness’ was published in 1943–4. It is now some 68 years later (as of 2012). Piper’s paradigm, while attractive initially, has not ‘caught on’, so to speak, within contemporary Baha’i discourse. Piper’s unity paradigm is but a historical footnote, little more than a citation. A fuller and more natural order of Baha’i principles has been long overdue, if indeed unity does have paramount importance in the Baha’i hierarchy of values.

It makes more sense to present Baha’i principles of unity roughly in order of their sources, first by way of Baha’u’llah (1817–92), prophet-founder of the Baha’i Faith (i.e. the ‘Manifestation of God’ for this day and age according to Baha’i belief), then by ‘Abdu’l-Baha (1844–1921), successor to Baha’u’llah, authorized interpreter and matchless exemplar of Baha’i lived ideals, and finally by Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), ‘Guardian’ of the Baha’i Faith (successor to ‘Abdu’l-Baha).

## VIII. Types of Unity as Propounded by Baha’u’llah: The Tablet of Unity (*Lawḥ-i Ittihād*)

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<sup>46</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1988 (1941), 14–15. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/ESW1/esw1-12.html>. For the same text, see also <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/GWB/gwb-132.html>.



The Tablet of Unity (*Lawḥ-i Ittiḥād*) is the fullest single statement by Baha’u’llah on the subject of unity. A provisional translation by Moojan Momen was published in 2001.<sup>47</sup> This tablet was revealed by Baha’u’llah, during the ‘Akka period (1868–92), in response to a question posed by Siyyid Asad’u’llāh of Rasht (in northern Iran): ‘Thou hast asked about unity (*ittiḥād*)’.<sup>48</sup> This tablet is dated sometime after c.1879 when Siyyid Asad’u’llah converted to the Baha’i Faith – along with his four brothers (the ‘Sādāt-i Khams’) – through the efforts of the celebrated Baha’i poet and teacher, Āqā ‘Alī-Ashraf-i-Lāhījānī, known by his sobriquet, ‘Andalīb (‘Nightingale’).<sup>49</sup> Baha’u’llah expatiates on six or seven (depending on whether the last two are read as one) kinds of unity, expounding on such aspects of unity as ‘religion’ (*dīn*), ‘speech’ (*qawl*), religious ‘acts’ (*āmāl*), ‘rank’ or ‘station’ (*maqām*), ‘souls’ (*nufūs*), and earthly ‘wealth’ (*amvāl*).

1. **Unity in Religion** (*ittiḥād dar dīn*): This first unity, which Baha’u’llah prioritizes (perhaps for the benefit of the recipient), sets the context for the remaining types of unity. Distinct from the plurality of ‘unity of religion’ (see below), ‘unity in religion’ is a singularity. It is unity within the Baha’i community itself: ‘The first kind of unity is unity in religion (*ittiḥād dar dīn*)’. Clearly, the questioner was not united with his own Baha’i community. Of Siyyid Asad’u’llah, Mīrzā Yahyā ‘Amīdu’l-Atibbā Hamadānī, a contemporary, wrote: ‘Although he was

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<sup>47</sup> Moojan Momen, ‘The Tablet of Unity (*Lawḥ-i Ittiḥād*) – A Provisional Translation’, *Lights of ‘Irfān: Papers Presented at the ‘Irfān Colloquia and Seminars*, Book II, Evanston, IL: ‘Irfān Colloquia, 2001, 93–8. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-388.html>. See also Bahá’u’lláh, *Ad’iyyih Ḥaḍrat-i Maḥbūb* (‘The Prayers of the Beloved’), Bundoora, Victoria: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1994, 388–406.

<sup>48</sup> Momen, ‘Tablet of Unity’ 95. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-388.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Shahrokh Monjazez, ‘The Creative Word and the Meaning of Unity: An Annotated Survey of Baha’u’llah’s *Lawḥ-i-Ittiḥād* (Tablet of Unity)’. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Baha’i Studies in San Francisco, 1995, and a revised presentation at the Association for Baha’i Studies conference in Toronto, 2000. Shared by permission of the author.

a believer, he hid his allegiance and strenuously avoided all the Baha'is of Rasht.<sup>50</sup> This may, in part, explain why Baha'u'llah begins his discourse with the problem of consolidation within the religious community.

Religious solidarity 'has always been the cause of the victory of the Faith of God in every age and century', as Baha'u'llah underscores metaphorically: 'Togetherness is the mystic sword of God'.<sup>51</sup> Here, what Momen translates as 'togetherness' is *ijtimā'*, which Shahrokh Monjazez renders 'assemblage of people'<sup>52</sup> and Juan Cole as 'gathering together'.<sup>53</sup> This latter translation has been used in official Baha'i translations, such as this sentence from the 'Tablet of the World' (*Lawḥ-i Dunyā*): 'The mere act of your gathering together is enough to scatter the forces of these vain and worthless people.'<sup>54</sup> Here, 'gathering together' is religious in nature.

Here, Momen translates *saif-i ma'navī-yi ilāhī* as the 'mystic sword of God', where Steingass glosses *ma'nawī* as 'Significant; true, real, intrinsic, essential, absolute; spiritual'.<sup>55</sup> This quintessential or real 'sword' (*saif*) is not a weapon of war. Rather, it is an instrument of success. The 'victory' in the struggle to overcome religious division internally in order to advance religion externally in order to fulfil its transformative role in the betterment of society.

Religious unity can prove to be a powerful social model that ultimately can attract the interest of government, as Monjazez translates: 'For instance, if at the present time a government

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<sup>50</sup> Mīrzā Yahyā 'Amīdu'l-Atibbā Hamadānī, *Memoirs of a Baha'i in Rasht: 1889–1903*, trans. Ahang Rabbani (unpublished), 57. Online at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/20975628/Bahais-in-Rasht>.

<sup>51</sup> Momen, 'Tablet of Unity' 95. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-388.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Monjazez, 'Baha'u'llah's *Lawḥ-i-Ittiḥād*' 2.

<sup>53</sup> Juan Cole, 'The Tablet of Unity (*Lawḥ-i-Ittiḥād*): Provisional Translation'. Online at <http://bahai-library.com/provisionals/ittihad.cole.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Baha'u'llah, 'Tablet of the World' (*Lawḥ-i Dunyā*), *Tablets* 85. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/TB/tb-7.html>.

<sup>55</sup> Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary* 1276.

realizeth that the majority of its citizens have rent the veil asunder and directed themselves toward the Horizon of God’s Revelation [i.e. Baha’u’llah] it would be compelled to take note and listen.’<sup>56</sup> For such to become a reality, other kinds of unity must come into play as well.

2. **Unity in Speech** (*ittihād dar qawl*): It stands to reason that a faith-community should speak with one voice, and that its public discourse ought to truly reflect its social cohesion. ‘And another kind of unity is unity in speech (*ittihād dar qawl*)’, Baha’u’llah writes. He explains that internal dissension can foment discord and thus deprive the community of the inherent power of its unity.

‘Unity in speech’ has three dimensions: (1) unity of discourse; (2) harmony of word and deed; and (3) exercise of wisdom in speech. Here, Baha’u’llah speaks also of voluntary sharing and of personal virtue. More effective than ideal discourse are ideal deeds: ‘That which aids the One True God has always been and is words (*bayān*, lit. ‘explanation’), but in this most mighty Dispensation, [goodly] deeds and a goodly character are the hosts of the One True God and are responsible for the triumph of the Cause.’<sup>57</sup> Thus the advancement of the Baha’i community is coefficient with the degree to which its adherents contribute to the betterment of society.

3. **Unity in [Ritual] Acts** (*ittihād-i ā’māl*): This unity focuses not on deeds in general, but on pious practices in particular, which can divide as well as unite: ‘And in another respect, unity in [ritual] acts (*ittihād-i ā’māl*) is intended. For any difference in these is the cause of disunity.’<sup>58</sup> Monjazez translates *āmāl* as ‘actions’<sup>59</sup> and Cole as ‘deeds’.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Monjazez, ‘Baha’u’llah’s *Lawḥ-i-Ittihād*’ 2.

<sup>57</sup> Momen, ‘Tablet of Unity’ 95–6. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-389.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Momen, ‘Tablet of Unity’ 96. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-391.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Monjazez, ‘Baha’u’llah’s *Lawḥ-i-Ittihād*’ 2.

<sup>60</sup> Cole, ‘The Tablet of Unity (*Lawḥ-i-Ittihād*)’.

Baha'u'llah points to Islam as a case in point, having split over praxis. From the 'ocean' Islam have branched numerous 'gulfs': 'Thus one gulf is Shi'a, one gulf is Sunni, one Shaykhī, another Shāh Ni'matu'llāhī, one Naqshbandī, another Malāmatī, one Jalālī, another Rafā'ī, and yet another Kharābātī'. These sects and Sufī orders have compromised Islam: 'Thus are multiplied the innumerable pathways to hell. Thus do the stones weep and the Pen of the All-High laments.'<sup>61</sup> Monjazez points out that the clear implication here is that differences of actions (*ikhtilāf-i āmāl*), such as divergent modes of worship, etc., have led to the weakening of religion, especially Islam.<sup>62</sup> From this perspective, such pluralism has come at considerable cost, as the Islamic world has forfeited its former role as a (medieval) superpower and is now in a state of malaise. A parallel text that emphasizes power of the Baha'i revelation to promote transconfessional affinity, i.e. ideal interfaith relations, is the following:

The second question concerneth faith and religion (*kīsh va āyīn*). The Faith of God (*kīsh-i yazdān*) hath in this day been made manifest. He Who is the Lord of the world (*jahāndār*) is come and hath shown the way (*rāh*). His faith is the faith of benevolence and His religion is the religion of forbearance (*kīsh-ash nīkūkārī va āyīn-ash burdbārī*). This faith bestoweth eternal life (*zindigī-yi pāyandih*) and this religion enableth mankind to dispense with all else. It verily embraceth all faiths and all religions (*īn kīsh va āyīn dārā-yi kīsh-hā va āyīn-hā-st*). Take hold thereof and guard it well.<sup>63</sup>

While this text emphasizes *intra*-religious unity (i.e. unity *within* religion, i.e. a single religion, the Baha'i Faith), other passages promote *inter*-religious unity (i.e. unity *among* religions). (See principle #11, *infra*.)

4. **Unity of Station** (*ittihād-i maqām*): There is a shift now from assemblage to self: 'And amongst the realms of unity is the unity of rank and station' (*ittihād-i maqām*). Here, 'unity'

<sup>61</sup> Momen, 'Tablet of Unity', 96. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-394.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Monjazez, 'Baha'u'llah's *Lawḥ-i-Ittihād*' 23.

<sup>63</sup> Baha'u'llah, 'Tablet of the Seven Questions' (*Lawḥ-i-Haft Pursish*), *Tabernacle* 59. Original Persian tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/c/YP/yp-15.html>.

means ‘equality’ of station. The ideal demeanour of Baha’is is to see one’s own self in relation to others, such that all people might ideally be on the same ‘plane’ (*ṣuq*) and station (*maqām*). If this were truly put into practice, then ‘the world would become as the Abhá Paradise’.<sup>64</sup> Thus Paradise may be realized in the here-and-now, just as it may be gained in the Hereafter, if unity of station is put into practice.

5. **Unity of Souls** (*ittihād-i nufūs*): Although treated as a distinct type of unity, ‘unity of souls’ bears some resemblance to ‘unity in religion’. The subtle difference here likely inheres in the integrity of the faith-community in putting into practice professed ideals, as distinct from social cohesion within the community itself: ‘The meaning of the unity of souls (*ittihād-i nufūs*) is that all should gather around and cling to the Love of God and the Word of God.’<sup>65</sup> Indeed, all of the types of unity propounded in the Tablet of Unity interrelate, as explicitly stated in this passage:

These unities (*ittihād-hā*) that We have mentioned are each an army among the hosts of God, a part of the party of God, and a command that is part of the Decree of God. The unity of souls (*ittihād-i nufūs*), from the beginning of creation until now, hath been and shall be that which doth assist and bring victory to the Truth – that is to say that unity that is established according to the Decree of God and His Law. In this station, unity does not exceed this degree.<sup>66</sup>

The next type of unity is more challenging because it involves a certain measure of sacrifice in terms of one’s wealth.

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<sup>64</sup> ‘Tablet of Unity’ (but not identified as such), translated on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, ‘Ranks and Functions in the Baha’i Cause’, 27 March 1978. Online at [http://bahai-library.com/uhj\\_nsa\\_counsellors](http://bahai-library.com/uhj_nsa_counsellors). Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-396.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Momen, ‘Tablet of Unity’ 97. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-401.html> and <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-402.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Momen, ‘Tablet of Unity’ 97. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-401.html> and <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-402.html>.

6. **Unity of People and Wealth** (*ittihād-i nufūs va amvāl*): Baha’u’llah concludes the discourse on the several manifestations of unity within Baha’i communities so: ‘Another example is the unity of souls and of wealth (*ittihād-i nufūs va amvāl*) and with this example we will end our discourse on unity.’ Here, by ‘wealth’, Baha’u’llah means money, property, goods, earthly possessions, etc. He exhorts people (*nufūs*) to be united so that they can give their wealth (*amvāl*) to one another altruistically, as needed.

After acknowledging the virtues of equality, Baha’u’llah goes on to explain that voluntary sharing (*muvāsāt*) ranks higher than equitable distribution of wealth (*musāvāt*). ‘This station goes beyond just equality’ in that altruistic individuals who ‘prefer others over themselves have a station that, in truth, is above this station, as has already been ... revealed in the Qur’an’. Baha’u’llah then cites Q. 59:9 as a proof-text (‘and preferring others above themselves, even though poverty be their portion ...’).<sup>67</sup> Baha’u’llah states that unity of wealth (*ittihād-i amvāl*) is the source of cheer and joy and exultation and that, from it, the attribute of voluntary sharing – that is, charitable giving (*muvāsāt*) – is manifested. Thus, the philanthropy of *muvāsāt* exceeds the equitable distribution of wealth that is the reflex of *musāvāt*. On this principle, which has limits, Shahrokh Monjazez has commented:

Baha’u’llah warns, however, that this act of ‘charitable giving’ is only limited to ‘earthly possession’ (*māl*) and nothing more. Baha’u’llah then states that this attribute (i.e. *muvāsāt*) ranks above ‘equality’ (*musāvāt*). He defines equality as when a person expends generously to his fellow men the material riches that God has bestowed upon him. ... But the acts of those who prefer others over themselves is even nobler, for in this state the person is sacrificing his own material needs for the needs of others. ... Baha’u’llah insists that the act of ‘charitable giving’ (*muvāsāt*) is only confined to material possessions. In fact, in another Tablet, in which He expounds on the meaning of *muvāsāt*, Baha’u’llah declares that the act

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<sup>67</sup> Momen, ‘Tablet of Unity’ 97. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-398.html>.

of anyone who exceeds this limitation is considered before God only the result of the prompting of his over-indulgent self and passion.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, in his ‘Tablet to The Hague’, ‘Abdu’l-Baha states that ‘among the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh is voluntary sharing of one’s property with others among mankind’, adding: ‘This voluntary sharing is greater than equality, ... [in] that man should not prefer himself to others, but rather should sacrifice his life and property for others ... and spend willingly for the poor, just as is done in Persia among the Bahá’ís.’<sup>69</sup>

7. **Unity of God** (*tawḥīd-i ilāhī*): Baha’u’llah ends this tablet by reminding the recipient to contemplate God: ‘Everyone must meditate upon God and in particular upon the Unity of God (*tawḥīd-i ilāhī*)’.<sup>70</sup> *Tawḥīd*, the doctrine of the Oneness of God, is the most fundamental concept of monotheism in Islam. Meditating on the transcendence and mystery of God orients the believer’s thoughts, in which the proverbial ‘brotherhood of man’ follows from the ‘fatherhood of God’. This particular ‘unity’ (*tawḥīd*), it should be pointed out, is distinct from *ittihād* and its synonyms. Whereas *ittihād* conveys the idea of unifying people, *tawḥīd* has no such meaning in reference to God. In Baha’i doctrine, the unity of God transcends even intrinsic oneness, and so is beyond numeric singularity. So, in a sense, it could be argued that the ‘unity of God’ cannot be considered among the various kinds of unity enumerated in this paper, and certainly, in the Tablet of Unity, Baha’u’llah does not conflate *ittihād* and *tawḥīd*. In popular Baha’i discourse, however, the ‘Three Onenesses’ (of God, the Messengers of God, and humankind), are widely proclaimed as the epitome of Baha’i belief. These three unities are formally expressed in the following statement by Shoghi Effendi: ‘The Baha’i Faith upholds [1] the unity of God, recognizes [2] the

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<sup>68</sup> Monjazez, ‘Baha’u’llah’s *Lawḥ-i-Ittihād*’ 4, citing *Daryā-yi Dānish*, 145–6.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s Tablet to the Executive Committee of the Central Organization for a Durable Peace (17 December 1919) was dispatched to the Committee at The Hague. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 302. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-307.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Momen, ‘Tablet of Unity’ 97. Online at <http://bahai-library.org/provisionals/ittihad.html>. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/AHM/ahm-404.html>.

unity of His Prophets, and inculcates [3] the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race.<sup>71</sup>

## IX. Types of Unity as Propounded by Baha'u'llah: Other Types of Unity

8. **Unity of Existence (Oneness of Being) and Manifestation** (Arabic: *waḥdat al-wujūd wa shuhūd*/Persian: *vaḥdat-i vujūd va shuhūd*): The previous principle of unity should steer the believer away from the pantheistic inclination of Sufi mystics who predicated their claims of union with God (via such peak mystical experiences as beatific vision or divine audition) on notions of divine immanence pervading creation.

In Baha'u'llah's pre-eminent mystical work, *The Seven Valleys (Haft Vādī)*, a Sufi doctrine known as the 'oneness of being' and commonly construed as pantheism, is referenced: 'In this Valley, the wayfarer leaveth behind him the stages of the 'oneness of Being and Manifestation' (*vaḥdat-i vujūd va shuhūd*) and reacheth a oneness (*vaḥdat*) that is sanctified above these two stations. Ecstasy alone can encompass this theme, not utterance (*bayān*) nor argument; and whosoever hath dwelt at this stage of the journey, or caught a breath from this garden land, knoweth whereof We speak.'<sup>72</sup>

Here, this 'oneness' is not the 'Unity of Existence and Manifestation' *per se*, but rather what is described as 'a oneness that is sanctified *above* these two stations' (emphasis added) which has no name because it is beyond description, representing the pinnacle of mystical experience, which is ineffable. Elsewhere, Baha'u'llah explains that true 'unity of vision' (*tawḥīd-i-shuhūdī*) is witnessing God's attributes and seeing the reflection of God's uniqueness in all things.<sup>73</sup> Further to this line of discussion, 'Abdu'l-Baha's discourse on the

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<sup>71</sup> Shoghi Effendi, 'Preface', *The Promised Day Is Come*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, v (numbered brackets inserted).

<sup>72</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, 39. Persian/Arabic original: Bahá'u'lláh, *Āthāri qalami a'lā*, vol. III, Tehran: Mu'assasih-yi Millī-yi Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī, 129 Badī', 1972-3 (works revealed in the 1850s and early 1860s), 133.

<sup>73</sup> See 'Abdu'l-Ḥamīd Ishrāq-Khāvarī, *Mā'idih-yi Āsmānī* 7:142.



distinction between the Baha'i doctrine of 'manifestation' and the Sufi doctrine of 'emanation' (leading to pantheism) is illuminating, but 'technical' in its intricate elucidation of the relevant Sufi metaphysical terms.<sup>74</sup>

**9. Unity of the Manifestations of God** (*maqām-i tawhīd*): From the doctrine of the unity of God, it follows that anything that emanates from God must likewise be a unity. This holds true for any and all revelations from God. A major Baha'i doctrine is that of prophetic unity, wherein all Messengers of God – such as Abraham, Moses, Christ and Muhammad in the Abraham faiths, along with Zoroaster, Krishna and the Buddha in the Indo-Aryan religions, for instance – are considered one in spirit and teachers of religious doctrines that are quintessentially harmonious, as Baha'u'llah metaphorically writes in this oft-quoted passage:

Inasmuch as these Birds of the Celestial Throne are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His irresistible Faith, they therefore are regarded as one soul and the same person. ... Sayings such as this, which indicate the essential unity (*tawhīd*) of those Exponents of Oneness, have also emanated from the Channels of God's immortal utterance, and the Treasuries of the gems of divine knowledge, and have been recorded in the scriptures.<sup>75</sup>

This key doctrine is explained by Shoghi Effendi: 'The Bahá'í Faith upholds the unity of God, recognizes the unity of His Prophets, and inculcates the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race.'<sup>76</sup> These are the so-called 'Three Onenesses' in popular Baha'i discourse. 'Abdu'l-Baha explains in more detail: 'We believe in that which Jesus Christ and all the Prophets have believed. For example, the Báb states, "I am the return of all the Prophets." This is significant of the oneness of the prophetic virtues, the oneness of power, the

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<sup>74</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, 294. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SAQ/saq-208.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i Íqán*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989, 152–3. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/KI/ki-8.html> (Paragraph 161, page 101).

<sup>76</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, v.

oneness of bestowal, the oneness of radiation, the oneness of expression, the oneness of revelation.<sup>77</sup>

10. **Spiritual Oneness** (*vaḥdat-i rawḥānī*): In the untranslated Persian section of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner (the Arabic portion of which was the first complete tablet that Shoghi Effendi translated following his appointment as the Guardian of the Baha’i Faith),<sup>78</sup> there is a scene in which the captain of the Baha’i ship of salvation, called the ‘Crimson Ark’, imparted a secret to the dwellers of the Ark that transports them with such joy that they attain ‘spiritual oneness’ or ‘unity of spirit’.

In this extended Baha’i allegory, there came a decree from Heaven, which the ‘eternal Mariner’ (*mallāḥ-i baqā’*) discloses to the shipmates (*ahl-i fulk*) – not in full, but in part – divulging but a single letter from the mystic, arcane word (*ḥarfī az kalima-yi ikhfā’*) sent from Heaven, so that, with assistance from the invisible realm, these seafarers might pass through the Valley of Bewilderment of their lower natures (*vādī-yi ḥayrat-i nafsānī*), enter into the joyous atmosphere of spiritual oneness (*vaḥdat-i rawḥānī*), and reach the summit of the divine Qāf of Immortality (*qāf-i baqā’-yi jān*) [mystic mountain thought to be in Qafqāz], to attain the presence of the Beloved (*liqā’-i ḥaḍrat-i jānān*), who is Baha’u’llah.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 168.

<sup>78</sup> See Bahá’u’lláh, “‘Song of the Holy Mariner’”, Revealed by His Holiness Baha’ullah’ [*sic*], trans. Shoghi Effendi, *Star of the West* 13(4), 17 May 1922, 75–7 (translation received in April 1922). Subsequent translation: idem, ‘Tablet of the Holy Mariner’, *Bahá’i Prayers: A Selection of Prayers revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’lBahá*, Wilmette: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1991, 221–9.

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha’i Faith*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, 222–3. See provisional translation by Mehran Ghasempour. Online at <http://bahai-library.com/provisionals/lawh.mallah.quds.mg.html>. Original Persian section of this tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/MAS4/mas4-339.html> ff. See also ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamīd Ishrāq-Khāvarī, *Mā’idih-yi Āsmānī*, vol. 4, Tehran: Mu’assasih-yi Millī-yi Maṭbū’āt-i Amrī [Baha’i Publishing Trust], 1973/129 BE, 339, online at <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/baha/M-R/M/maidih4/4ma339.jpg>. Latter reference courtesy of Bijan Masumian, personal communication, 4 November 2012.

Of course, the reader who has little or no familiarity with the Tablet of the Holy Mariner will not understand this allegory, but it is nevertheless recounted here in the course of cataloguing the various Baha’i principles of unity.

11. **Unity/Peace Among Religions** (*sabab-i ulfat bayn-i adyān/ṣuḥul bayn-i adyān*): This Baha’i principle of unity is inferred from such passages as the following, which is from the ‘Tablet of Ornaments’ (*Lawḥ-i Tarazāt*) where ‘ornaments’ metaphorically refer to attributes of a goodly and godly character:

The second Ṭarāz is to consort with the followers of all religions (*mu’āsharat bā adyān*) in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship (*bi-rawḥ va rayḥān*), to proclaim (*iẓhār*) that which the Speaker on Sinai (*mukallam al-ṭūr*, i.e. the Manifestation/Interlocutor of God) hath set forth and to observe fairness (*inṣāf*) in all matters.

They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness (*aṣḥāb-i ṣafā va vafā*) should associate (*bāyad ... mu’āsharat namāyand*) with all the peoples and kindreds of the earth (*bā jamī’-i ahl-i ‘ālam*) with joy and radiance (*bi-rūuḥ va rayḥān*), inasmuch as consorting (*mu’āsharat*) with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord (*sabab-i ittihād va ittifāq*), which in turn are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world (*ittihād va ittifāq sabab-i nizām-i ‘ālam*) and to the regeneration of nations (*ḥayāt-i umam*). Blessed (*tūbā*) are such as hold fast to the cord of kindness and tender mercy (*ḥabl-i shafaqat va ra’fat*) and are free from animosity and hatred (*ḡaghīnih va bagḥzā*).<sup>80</sup>

In this remarkable passage (that is, noteworthy with respect to the scriptures of world religions generally), the term ‘*rayḥān*’ literally means ‘fragrance’ and refers to the herb, sweet basil, a spice that has its own pleasant aroma. Steingass defines *rayḥān* as ‘sweet basil; any odoriferous herb’.<sup>81</sup> Here, the purport of the metaphor is given, rather than its literal translation.

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<sup>80</sup> Baha’u’llah, ‘Tablet of Ornaments’ (*Lawḥ-i Tarazāt*), *Tablets* 35–6. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/TB/tb-4.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary* 601.

Friendly association with adherents of religions other than one's own co-religionists is no guarantor of interfaith concord, of course, but certainly it is a step in the right direction. From this standpoint, it has been suggested that *mu'āsharat* is a 'precursor' to *ittihād*.<sup>82</sup>

One barrier to interfaith co-fraternity is the law of ritual impurity, where contact with adherents of other religions must be minimized for fear of contamination. Baha'u'llah proclaimed that this barrier, in principle (and thus, eventually, in practice), has been abolished:

God hath, likewise, as a bounty from His presence, abolished the concept of 'uncleanness', whereby divers things and peoples have been held to be impure. ... Verily, all created things were immersed in the sea of purification when, on that first day of Ridván, We shed upon the whole of creation the splendours of Our most excellent Names and Our most exalted Attributes. ... Consort ('*āshirū*) ye then with the followers of all religions (*al-adyān*), and proclaim ye the Cause of your Lord, the Most Compassionate; this is the very crown of deeds, if ye be of them who understand.<sup>83</sup>

Here, Baha'u'llah categorically abolishes the Islamic law of ritual impurity, whereby certain things (and people) are declared to be defiling (*najis*) when, if touched, will alter a Muslim's state of ritual purity by contamination. In Shi'i teaching, moreover, non-Muslim minorities are deemed ritually impure. Restrictions were thus imposed on Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians so that Muslims could avoid pollution by unwanted contact. The result was avoidance at the cost of social solidarity. No society could be truly egalitarian under such alienating practices. By sweeping away this pejorative category and its oppressive practices, Baha'u'llah, in theory if not in practice, opened the way to social rapprochement across intercommunal boundaries within predominantly Muslim societies and thereby reducing, if not eliminating sectarian strife over time.

A corollary of the principle of unity among religions is that of peace among religions. Baha'u'llah's first legislative act, in fact, was the abolition of holy war (*jihād*). Notwithstanding,

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<sup>82</sup> Insight by Hajir Moghaddam, personal communication, 21 October 2012.

<sup>83</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992, 47.

‘Abdu’l-Baha (see below) wrote of the continuing problem of ‘war among the religions’.<sup>84</sup> In a tablet addressed to the ‘Congress of Religions’ (*kungrih-yi adyān*), ‘Abdu’l-Baha states that what is needed is ‘peace among religions’ (*sabab-i šulḥ bayn adyān shavad*).<sup>85</sup> In other words, unity among religions is an essential prerequisite to world peace. This tablet was addressed to the Unitarian minister, Dr Charles William Wendte (1844–1931), secretary of the sixth International Congress of Religious Progress, held in Paris from on 16–22 July 1913, and to which ‘Abdu’l-Baha was invited to participate.<sup>86</sup> In fact, ‘Abdu’l-Baha was invited, in person, by the French members of the organizing committee during a visit to the Protestant Theological Faculty in Paris in 1913. The fact that Dr Wendt is addressed by name it means that ‘Abdu’l-Baha must have received a written invitation as well.<sup>87</sup> This tablet was first published in the Persian section of *Star of the West*.<sup>88</sup> An English translation may be found in *Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy*,<sup>89</sup> and in *Abdul Baha in Egypt*,<sup>90</sup> although the two translations differ somewhat. On

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<sup>84</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 32 (Tablet Addressed to the readers of *The Christian Commonwealth*, 1 January 1913). Original Persian tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-281.html> and <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-282.html>.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Min Makátib-i Ḥadrát-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (‘From the Collected Tablets of His Holiness ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’), Rio de Janeiro: Editora Baha’i-Brasil, 1982, 224. Original Persian tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MMAB/mmab-222.html#pg224>. Sen McGlinn (The Netherlands), personal communication, 2 November 2011.

<sup>86</sup> Amín Egea (Spain), personal communication, 3 November 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Jan Jasion (France), personal communication, 3 November 2012. See Jan Teofil Jasion, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in France*, Paris: Editions Baha’ies France, 1912 (forthcoming).

<sup>88</sup> Amín Egea (Spain), personal communication, 3 November 2012.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy*, compiled by Isabel Fraser Chamberlain, Boston: Tudor Press, 1918, 159–64. English translation online at <http://bahai-library.org/books/div.phil/divine.philosophy.09.html>. Amín Egea (Spain), personal communication, 3 November 2012.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, *Abdul Baha in Egypt*, ed. and trans. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, New York: J. H. Sears & Co. Inc. for the New History Foundation, 1929, 19–23. English translation online at [http://bahai-library.com/sohrab\\_abdulbaha\\_egypt#17](http://bahai-library.com/sohrab_abdulbaha_egypt#17). Amín Egea (Spain), personal communication, 3 November 2012.

peace among religions (which, as stated, is a corollary of unity among religions), ‘Abdu’l-Baha writes:

My honorable and dear friend: Your kind letter was received and its contents became the means of happiness (*sabab-i surūr-i vujdān*, literally ‘cause of the joy of conscience’), for it indicated the fact that a number of the well-wishers of humanity have put forth a mighty effort to organize the Sixth International Congress of Free and Progressive Christians and other Religious Liberals (*kungrih-yi adyān*), literally ‘Congress of Religions’), so that they may establish good-fellowship among the various sects (*sabab-i ulfat bayn-i adyān*) and unveil the reality of religion (*ḥaqīqat-i dīn*), investigate the foundation of divine faith and remove the present misunderstandings (*sū’-i tafāhum*) rampant among the nations (not in the original). ... I hope that the noble congress (*anjuman*, without ‘noble’) may become assisted in the affiliation of the hearts of the peoples of the world and create a compact of eternal peace among the adherents of religion (*sabab-i šuḥul bayn-i adyān shavad*); so that the world (*dar ‘ālam-i insānī*) may become free from strangeness (*bīgānigī*) and all the followers of religions may be ushered into the tent of amity which is the universal tabernacle of the oneness of the world of humanity (*jamī’-i adyān bi-‘ālam-i yigānigī ya ‘nī vahdat-i ‘ālam-i insānī dar āyand*, literally, ‘followers of all religions may enter into the world of unity, that is, the oneness of the world of humanity’).<sup>91</sup>

Baha’is expect that, over the course of time, affinity among religions will increase to the point that differences will be subordinated to common denominators shared by most, if not all major world religions, which, in any case, are expected to ultimately merge as part of the future golden age of world civilization that the Baha’i texts envision. Thus, ‘unity among religions’ will culminate in ‘unity in religion’. Peace among religions is part of the agenda of the Lesser Peace, a term that Baha’i texts use to describe the process of progressive reconciliation among nations and improved international relations as the world advances in its social evolution, eventually

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<sup>91</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy*, 159–60. (Persian transliteration inserted by the present writer.) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Min Makátib-i Ḥaḍrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Rio de Janeiro: Editora Baha’i-Brasil, 1982, 224. Original Persian tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MMAB/mmab-222.html#pg224>.

dispensing with war altogether in favour of more direct and far less costly mechanisms of conflict resolution.

## **X. Types of Unity as Defined by ‘Abdu’l-Baha: The Seven Candles of Unity**

‘Abdu’l-Baha (1844–1921) was Baha’u’llah’s eldest son, appointed successor, authorized interpreter and perfect exemplar of Baha’i ideals. Perfectly consistent with Baha’u’llah’s teachings above, ‘Abdu’l-Baha emphasized the importance of unity:

It is certain that the greatest of instrumentalities for achieving the advancement and the glory of man, the supreme agency for the enlightenment and the redemption of the world, is love and fellowship and unity among all the members of the human race. Nothing can be effected in the world, not even conceivably, without unity and agreement, and the perfect means for engendering fellowship and union is true religion.<sup>92</sup>

Just as the Tablet of Unity is the single most important statement on unity by Baha’u’llah, the tablet known as the ‘Seven Candles of Unity’ is the single most important statement on unity by ‘Abdu’l-Baha. In a tablet (dated 1906) written for Jane Elizabeth Whyte (1857–1944), an ardent sympathizer of the Baha’i Faith, if the first native Baha’i in Scotland,<sup>93</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha presages seven types of world ‘unity’ that will eventually come to pass:

O honoured lady!... Behold how its [unity’s] light is now dawning upon the world’s darkened horizon. The first candle is unity in the political realm, the early glimmerings of which can now be discerned. The second candle is unity of thought in world undertakings, the consummation of which will ere long be witnessed. The third candle is unity in freedom which will surely come to pass. The fourth candle is unity in religion which is the cornerstone of the foundation itself, and which, by the power of God, will be revealed in all its

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<sup>92</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990, 73.

<sup>93</sup> See Anjam Khursheed, *The Seven Candles of Unity: The Story of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Edinburgh*, London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991.

splendour. The fifth candle is the unity of nations – a unity which in this century<sup>94</sup> will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland. The sixth candle is unity of races, making of all that dwell on earth peoples and kindreds of one race. The seventh candle is unity of language, i.e., the choice of a universal tongue in which all peoples will be instructed and converse. Each and every one of these will inevitably come to pass, inasmuch as the power of the Kingdom of God will aid and assist in their realization.<sup>95</sup>

Here, the seven ‘candles of unity’ are the motive force in the social evolution of the planet that will culminate in the establishment of a global commonwealth, leading to a future golden age of world civilization. In *Century of Light* (an official Baha’i statement commissioned by the Universal House of Justice), the authors conclude that much of this remarkable prophetic passage has, in fact, already come to pass: ‘While it will be decades – or perhaps a great deal longer – before the vision contained in this remarkable document is fully realized, the essential features of what it promised are now established facts throughout the world.’<sup>96</sup>

12. **Unity in the Political Realm** (*vahdat-i siyāsat*): ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s vision of the future, based the prescience of insight and foresight, begins with a prediction of political unity: ‘The first candle is unity in the political realm (*vahdat-i siyāsat*), the early glimmerings of which can now be discerned’.<sup>97</sup> This first ‘candle of unity’ is ‘a unity which politically independent and

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<sup>94</sup> In the Baha’i writings, ‘century’ often means an age or era, rather than 100 years in a particular calendar.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 32. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-46.html>. A facsimile of the original tablet is reproduced in Khursheed, *The Seven Candles of Unity*, 166–7.

<sup>96</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Century of Light*, Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2006, 128.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 32. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-46.html>.



sovereign states achieve among themselves'.<sup>98</sup> In *Century of Light*, the authors note that political unity was institutionally realized in the establishment of the United Nations: 'As to "unity in the political realm", Shoghi Effendi has explained that the reference is to unity which sovereign states achieve among themselves, a developing process the present stage of which is the establishment of the United Nations.'<sup>99</sup> The UN is far from perfect, but its formation was a landmark achievement.

13. **Unity of Thought** (*vaḥdat-i ārā*) in **World Undertakings**: The next global development foreseen by 'Abdu'l-Baha is that of international cooperation: 'The second candle is unity of thought (*vaḥdat-i ārā*) in world undertakings, the consummation of which will ere long be witnessed.'<sup>100</sup> The authors of *Century of Light* observe that this prediction, for the most part, has already taken place: "'Unity of thought in world undertakings", a concept for which the most idealistic aspirations at the opening of the twentieth century lacked even reference points, is also in large measure everywhere apparent in vast programmes of social and economic development, humanitarian aid and concern for protection of the environment of the planet and its oceans.'<sup>101</sup> Thus this part of 'Abdu'l-Baha's vision is largely realized as well.

14. **Unity in Freedom** (*vaḥdat-i āzādī*): 'Abdu'l-Baha's next predicate, in the form of a prediction, is the burgeoning desire for freedom and independence and national self-determination worldwide: 'The third candle is unity in freedom (*vaḥdat-i āzādī*) which will surely come to pass.'<sup>102</sup> In *Century of Light*, the authors note that this urge to freedom is now a

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<sup>98</sup> Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 26 July 1936 to an individual believer, in *Peace*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985, 34.

<sup>99</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Century of Light* 128–9.

<sup>100</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 32. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-46.html>.

<sup>101</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Century of Light* 128.

<sup>102</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 32. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-46.html>.

global phenomenon: “‘Unity in freedom’ has today, of course, become a universal aspiration of the Earth’s inhabitants.’ The authors point to the end of the colonial era and the various freedom movements that have since arisen: ‘Among the chief developments giving substance to it, the Master may well have had in mind the dramatic extinction of colonialism and the consequent rise of self-determination as a dominant feature of national identity at century’s end.’<sup>103</sup> By and large, this aspect of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s vision has been fulfilled as well.

15. **Unity in Religion** (*vaḥdat-i dīnī*): ‘Abdu’l-Baha next writes of unity in religion: ‘The fourth candle is unity in religion (*vaḥdat-i dīnī*) which is the corner-stone of the foundation itself, and which, by the power of God, will be revealed in all its splendour.’<sup>104</sup> (This principle is closely related to principle #1 above, the distinction being that the latter concerns unity within the Baha’i religion, where as this instant unity is of world religions in general.) In *Century of Light*, the authors indicate that the world has witnessed great progress insofar as unity in religion is concerned: ‘In several of the great changes envisioned – unity of race and unity of religion – the intent of the Master’s words is clear and the processes involved are far advanced, however great may be the resistance in some quarters.’<sup>105</sup>

The ‘process’ spoken of here appears to be a growing appreciation of the quintessential unity of religions, as Shoghi Effendi has said: ‘He is happy to hear of your great devotion to the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh and how clearly you have grasped the fundamental truth that all the Prophets are from One Essence and one in spirit. This is one of the greatest blessings the Faith has to offer to people – the knowledge of the unity of all religions.’<sup>106</sup>

The reference here appears to be primarily about harmony among religions, in the context of religious pluralism, through the abolition of religious prejudices, and, secondarily, to unity

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<sup>103</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Century of Light* 129.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 32. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-46.html>.

<sup>105</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Century of Light* 128.

<sup>106</sup> Shoghi Effendi, ‘Letter of 5 May 1943’, *Messages to Canada*, Thornhill, ON: Bahá’í Canada Publications, 1957, 77–8.

within religion, that is, within the Baha’i religion. While those who embrace the Baha’i Faith hail from all religious backgrounds and experience intra-religious unity, the purpose of the Baha’i religion is to promote unity, both within and without. Teaching the fundamental harmony of all religions serves to foster interfaith reciprocity.

16. **Unity of Nations** (*vaḥdat-i vaṭan*): ‘Abdu’l-Baha gives assurance of the eventual unity of nations, which is distinct from political unity: ‘The fifth candle is the unity of nations (*vaḥdat-i vaṭan*) – a unity which in this century<sup>107</sup> will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland.’<sup>108</sup> This fifth ‘candle of unity’, according to Shoghi Effendi, ‘is one which is brought about between nations, the difference between a state and a nation being that the former, as you know, is a political entity without necessarily being homogeneous in race, whereas the second implies national as well as political homogeneity.’<sup>109</sup>

After referring to Shoghi Effendi’s statement just cited, the authors of *Century of Light* note that this prediction of ‘Abdu’l-Baha is progressively becoming a social reality: ‘The Master’s promise of “unity of nations”, on the other hand, looked forward to today’s widespread acceptance among the peoples of the world of the fact that, however great the differences among them may be, they are the inhabitants of a single global homeland.’<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> As previously stated, ‘century’, as typically used in the Baha’i writings, often means an age or era, rather than a hundred years in a particular calendar.

<sup>108</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 32. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-46.html>.

<sup>109</sup> Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 26 July 1936 to an individual believer, in *Peace* 34.

<sup>110</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Century of Light* 129.

17. **Unity of Races** (*vaḥdat-i jins*): ‘The sixth candle is unity of races (*vaḥdat-i jins*), making of all that dwell on earth peoples and kindreds of one race’.<sup>111</sup> Elsewhere, ‘Abdu’l-Baha urges the Baha’is to perfect their unity, irregardless of race or ethnicity, so that the Baha’i community can offer a living model of unity that transcends such superficial distinctions:

Strive with heart and soul in order to bring about union and harmony among the white and the black and prove thereby the unity (*vaḥdat*) of the Bahá’í world wherein distinction of colour findeth no place, but where hearts only are considered. Praise be to God, the hearts of the friends are united and linked together, whether they be from the east or the west, from north or from south, whether they be German, French, Japanese, American, and whether they pertain to the white, the black, the red, the yellow or the brown race. Variations of colour, of land and of race are of no importance in the Bahá’í Faith; on the contrary, Bahá’í unity overcometh them all and doeth away with all these fancies and imaginations.<sup>112</sup>

In *Century of Light*, the authors comment that ‘the processes involved’ in the ‘unity of race’ are ‘far advanced’.<sup>113</sup>

18. **Unity of Language** (*vaḥdat-i lisān*): ‘The seventh candle is unity of language (*vaḥdat-i lisān*), i.e., the choice of a universal tongue in which all peoples will be instructed and converse.’<sup>114</sup> In *Century of Light*, the authors observe that ‘the processes involved’ in achieving ‘unity of language’ are ‘far advanced’ while the need for formal adoption of a universal auxiliary language remains:

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<sup>111</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 32. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-46.html>. Here, the Persian is context-dependent, as the same expression can also refer, *inter alia*, to harmony between men and women, or to unity of species/oneness of kind, etc. See principle 20, *infra*.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 112–13. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-125.html> and <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-126.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Century of Light* 128.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 32. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-46.html>.

The need for it is now recognized on all sides, as reflected in the circumstances that have compelled the United Nations and much of the non-governmental community to adopt several ‘official languages’. Until a decision is taken by international agreement, the effect of such developments as the Internet, the management of air traffic, the development of technological vocabularies of various kinds, and universal education itself, has been to make it possible, to some extent, for English to fill the gap.<sup>115</sup>

Whether or not English emerges not only as the *de facto* international language, but one by universal acclaim, remains to be seen.

## **XI. Types of Unity as Defined by ‘Abdu’l-Baha: Other Types of Unity**

19. **Unity of All Mankind/World Unity** (*ittifāq-i kull va ittiḥād-i ‘umūm*): The overarching principle of Baha’i teachings is the consciousness of the oneness of humankind: ‘Hence the unity of all mankind (*ittifāq-i kull va ittiḥād-i ‘umūm*) can in this day be achieved. Verily this is none other but one of the wonders of this wondrous age, this glorious century.’<sup>116</sup> Commenting on this principle, Shoghi Effendi states that world unity is the next stage in the world’s social evolution: ‘Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching.’<sup>117</sup> ‘Up to the present Unity of Mankind was only of an academic importance,’ Shoghi Effendi elsewhere states, ‘Now it is becoming more and more a subject for international statesmen to think of. ... It is therefore a wonderful chance for us to come to the front and expound the teaching which is the goal and aim of the social precepts of Bahá’u’lláh’.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Century of Light* 128.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 32. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MA1/ma1-356.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991, 202. Persian translation online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/se/WOB/wob-158.html>.

<sup>118</sup> Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 28 January 1932 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, in *Peace*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1985, 32.

20. **Unity of Species** (*vahdat-i jins*): Appeals to nature are commonly met with in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s discourse. This is one example, from ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s Howard University speech in Rankin Chapel on 23 April 1912:

Often a white dove soars aloft with a black one. Throughout the animal kingdom we do not find the creatures separated because of color. They recognize unity of species and oneness of kind. If we do not find color distinction drawn in a kingdom of lower intelligence and reason, how can it be justified among human beings, especially when we know that all have come from the same source and belong to the same household? In origin and intention of creation mankind is one. Distinctions of race and color have arisen afterward.<sup>119</sup>

Although the Persian original of this historically poignant speech is available, with every likelihood that this Persian text accurately represents the speech verbatim, vol. 2 of *Khiṭābāt* is not authenticated and therefore not authoritative (although Shoghi Effendi quotes this passage with approval.<sup>120</sup> Fortunately, there are authoritative texts that convey the same idea, such as this:

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<sup>119</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha, ‘23 April 1912: Talk at Howard University, Washington, D.C.’, translated by Amin Banani, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Discourses by Abdul-Baha Abbas during His Visit to the United States in 1912*, Chicago: Baha’i Publishing Committee, 1925/Wilmette, IL: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1982, 44–6, see 45. Persian text of speech published in *Majmū‘ih-yi Khiṭābāt Haḍrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahā fī Ūrūpā va Āmrīkā* (‘Collected Talks of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in Europe and America’), vol. 2, Tehran: Mu’asisayi Millīyi Maṭbū‘ati Amrī, 127 Badī [Baha’i Era], 1970–1. (Hereafter, volume/page references in this format: ‘*Khiṭābāt* 2:45’.) Original Persian/Arabic text online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA2/ka2-45.html>. Amin Banani, is the emeritus professor of History and Persian Literature at UCLA and former chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and acting director of the Center for Near Eastern Studies. Here, Professor Banani has left Shoghi Effendi’s citation of the prior translation unchanged. See Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1990, 38. On this historic speech, see Christopher Buck, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s 1912 Howard University Speech: A Civil War Myth for Interracial Emancipation’, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey West: The Course of Human Solidarity*, ed. Negar Mottahedeh (Duke University), New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 (in press).

<sup>120</sup> See Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1990, 38. Professor Banani has left Shoghi Effendi’s citation of the prior translation (taken down in contemporaneous notes by Joseph H. Hannen, although the translator is not named) unchanged.

‘But the docile, good-natured and gentle animals, whether they belong to the flying or grazing species, associate with one another in complete affinity, united in their flocks, and living their lives with enjoyment, happiness and contentment.’<sup>121</sup> While ‘unity of species’ is not a positive Baha’i principle of unity that can be put into practice, this appeal to the animal kingdom (which, as stated, draws no distinction as to colour) is calculated to elevate prejudice-ridden mindsets from what is essentially an animalistic tendency, yet one which finds no counterpart in the natural world as to racial distinctions.

21. **Unity of Truth** (*vaḥdat-i ḥaqīqat*): The reality of the human predicament and its solution, from the Baha’i perspective, will become increasingly obvious as the world, impelled by the forces of its social evolution, advances ever closer to its inevitable integration. With confidence, ‘Abdu’l-Baha expresses hope that ‘the unity of truth (*vaḥdat-i ḥaqīqat*), through the power of God, will make these illusory differences to vanish away’, such that, over time, truth becomes self-evident. Truth is seen as a necessary adjunct of unity, largely because disunity is the outcome of illusion, such as the pernicious notions of racial, national or religious superiority. ‘This is the one essential,’ ‘Abdu’l-Baha goes on to say, ‘for if unity be gained, all other problems will disappear of themselves.’<sup>122</sup>

22. **Unity of Conscience** (*vaḥdat-i vujdān*): The question of peace requires ‘unity of conscience’ in reaching consensus:

There is not one soul whose conscience does not testify that in this day there is no more important matter in the world than that of universal peace. ... [U]ntil the minds of men become united, no important matter can be accomplished. At present universal peace is a matter of great importance, but unity of conscience (*vaḥdat-i vujdān*) is essential. ...

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<sup>121</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 286. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-291.html>.

<sup>122</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 30. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-44.html>.

Therefore Bahá'u'lláh, fifty years ago, expounded this question of universal peace at a time when He was confined in the fortress of 'Akká and was wronged and imprisoned.<sup>123</sup>

Freedom of conscience is a related Baha'i principle, but, here, the need for consensus on matters of world-historical importance is stressed.

23. **All-Unifying Power** (*jihat-i jāmi'ih*): While a departure from the terminology used so far, the Baha'i concept of an 'All-Unifying Power' is important, as it conveys the source of authority – and the unity and integrity – of the Baha'i community itself. In the Tablet to August Forel, Swiss scientist (1848–1931), 'Abdu'l-Baha, in setting forth a logical proof of the existence of God, writes of the 'all-unifying agency (*jihat-i jāmi'ih*) known as the human soul',<sup>124</sup> and analogizes this to God as the 'all-unifying Power (*jihat-i jāmi'ih*)' of the universe, which agencies operate to 'connect and harmonize these diverse and infinite realities'.<sup>125</sup> Elsewhere, in *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, after speaking of various kinds of 'collective centers' (an alternative translation to 'All-Unifying Power') – patriotism, nationalism, identity of interests, political alliance, union of ideals, etc. – 'Abdu'l-Baha writes of the Baha'i 'Collective Center' that embodies its institutions and teachings:

But the Collective Center (*jihat-i jāmi'ih*) of the Kingdom, embodying the institutions and divine teachings, is the eternal Collective Center. It establishes a relationship between the East and the West, organizes the oneness of the world of humanity, and destroys the foundation of differences. ... Consequently, the real Collective Center is the body of the

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<sup>123</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 297. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-302.html>.

<sup>124</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, Oxford: George Ronald Publishers, 1978, 13. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MA3/ma3-58.html>.

<sup>125</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel* 21. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MA3/ma3-58.html>.



divine teachings, which include all the degrees and embrace all the universal relations and necessary laws of humanity.<sup>126</sup>

A synonym for ‘Collective Center’ would be the Baha’i ‘Covenant’, a term that adumbrates fidelity to the authority of the Baha’i ‘Central Figures’ (the Bab, Baha’u’llah, ‘Abdu’l-Baha), the Baha’i institutions (The Guardianship, i.e. Shoghi Effendi as ‘The Guardian of the Cause of God’, the Universal House of Justice, national, regional and local spiritual assemblies), and Baha’i laws and ethics.

**24. Unity of Science and Religion** (*vaḥdat-i ‘ilm va dīn*): The harmony and complementarity of science and religion is a bedrock principle of Baha’i belief:

For every era hath a spirit; the spirit of this illumined era lieth in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. ... They are founded upon the unity of science and religion (*vaḥdat-i ‘ilm va dīn*) and upon investigation of truth. They uphold the principle that religion must be the cause of amity, union and harmony among men. They establish the equality of both sexes and propound economic principles which are for the happiness of individuals. They diffuse universal education, that every soul may as much as possible have a share of knowledge. They abrogate and nullify religious, racial, political, patriotic and economic prejudices and the like. Those teachings that are scattered throughout the Epistles and Tablets are the cause of the illumination and the life of the world of humanity.<sup>127</sup>

Given that these are among the most important of Baha’i principles, privileging the ‘unity of science and religion (*vaḥdat-i ‘ilm va dīn*)’ is noteworthy, if not remarkable, given the fact that the Baha’i religion appears to be the only religion that has adopted this principle as a core belief. As with religion, the purpose of science is to further the unity and progress of the human race, as Baha’u’llah states: ‘O people of Bahá! The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of

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<sup>126</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1993, 101–2. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MA3/ma3-58.html#pg58>.

<sup>127</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 109. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-122.html>.

wisdom and utterance as will promote the well-being and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth.’

25. **Unity of the Rights of Men and Women** (*vaḥdat-i huqūq-i rijāl va nisā’*): In the passage cited above, ‘equality of both sexes’, that is, gender equality, is presented by ‘Abdu’l-Baha as one of the foremost principles of Baha’i precept and praxis. This same teaching is commonly met with in other passages, such as this:

Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed equality of the sexes (literally, ‘oneness of the rights of men and women’ (*vaḥdat-i huqūq-i rijāl va nisā’*)) – that both man and woman are servants of God before Whom there is no distinction. ... Equality of the sexes will be established in proportion to the increased opportunities afforded woman in this age, for man and woman are equally the recipients of powers and endowments from God, the Creator. God has not ordained distinction between them in His consummate purpose.<sup>128</sup>

Here, the teaching that men and women are equal is shorthand for their equality of rights and opportunities, although differences between the sexes tend to be de-emphasized in Baha’i discourse, especially as regards the education of boys and girls. Education, in fact, is seen as the single most pragmatic and direct approach in promoting gender equality. ‘He promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman’, ‘Abdu’l-Baha proclaimed. ‘Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes.’<sup>129</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha goes on to say that the education of women will be the single greatest factor in the abolition of war.

26. **Unity in Education** (*vaḥdat-i uṣūl va qavānīn-i tarbiyat*): Universal compulsory education is another core Baha’i belief, and the curriculum must be the same, irrespective of gender, according to ‘Abdu’l-Baha:

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<sup>128</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 300. Original Persian/Arabic text, *Khiṭābāt* 2:234–5, online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA2/ka2-234.html> and <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA2/ka2-235.html>.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 175. Original Persian/Arabic text, *Khiṭābāt* 2:140, online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA2/ka2-140.html>.

Eighth, education is essential, and all standards of training and teaching (*vaḥdat-i usūl va qavānīn-i tarbiyat*) throughout the world of mankind should be brought into conformity and agreement; a universal curriculum (*tarbiyat-i vāḥidih*) should be established, and the basis of ethics be the same (*yik usūl va adab*).<sup>130</sup>

There is a direct relationship between this Baha’i principle of unity and the preceding one: ‘He promulgated the adoption of the same (*vaḥdat*) course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity (*ittihād*) of the sexes’, ‘Abdu’l-Baha declares, with the result that: ‘When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality (*vaḥdat*) of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed.’<sup>131</sup>

The source on which this Baha’i principle of unity is based requires some explanation, which will raise an important issue regarding the methodology of the present study. Every effort has been made to validate each of the Baha’i principles of unity in an authenticated original Persian or Arabic text, except for the several Baha’i principles of unity that were articulated by Shoghi Effendi in English as the original language (*infra*). A collection of the Persian speeches by ‘Abdu’l-Baha delivered in Europe, America and Canada from 1911 to 1913 was published in *Majmū’ih-yi Khiṭābāt Ḥaḍrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahā fī Ūrūpā va Āmrīkā* (hereafter, *Khiṭābāt*; ‘Collected Talks of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in Europe and America’). Volume 1 was published with

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<sup>130</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 182. Original Persian/Arabic Tablet, *Khiṭābāt* 2:148, online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA2/ka2-153.html>. Note that the expression in the Persian text literally reads, ‘unity of principles’ (*vaḥdat-i usūl*). The Persian text adds: ‘unity of humankind’ (*vaḥdat-i ā‘lam-i bashar*). See also <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/c/AK4/ak4-304.html#pg300>.

<sup>131</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 175. Original Persian/Arabic text, *Khiṭābāt* 2:140, online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA2/ka2-140.html>.

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s approval,<sup>132</sup> whereas volumes 2 and 3 have not been similarly authenticated, although their reliability is certainly superior to the stenographic notes that were set down in English as a result of contemporaneous translation. Thus any of these Baha’i principles of unity that invoke volumes 2 or 3 of *Khiṭābāt* require additional attestation.<sup>133</sup>

Fortunately, a number of authenticated texts directly bear on the Baha’i principle of ‘unity in education’, although not necessarily using that particular expression. One example will suffice: ‘Ignorance is thus utterly to be blamed, whether in male or female; indeed, in the female its harm is greater. I hope, therefore, that the friends will make strenuous efforts to educate their children, sons and daughters alike.’<sup>134</sup>

**27. Unity of Husband and Wife (*vaḥdat*):** Although this is a separate principle, unity of husband and wife is capable of fulfilment if true equality exists between husband and wife, and if

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<sup>132</sup> *Majmū‘ih-yi Khiṭābāt Ḥadrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahā fī Ūrūpā va Āmrīkā* (‘Collected Talks of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in Europe and America’). Vol. 1. Compiled by Maḥmūd Zarqānī (Cairo: Shaykh Faraju’llāh al-Zakī al-Kurdī, 1340 AH/1922 CE [title page incorrectly reads 1921]). This first volume was reviewed and approved by ‘Abdu’l-Baha for publication, as indicated by the editor’s statement: ‘Praised be God, the Glory of Glories! Through the grace and loving-kindness of the Center of the Covenant, this lowly servant has succeeded in collecting the talks delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Baha during the course of His first trip to Europe in 1320 AH/1912 CE. All of the talks have been approved by ‘Abdu’l-Baha and are published at His request. His lowly servant, Maḥmūd Zarqānī’. Translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami, PhD (University of Toronto), personal communication, 26 December 2011 (emphasis added). For the Persian original see the title page of *Khiṭābāt*, vol. 1, online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA1/ka1-3.html>, where, at the top of the title page, a short prayer, in what appears to be ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s handwriting, states: ‘O Lord, confirm Shaykh Faraj to render service at the Sacred Threshold. ‘Abdu’l-Baha.’ Provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami. Id. Vol. 1 was thus published in Egypt in 1340 AH (1922), vol. 2 in 99 BE (1942–3), and vol. 3 in Tehran, 127 BE (1970–1). Reprint of three volumes of the original edition, HofheimLangenhain: Bahá’íVerlag, 1984.

<sup>133</sup> Id. Vol. 1 was thus published in Egypt in 1340 AH (1922), vol. 2 in 99 BE (1942–3), and vol. 3 in Tehran, 127 BE (1970–1). Reprint of three volumes of the original edition, HofheimLangenhain: Bahá’íVerlag, 1984.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a tablet, translated from the Persian and Arabic, *A Compilation on Baha’i Education*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá’í World Centre, August 1976, 36.

that unity is spiritual as well as physical: ‘Among the people of Bahá, however, marriage must be a union of the body and of the spirit as well, ... for if the marriage is based both on the spirit and the body, that union (*vahdat*) is a true one, hence it will endure.’<sup>135</sup>

28. **Unity of the Family** (*ittihād va ittifāq dar miyān-i khāndān*): In a Baha’i perspective, the family is considered the fundamental unit of society: ‘Bahá’u’lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family.’<sup>136</sup> If society is an aggregate of families, then family unity is an index of social cohesion. ‘Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family (*ittihād va ittifāq dar miyān-i khāndān*), the affairs of that family are conducted’, ‘Abdu’l-Baha observes, ‘what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world.’<sup>137</sup>

29. **Baha’i Unity** (*vahdat-i Bahā’ī*): this principle of unity is closely related to principle #1, yet maybe distinguished by its emphasis on organic unity, through the power of ‘the Covenant’, which is adherence to decisions promulgated by the elected institutions: ‘Do not disrupt Bahá’i unity (*vahdat-i Bahā’ī*), and know that this unity cannot be maintained save through faith in the Covenant of God.’<sup>138</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha gives assurances that the Baha’i model of unity will attract the world at large if Baha’i ideals are authentically put into practice and become a lived reality. ‘If once the beauty of the unity (*vahdat*) of the friends – this Divine Beloved – be decked in the

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<sup>135</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 117. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-130.html>.

<sup>136</sup> The Universal House of Justice, letter dated 1 August 1978. *A Compilation on Women*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa: Bahá’i World Centre, 1986, 25. The website maintained by the Bahá’i World Centre states: ‘Bahá’is understand that the family is the basic unit of society. Unless this all-important building block is healthy and unified, society itself cannot be healthy and unified. Monogamous marriage stands at the foundation of family life.’ See ‘Marriage and Family Life’, online at <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-6-4-1.html>.

<sup>137</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 279. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-284.html>.

<sup>138</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 215. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-225.html>.

adornments of the Abhá Kingdom’, ‘Abdu’l-Baha assures us, ‘it is certain that within a very short time those countries will become the Paradise of the All-Glorious, and that out of the west the splendours of unity will cast their bright rays over all the earth.’<sup>139</sup>

Strive with heart and soul in order to bring about union and harmony among the white and the black and prove thereby the unity (*vahdat*) of the Bahá’í world wherein distinction of colour findeth no place, but where hearts only are considered. Praise be to God, the hearts of the friends are united and linked together, whether they be from the east or the west, from north or from south, whether they be German, French, Japanese, American, and whether they pertain to the white, the black, the red, the yellow or the brown race.<sup>140</sup>

Moral authenticity is needed before Baha’i ideals can be respected and taken seriously by the world at large:

Today the one overriding need is unity and harmony (*ittihād va ittifāq-i aḥibbā-yi ilāhī*) among the beloved of the Lord, for they should have among them but one heart and soul (*yik dil va yik jān*) and should, so far as in them lieth, unitedly withstand the hostility of all the peoples of the world (*ahl-i ‘ālam*); they must bring to an end the benighted prejudices of all nations and religions and must make known to every member of the human race that all are the leaves of one branch, the fruits of one bough. Until such time, however, as the friends establish perfect unity (*ittihād va ittifāq*) among themselves, how can they summon others to harmony and peace (*ittihād va ittifāq*)?<sup>141</sup>

This dynamic relationship between internal and external unity is reinforced, time and again, in the Baha’i writings. ‘Today the most remarkable favour of God centereth around union and harmony (*ittihād va ittifāq*) among the friends’, ‘Abdu’l-Baha explains, ‘so that this unity and concord (*ittihād va ittifāq*) may be the cause (*sabab*) of the promulgation of the oneness of the

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<sup>139</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 84. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-97.html>.

<sup>140</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 112–13. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-125.html>.

<sup>141</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 277. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-283.html>.

world of humanity (*vahdat-i 'ālam-i insānī*), may emancipate the world from this intense darkness of enmity and rancour, and that the Sun of Truth may shine in full and perfect effulgence.<sup>142</sup> The world needs an exemplary community as a model of unity, and the Baha'i community endeavours to live up to its ideals of harmonious and progressive social life.

30. **Unity among Baha'i Women** (*al-ittihād wa'l-ittifāq*): While this Baha'i principle of unity may be considered to be a subset of the previous one, 'Abdu'l-Baha exhorts the 'spreading the spirit of unity (*al-ittihād wa'l-ittifāq*) among His handmaids'<sup>143</sup> as a worthy endeavour with its own intrinsic value. This text is authenticated, and finds further support in several 'reported utterances' much in the same vein. 'The news concerning the unity, harmony, affinity and oneness of the maid-servants of the Merciful One and the friends of God in those parts, imparted the utmost joy and happiness (to me),' 'Abdu'l-Baha exclaimed. 'This indicated that the Cause will before long yield results in that country.'<sup>144</sup>

31. **Oneness of Emotions** (*ihsāsāt-i vāḥidih*): In a talk given on the morning of 9 June 1912 at the Unitarian Church, Fifteenth Street and Girard Avenue, in Philadelphia, 'Abdu'l-Baha ends his speech with this prediction: 'All will become as one family, one people, and the same susceptibility to the divine bounty and education will be witnessed among mankind.'<sup>145</sup> A Persian transcription for this speech exists. In the Persian original, in a single sentence, 'Abdu'l-Baha enumerates seven types of unity: (1) One Family (*'a'ila-yi vāḥidih*); (2) One Nation (*millat-i vāḥidih*); (3) One People (*jins-i vāḥid*); (4) One Nation/Homeland (*vatan-i vāḥid*); (5) One Political System (*siyāsāt-i vāḥid*); (6) Oneness of Emotions (*ihsāsāt-i vāḥidih*); (7) Oneness of

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<sup>142</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 103. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-117.html>.

<sup>143</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 164. Original Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-177.html>.

<sup>144</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Baha'i Publishing Committee, 1909, 663. See also ibid 247 ('unity of the maid-servants of the Merciful').

<sup>145</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 176. For the original Persian text, see the next note.

Education (*tarbiyat-i vāḥidih*).<sup>146</sup> This statement is remarkable for its rhetorical stress on the importance of social cohesion at every level of society which are, at any rate, interrelated. ‘Oneness of Emotions’ is understood by the present writer as the power of empathy, by which human beings become alive to the needs and sufferings of others, and are motivated to provide assistance thereby.

32. **Unity of the Nations/International Unity** (*vaḥdat-i ‘ālam-i insānī*): ‘Today the world of humanity is in need of international unity (*vaḥdat*) and conciliation (*vaḥdat-i ‘ālam-i insānī*)’.<sup>147</sup> Although there is a Persian original for this statement, volume 2 of *Khiṭābāt* is not authenticated and therefore not authoritative. There are authoritative texts that convey the same idea, conveying the teaching that, once ‘the oneness of the world of humanity’ is accepted worldwide, then ‘peace and universal reconciliation’ will come to pass, such that ‘the pavilion of the unity of nations may cast its shadow over all regions’.<sup>148</sup>

33. **Unity of the Spiritual Assembly** (*yigānigī*): Just as each Baha’i community should be united and supportive of the elected local spiritual assembly (Baha’i consultative council), the members of that institution itself should be united, as their efficacy depends upon it. ‘The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly’, ‘Abdu’l-Baha counsels, adding: ‘They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity (*yigānigī*) of God.’<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Khiṭābāt* 2:142. Original Persian/Arabic text, *Khiṭābāt* 2:142, online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA2/ka2-142.html>.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 17–18. Original Persian/Arabic text, *Khiṭābāt* 2:17, online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/KA2/ka2-22.html#pg17>.

<sup>148</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 113–14. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-126.html> and <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-127.html>.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 87–8. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-100.html>.



34. **Unity of The Universal House of Justice and Governments:** The Baha'i community is administered by elected councils at the local, national and international levels. The supreme Baha'i institution is the Universal House of Justice, first elected in April 1963 at the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel. The Baha'i administrative order aspires not only to serve as a well-functioning administrative order, but also to evolve into a model of good governance. Thus, if and when Baha'is reach a majority in any given country, the will of the majority would be to turn that model of good governance into an institution of the government. This would only happen as the result of a democratic process, and the rights of non-Baha'i minorities would be respected and safeguarded as a matter of principle and as an ethic of justice. Long before the Universal House of Justice came into actual existence, it was originally conceived by Baha'u'llah and elaborated on by 'Abdu'l-Baha, who stated that the future House of Justice and Baha'i governments must cooperate with ideal harmony in applying Baha'i principles of justice:

And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. ... This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them. The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive must aid and assist the legislative body so that through the close union and harmony (*irtibāt va iltiyām*, literally, 'affinity<sup>150</sup> and conciliation'<sup>151</sup>) of these two forces (*īn du qūvat*), the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong, that all the regions of the world may become even as Paradise itself.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, 33, translates *irtibāt* as 'Binding, being tied; connection, affinity, familiarity, close friendship'.

<sup>151</sup> Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, 92, translates *iltiyām* as 'conciliation' in the context of 'healing'.

<sup>152</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, 14–15 (emphasis added). Original Persian/Arabic tablet published in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Alvāḥ-i Vaṣāyā-yi Mubārakah-yi Ḥaḍrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, Karachi: Sterling Garden Road Press, 1960, 15–16. Thanks to Adib Masumian for providing this reference and the relevant Persian text. Personal communication, 31 October 2012.

Here, the principle of intra-governmental coordination serves as a complement of international cooperation, where a unified system is advocated, both in constitutive structure and in operational functioning. Justice is a necessary precondition of unity, as Baha'u'llah writes, the 'Words of Paradise':

The word of God which the Supreme Pen hath recorded on the sixth leaf of the Most Exalted Paradise is the following: The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance.<sup>153</sup>

## **XII. Types of Unity Articulated by Shoghi Effendi: Foundations of Baha'i Administration and the Future World Commonwealth**

35. **Unity in Diversity:** The types of unity that follow focus primarily on the foundations of the Baha'i administrative order, and on the future world commonwealth. 'For the bedrock of the Bahá'í administrative order is the principle of unity in diversity', Shoghi Effendi stresses, 'which has been so strongly and so repeatedly emphasized in the writings of the Cause.'<sup>154</sup> While a commonplace catchphrase today, 'unity in diversity' remains a watchword in the Baha'i community.

36. **Unity of the Baha'i Revelation:** Baha'u'llah was preceded by a religious figure, known as the Bab, a spiritual title meaning 'the Gate' (1819–50). Parallel to John the Baptist in relation to Jesus Christ, the Bab prepared his followers for the advent of Baha'u'llah and, in the process, revealed a considerable body of religious texts that ought to be considered as Baha'i scripture: 'Shoghi Effendi feels that the unity of the Bahá'í revelation as one complete whole embracing

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<sup>153</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, 'Kalímát-i-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise)'. *Tablets* 66–7. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/TB/tb-6.html>.

<sup>154</sup> Shoghi Effendi, Letter dated 2 January 1934, *Dawn of a New Day*, New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of India, 1970, 48.

the Faith of the Báb should be emphasised.<sup>155</sup> Thus the Bab is considered the ‘Co-founder’<sup>156</sup> of the Baha’i religion, historically, doctrinally and legislatively (to the extent that certain laws of the Bab have been adopted, in modified form, in Baha’i praxis).

37. **Unity of Doctrine:** A necessary corollary of scriptural integrity is doctrinal integrity, which is safeguarded by an established set of primary sources with a clear line of interpretive authority, acting as a bulwark against schism – a typically irreversible problem that has caused other world religions to be fragmented, often with serious tensions or even antagonisms. On this, the Universal House of Justice has stated: ‘Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding “authoritative” or “inspired” interpretations or usurping the function of Guardian.’<sup>157</sup> With such lines of authority being clear and unambiguous, there is room for diversity of private understanding and personal elucidations that may be offered. ‘Doctrinal unity and administrative unity, these are the two chief pillars that sustain the edifice of the Cause’, writes Shoghi Effendi, ‘and protect it from the storms of opposition which so severely rage against it.’<sup>158</sup>

38. **Unity of Baha’i Administration:** The unity and integrity of the Baha’i administrative order is considered to be divinely inspired in its essential features and is therefore highly valued. Shoghi Effendi urges Baha’is to ‘maintain the unity of the administrative order’ along with ‘the unity of the believers’.<sup>159</sup> ‘Differences which are not fundamental and contrary to the basic

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<sup>155</sup> Shoghi Effendi, ‘Letter of 30 November 1930’, *Unfolding Destiny*, London: UK Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1981, 426–7.

<sup>156</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’i World: 1950–1957*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1971, 46 and 52.

<sup>157</sup> Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1963–68*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1969, 53.

<sup>158</sup> Shoghi Effendi, Letter dated September 5, 1936, *Dawn of a New Day*, 61.

<sup>159</sup> Shoghi Effendi, ‘Letter of 2 March 1949’, *The Light of Divine Guidance*, vol. 2, Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha’i-Verlag, 1985, 80.

teachings of the Cause should be maintained’, Shoghi Effendi goes on to say, ‘while the underlying unity of the administrative order should be at any cost preserved and insured.’<sup>160</sup>

The Baha’i religion would forfeit moral authority in its efforts to promote world unity if its own integrity as a unified community was ever to be compromised. Diversity is still valued, and differences respected, so long as they do not divide:

For the bedrock of the Bahá’í administrative order is the principle of *unity in diversity*, which has been so strongly and so repeatedly emphasized in the writings of the Cause. Differences which are not fundamental and contrary to the basic teachings of the Cause should be maintained, while the underlying *unity of the administrative order* should be at any cost preserved and insured. *Unity, both of purpose and of means* is, indeed, indispensable to the safe and speedy working of every Assembly, whether local or national.<sup>161</sup>

The mechanism of administrative integrity and coherence is the authority of the democratically elected (elected every five years) international Baha’i council, the Universal House of Justice, to wit: ‘Unity of administration is assured by the authority of the Universal House of Justice.’<sup>162</sup>

39. **Unity of Purpose:** ‘With unity of purpose firmly established in our minds, with every trace of personal animosity banished from our hearts, and with the spirit of whole-hearted and sustained fellowship kindled in our souls’, Shoghi Effendi counsels, ‘can we hope to deliver effectively the Message of Bahá’u’lláh, and execute faithfully the various provisions of our Beloved’s Will and Testament.’<sup>163</sup> And further, Shoghi Effendi urges ‘unity of purpose and action’ in order to ‘form one united front and combat, wisely and tactfully, every force that might darken the spirit of the Movement, cause division in its ranks, and narrow it by dogmatic and

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<sup>160</sup> Shoghi Effendi, ‘Letter of January 2, 1934’, *Dawn of a New Day* 48.

<sup>161</sup> Shoghi Effendi, Letter dated 2 January 1934, *Dawn of a New Day* 48 (emphasis added).

<sup>162</sup> Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring* 53.

<sup>163</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974, 35–6. See also Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979, 334.

sectarian belief'.<sup>164</sup> Disunity, i.e. internal disagreements, will result in a faith community at cross-purposes with itself. Unity within the Baha'i community is a paramount concern, and is expressed in terms of remaining faithful to the Baha'i 'Covenant', which mandates that the Baha'i community supports the institutions (i.e. the Universal House of Justice, along with national and local spiritual assemblies) that were brought into existence by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, and which the Baha'is themselves democratically elect.

40. **Unity of Means:** Closely related to unity of purpose is the process of accomplishing that purpose, i.e. 'unity of means'. 'Unity, both of purpose and of means', Shoghi Effendi explains, 'is, indeed, indispensable to the safe and speedy working of every Assembly, whether local or national.'<sup>165</sup> This is an emphasis on congruence and coherence in effectively carrying out administrative tasks.

41. **Unity of Vision:** The next few Baha'i principles of unity are pragmatic. Vision precedes action. Shared vision is necessary for forming a collective plan of action. The Universal House of Justice employs the expression, 'unity of vision' in the context of 'systematic action'. Speaking of the 'requirements of systematic action in advancing the process of entry by troops' (i.e. attracting significant numbers of new Baha'is), the Universal House of Justice stresses the strategic importance of conducting Baha'i 'reflection meetings' at the local 'cluster' level, in which 'participatory discussions' serve 'to maintain *unity of vision*, sharpen clarity of thought and heighten enthusiasm'.<sup>166</sup>

42. **Unity of Action:** Once 'unity of vision' is reached, 'unity of action' follows. This Baha'i principle of unity is to be distinguished from 'Unity of (Ritual) Acts' (principle #3, *supra*). As to the observance of Baha'i feasts and holy days, Shoghi Effendi wrote:

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<sup>164</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration* 45.

<sup>165</sup> Shoghi Effendi, 'Letter of 2 January 1934', *Dawn of a New Day* 48.

<sup>166</sup> Universal House of Justice, 'To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors', Letter dated 27 December 2005 (emphasis added).

Unity of action, in matters of so vital an importance as the observance of Bahá'í holidays, is essential. It is the responsibility of the NSA to remind and urge the friends to faithfully carry out all such laws and precepts of the Cause, the enforcement of which does not constitute an open violation of the laws of their country.<sup>167</sup>

Today, unity of action is even more essential for the current emphasis on systematic action involving worldwide 'coherence' in furthering the collective interests of the Baha'i Faith in its efforts to significantly grow in size and in its leavening influence in wider societies. 'Unity of action' is not only important within the Baha'i community, but has implications for the world at large, as indicated by the Baha'i International Community, which is an international agency that officially represents the Universal House of Justice in published statements on various issues of international concern, such as in the statement regarding 'unity of thought and action' in the pursuit of justice:

Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organization. With ever greater frequency, proposals aiming at the development of the planet will have to submit to the candid light of the standards it requires. ...

At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision making, because it is the only means by which *unity of thought and action* can be achieved.<sup>168</sup>

This language reflects such exhortations by Shoghi Effendi as in his 1928 call 'that a concerted effort be made and a unity in thought and action be obtained'<sup>169</sup> and in his 1948

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<sup>167</sup> Shoghi Effendi, Letter dated 22 November 1935, *Dawn of a New Day* 56.

<sup>168</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, Haifa, Israel: 3 March 1995, § II (emphasis added). Online at <http://statements.bahai.org/95-0303.htm>.

<sup>169</sup> Shoghi Effendi, '10 October 1928', *Messages to Canada*, Thornhill, ON: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1957, 28.

cablegram, ‘URGE UTMOST UNITY ENERGETIC ACTION’.<sup>170</sup> This principle complements the ‘second candle’ of the ‘Seven Candles of Unity’ (presented above), which is ‘unity of thought in world undertakings’.<sup>171</sup> Thus there should be agreement both within the Baha’i community and as well as in international undertakings, be they scientific, medical, economic, environmental, political or otherwise.

43. **Evolving Social Unities:** Underlying the future golden age of world civilization that the Baha’i writings envision is a theory of social evolution, where civilization advances throughout history in a progressive series of widening circles of unity, as Shoghi Effendi has framed it:

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end.<sup>172</sup>

Thus, ‘unity of family’, ‘unity of tribe’, ‘unity of city-state’ and ‘unity of nation’<sup>173</sup> are evolutionary stages in social evolution, culminating, in due course, in a world civilization, described below.

44. **Unity of the World Commonwealth:** The preceding Baha’i principles of unity are teleological, in that they synchronically and synergistically aim to hasten the day in which the world commonwealth, as envisaged in the Baha’i writings, emerge, and the future golden age of world civilization will come into fruition:

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá’u’lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal

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<sup>170</sup> Shoghi Effendi, ‘Letter of 28 April 1948’, *Messages to Canada* 104.

<sup>171</sup> See principle #13, *supra*.

<sup>172</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991, 202.

<sup>173</sup> For a Persian translation of these terms by Shoghi Effendi, see <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/se/JMJ/jmj-105.html#pg101>.

freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. ... A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth.<sup>174</sup>

### **XIII. Other Unities**

Other types of unity round out this preliminary survey. What follows is a sampling of various exhortations and rhetorical expressions, all aimed at reinforcing the Baha'i focus on unity socially and administratively in all aspects of Baha'i thought and life. Due to lack of space, the following examples will be given without quotation or explanation:

45. **Mystic Unity of God and His Manifestations:** 'Abdu'l-Baha was charismatic and, without any intention to do so, attracted some followers who variously thought him to be the return of Christ or to share the powers of Baha'u'llah, etc. In the course of addressing the error of such views, Shoghi Effendi wrote of the 'the mystic unity of God and His Manifestations':

Moreover, to maintain that the assertion 'He is Myself', instead of denoting the mystic unity of God and His Manifestations (*vahdat-i ma'naviyih-yi mazāhir-i ilāhīyih*), as explained in the *Kitāb-i Íqán*, establishes the identity of Bahá'u'lláh with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, would constitute a direct violation of the oft-repeated principle of the oneness of God's Manifestations – a principle which the Author of these same extracts is seeking by implication to emphasize.<sup>175</sup>

The 'mystic unity of God and His Manifestations' expresses a vertical relationship, whereas 'the oneness of God's Manifestations' (represented in principle #9, *supra*) is horizontal in nature. This subtle distinction is incidental to the main point, which is that 'Abdu'l-Baha is not a prophet or, in the Baha'i term of art, a 'Manifestation of God'.

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<sup>174</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, 203. Persian translation online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/se/WOB/wob-159.html>.

<sup>175</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 137–8. Persian translation online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/se/DOB/dob-66.html>, in which the Persian for 'mystic unity of God and His Manifestations' is rendered *vahdat-i ma'naviyih-yi mazāhir-i ilāhīyih*.



46. **Unity of Meaning:** Historically, many schisms in other religions were precipitated by disagreements over the purport and application of various scriptural texts. Not so in the Baha’i context. Taken together, the Baha’i scriptures constitute a considerable corpus of authoritative religious texts. They are accepted as infused and imbued with a perfectly consistent gist: ‘In attempting to understand the Writings, therefore, one must first realize that there is and can be no real contradiction in them, and in the light of this we can confidently seek the unity of meaning which they contain.’<sup>176</sup> While ‘unity of meaning’ is not a term commonly met with in Baha’i discourse, the principle for which it stands is universally accepted and adhered to within the Baha’i community at large.

47. **Economic Unity** (*ittihād-i iqtisādī*): In an untranslated Persian text, within the short space of the single sentence, ‘Abdu’l-Baha sets forth five principles of unity: political unity (*ittihād-i siyāsī*); religious unity (*ittihād-i dīnī*); racial unity (*ittihād-i nizhādī*); economical unity (*ittihād-i iqtisādī*); social unity (*ittihād-i ijtimā’ī*).<sup>177</sup> This Baha’i teaching is far better known as “abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty.”<sup>178</sup>

48. **Methodological Coherence:** In what essentially amounts to the harmony of faith and reason as applied to the academic study of the Baha’i religion, The Universal House of Justice — a strong supporter of Baha’i scholarship as well as of the pursuit of all academic disciplines — recommends that the academic study of religion not be divorced from an ontological commitment (or, at least, a first-order phenomenological acknowledgment) of spiritual reality, as a key dimension of religion and spirituality that must be appreciated in any holistic appraisal:

The principal concern of the House of Justice is over a methodological bias and discordant tone which seem to inform the work of certain of the authors. The impression given is that, in attempting to achieve what they understand to be academic objectivity, they have inadvertently cast the Faith into a mould which is essentially foreign to its nature, taking no

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<sup>176</sup> Universal House of Justice, *Messages from The Universal House of Justice 1968–1973*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976, 38.

<sup>177</sup> For the original Persian text, see <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/se/TM/tm-285.html#pg281>.

<sup>178</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979, 281.

account of the spiritual forces which Bahá'ís see as its foundation. Presumably the justification offered for this approach would be that most scholars of comparative religion are essentially concerned with discernable phenomena, observable events and practical affairs and are used to treating their subject from a western, if not a Christian, viewpoint. This approach, although understandable, is quite impossible for a Bahá'í, for it ignores the fact that our world-view includes the spiritual dimension as an indispensable component for consistency and coherence, and it does not beseem a Bahá'í to write ... about his Faith as if he looked upon it from the norm of humanism or materialism.<sup>179</sup>

Baha'i scholars are thereby encouraged to avoid “adopting what is, in essence, a materialistic and localized stance.”<sup>180</sup>

49. **Unity with the Environment:** This Baha'i principle of unity in the present survey departs slightly from the criterion for inclusion that the principle is explicitly expressed as a 'unity' or 'oneness', etc. Former Vice-President Al Gore, quotes Shoghi Effendi to the effect that humanity and nature are inseparable and exert reciprocal influence, one upon the other:

One of the newest of the great universalist religions, Baha'i, founded in 1863 in Persia by Mirza Husayn Ali [Baha'u'llah], warns us not only to properly regard the relationship between humankind and nature but also the one between civilization and the environment. Perhaps because its guiding visions were formed during the period of accelerating industrialism, Baha'i seems to dwell on the spiritual implications of the great transformation to which it bore fresh witness: '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 molds the environment and

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<sup>179</sup> The Universal House of Justice, Letter dated 4 October 1994 to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *A Compilation on Scholarship*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í World Centre, February 1995, 26.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

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.’<sup>181</sup>

This application of the Baha’i emphasis on unity to environmental concerns demonstrates the integrative nature of the Baha’i worldview, in that any concerted effort to address environmental concerns necessarily should presuppose a dynamic interplay, or ‘mutuality’, between humanity, in terms of its spiritual conscience, and the physical world.

50. **Unity of the Free:** Baha’i texts distinguish between ‘true liberty’ (i.e. freedom within the bounds of propriety and moderation) and unbridled libertarianism that, in its extreme form, can slip into anarchy. The Universal House of Justice has developed this reasoning in a message that will be quoted at some length, so that the reader can better follow it:

The spirit of liberty which in recent decades has swept over the planet with such tempestuous force is a manifestation of the vibrancy of the Revelation brought by Bahá’u’lláh. His own words confirm it. ‘The Ancient Beauty’, He wrote in a soul-stirring commentary on His sufferings, ‘hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty’. ...

Consider what Bahá’u’lláh has done: He revealed laws and principles to guide the free, He established an Order to channel the actions of the free, He proclaimed a Covenant to guarantee the unity of the free.

Thus, we hold to this ultimate perspective: Bahá’u’lláh came to set humanity free. His Revelation is, indeed, an invitation to freedom – freedom from want, freedom from war, freedom to unite, freedom to progress, freedom in peace and joy.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Albert Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, New York: Rodale, 2006, 261–2, quoting from a letter, dated 17 February 1933, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, in ‘Conservation of the Earth’s Resources’, *The Compilation of Compilations*, compiled by Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Mona Vale: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1991, vol. 1, 84.

<sup>182</sup> Universal House of Justice, ‘Individual Rights and Freedoms: A Statement of the Universal House of Justice’, letter dated 29 December 1988, ¶¶ 52, 53 and 55. Online at [www.bahaistudies.net/uhj/individualrights.pdf](http://www.bahaistudies.net/uhj/individualrights.pdf).

‘Unity of the free’ is closely related to principle #14, ‘Unity in Freedom’ (i.e. the ‘third candle’ of the seven candles of unity, recounted above), yet may be distinguished as the reflex of the responsible individual exercise of freedom within a free society, where freedom may be taken to excess and may end as oppressive to others by impinging on their rights and dignities.

#### **XIV. Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study**

The illness/cure soteriological model in the phenomenology of religions is a useful method for understanding the core paradigms of world religions. This analytic prism commends itself in shedding light on the interior, coherent ‘logic’ of soteriological paradigms among the various world religions. As applied to the Baha’i Faith, the illness/cure model reveals that, in the Baha’i perspective, the human predicament is estrangement – what the Baha’i poet, Robert Hayden, in his poem, ‘American Journal’, called ‘strangering’<sup>183</sup> – and the ‘cure’ or social salvation that is offered is that of unity, or harmony, ranging from family relations to race relations to international relations. This is consistent with what Baha’u’llah proclaims as the distinctive contribution of the Baha’i revelation:

O ye that dwell on earth (*ay ahl-i ā’lam*)! The distinguishing feature that marketh the pre-eminent character of this Supreme Revelation (*faḍl īn zuhūr-i a’zam*) consisteth in that We have, on the one hand, blotted out from the pages of God’s holy Book whatsoever hath been the cause of strife, of malice and mischief (*sabab-i ikhtilāf va fisāl va nifāq*) amongst the children of men, and have, on the other, laid down the essential prerequisites of concord, of understanding, of complete and enduring unity (*‘illat-i ulfat va ittiḥād va ittifāq*). Well is it with them that keep My statutes.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> See Christopher Buck, ‘Robert Hayden’s “[American Journal]”: A Multidimensional Analysis’, *Online Journal of Baha’i Studies*, 2, 2008, 1–37; idem, ‘Robert Hayden’, *Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature*, edited by Jay Parini, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, vol. 2, 177–81.

<sup>184</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Tablet of the World’ (*Lawḥ-i Dunyā*), *Tablets* 94. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/TB/tb-7.html>.

And further, this following passage in Arabic uses the illness/cure metaphor, in which the remedy for the body politic is prescribed by the prophet-as-physician, which is basically to restore harmony of all systems and constituents within that collective body:

O ye elected representatives (*aṣḥāb al-majlis*) of the peoples in every land! Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind, and bettereth the condition (*ḥāl*) thereof, if ye be of them that scan heedfully. Regard the world (*ā'lam*) as the human body (*kih haykal insān*) which, though at its creation whole and perfect (*ṣaḥīḥ, kāmil*), hath been afflicted, through various causes (*asbāb*), with grave disorders and maladies (*amrād*). ... That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy (*al-daryāq al-a'zam*) and mightiest instrument for the healing (*ṣiḥḥat*) of all the world (*al-ard*) is the union (*ittiḥād*) of all its peoples in one universal Cause (*amr wāḥid*), one common Faith (*sharī'a wāḥida*). This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician (*tabīb ḥādhiq kāmil mu'ayid*).<sup>185</sup>

Here, there is a remarkable congruence between the data and the analytical prism used to study that data. The illness/cure model and the Baha'i texts themselves – where the passage cited above is a perfect exemplar – both invoke the metaphor of disease and cure, whether individual or social. Extending this medical metaphor could have significant implications in broader contexts, such as the *appropriateness* of the diagnosis, treatment and prognosis by a given religion, which may involve value judgments. It goes without saying that typically a plurality of salvation/liberation theories may coexist within a given world religion. Issues not only of efficacy, but of actual 'medical malpractice' at the hands of members of the clergy may be raised, where financial, political, sexual and/or other improprieties may call into question whether any 'cure' under review is being administered ethically. Other issues implicated by extending the medical metaphor of the illness/cure framework of analysis may be whether one religious 'cure' is appropriate ('Let the treatment fit the disease',<sup>186</sup> as the adage goes), or outmoded (where 'the

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<sup>185</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, 'Tablet to Queen Victoria', *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002, 91. Original Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/GWB/gwb-120.html>.

<sup>186</sup> See, for example, Daniel G. Remick, MD, 'Let the treatment fit the disease', *Critical Care Medicine* 39(6), June 2011, 1549–50.

remedy may change’,<sup>187</sup> as ‘Abdu’l-Baha observes) or where the cure is at the peril of others, in situations where the competing cures are not simply plural approaches, but may impinge on the well-being of each other, as in the case of inter-communal conflict or outright civil war, where religion is a major, aggravating factor, as in present-day Syria. But these issues are outside the scope of the present study.

The inventory of Baha’i principles of unity enumerated above – as indicated by selected genitive constructions (i.e. *‘idāfa* exemplars) involving the Persian/Arabic terms of *ittihād*, *ittifāq*, *yigānigī*, *vahdat*, *ulfat*, etc. – is by no means exhaustive. This paper is prolegomenal to, and indeed invites, an in-depth study, by further applying this analytical prism to the fundamental Baha’i paradigm of unity. Notwithstanding the open-ended nature of the foregoing results, the number of reiterative searches made to confirm the present results increases confidence that the present study has identified the majority of Baha’i principles of unity that may be found in the available primary sources.

The principles presented in the present study are *explicit* Baha’i principles of unity. Many other Baha’i teachings may be said to be *implicit* Baha’i principles of unity. The implications for future research are quite clear: once this inventory of explicitly formulated Baha’i principles of unity receives independent attestation, then a typology may be attempted, whether or not that means revisiting Piper’s original typology or devising another classification scheme that appears to naturally emerge from the source material itself.

All of the foregoing Baha’i principles of unity are presented as part of the ‘remedy’ that Baha’u’llah, in his professed role as the ‘Divine Physician’, has prescribed for the healing of the world. ‘[T]he people of religions find, in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, the establishment of Universal Religion,’ ‘Abdu’l-Baha proclaims, ‘a religion that perfectly conforms with present conditions, which in reality effects the *immediate cure of the incurable disease, which relieves*

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<sup>187</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 59. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-71.html> ff.

*every pain*, and bestows the infallible antidote for every deadly poison.<sup>188</sup> These principles, each with their own intrinsic worth, synergize and synthesize in the Baha'is' collective effort – and leavening influence – to unify the world, to establish universal peace, to advance civilization, to promote godliness and virtues, and to deepen the bonds of human fraternity, as 'Abdu'l-Baha declares:

Direct thine attention to the holy Tablets [of Bahá'u'lláh]; read thou the Ishráqát, Tajallíyyát, the Words of Paradise, the Glad Tidings, the Ṭarázát, the Most Holy Book. Then wilt thou see that today these heavenly Teachings are *the remedy for a sick and suffering world*, and a healing balm for the sores on the body of mankind. They are the spirit of life, the ark of salvation, the magnet to draw down eternal glory, the dynamic power to motivate the inner self of man.<sup>189</sup>

And further, in announcing the fulfilment of the prophecies in the Book of Revelation, 'Abdu'l-Baha has proclaimed, in patently Christian terms, that the Baha'i principles of unity constitute 'the remedy of true salvation':

He [Baha'u'llah] is Alpha and Omega. He is the One that will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life and *bestow upon the sick the remedy of true salvation*. He whom such grace aideth is verily he that receiveth the most glorious heritage from the

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<sup>188</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 305 (emphasis added). Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-301.html> ff.

<sup>189</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 61 (emphasis added). Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at Original Persian/Arabic Tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-301.html> ff.

Prophets of God and His holy ones. The Lord will be his God, and he His dearly-beloved son.<sup>190</sup>

Given the Baha'i emphasis on unity, there are many Baha'i teachings that may be characterized as good for the unity of society. The present study, however, has limited its inquiry to those teachings that are expressly characterized as Baha'i principles of unity. This limited scope notwithstanding, the research results are fairly impressive. The fifty (50) Baha'i principles of unity, as outlined above, cover quite a range of social contexts spanning, as previously stated, family relations to international relations.

Space does not permit an explanation as to how each of these teachings are typically put into practice, as that would likely require a separate monograph. Ideally, these Baha'i principles of unity should have a synergetic effect in furthering efforts to achieve social harmony within Baha'i communities and their orbits of influence throughout their locations worldwide – a social laboratory on a global scale. Whether the Baha'i 'cure' to the malady of agonistic disunity will be effective, only time will tell. The cure is no easy panacea. Yet the medicine, having been

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<sup>190</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 13, citing Revelation 21:6–7 (emphasis added). Translation by Shoghi Effendi, who comments: 'One of the very first general messages of our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá to His friends in America, dated 5th of Safer 1314 AH (1896 AD).' The translation published in *Selections* differs from Shoghi Effendi's original translation, however, in the passage beginning with, 'This is the City of God and His abode', where Shoghi Effendi renders, 'Hail, O City of God! Abide thou ...'. First published in *Star of the West*, vol. 14(12), March 1924, 358. Reference courtesy of Sen McGlinn, personal communication, 4 November 2012. Original Persian/Arabic tablet online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA1/swa1-28.html>.



prescribed by Baha'u'llah and further expanded by 'Abdu'l-Baha, is being put to practice – and thus put to the test of efficacy.<sup>191</sup>

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