

**FAITH AND WORLD ECONOMY: A JOINT VENTURE,  
BAHÁ'Í PERSPECTIVE**

**Author:** Guiseppe Robiati. Foreword by Ervin Laszlo. Translated from Italian by Julio Savi.

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Seldom is one asked to review a book that one already has purchased and read. It happened with Guiseppe Robiati's attractive softcover on heavy art paper. It is a book for both seekers and Bahá'ís who are looking for a clear presentation of the structure of the future Bahá'í world order. It represents one of many recent titles written on the socioeconomic and governmental system embodied in the world commonwealth drafted in the Bahá'í writings. Some of these books are designed for readers particularly interested in subjects such as world peace, internationalizing the educational curricula, a more equitable distribution of the world's wealth, and the destruction of the environment. Robiati concentrates on the latter issue. The different approaches of these volumes are principally due to the author's varied expertise and interest and the particular audience targeted.

This volume begins with a broad-brushed foreword by Ervin Laszlo in which he addresses humankind's limited environmental options in the twenty-first century. Laszlo concludes by stating that the Bahá'í perspective offers a solution to the world's present destructive environmental course that merits consideration.

Robiati's introduction describes humanity's present dilemma as a step in the world's history that is irreversibly leading to world unity. The Bahá'í International Community offers the spiritual and organizational structure required for the next evolutionary step. In chapter one on "History and Evolution," Robiati discusses how humanity has been forced to move from a microsystem to a macrosystem because of our dissipation of natural resources. A scarcity of resources has forced systems to change throughout history. The present process of great social change, as in the past, is one of complete dissipation followed by a period of transformation as we develop a lifestyle that is in harmony with our environment. The Bahá'í Faith offers a glimpse of this evolving macrosystem from both a governmental and religious vantage point.

Chapter two, "Economy and Today's World," largely discusses how decadent our economic setting has become. Robiati concentrates on rich nations using an inordinate proportion of the world's resources through exploitation of the resources of poor countries. Certainly, most readers are searching for answers to these confounding problems.

In chapter three, "Economy—Energy—Entropy," Robiati places the inevitable establishment of a globally organized system within the framework of two principles of thermodynamics. The first is that energy does not disappear, and the second is that in the process of production available energy is transformed into waste or dissipated. Although both these thermodynamic laws are operative, the author maintains that growth-oriented economists, politicians,

and industrialists have ignored entropy—the dissipation of free energy into nonrenewable resources or useless waste. They have refused to recognize historical patterns, and therefore have not developed the holistic and evolutionary worldview necessary for humanity's survival.

The fourth chapter, "Entropy-Economy and Bahá'í Concepts," points out that in a high-entropy culture, wealthy societies exploit the environment for self-consumption and gratification; while in low-entropy culture, societies are motivated by unity among peoples and harmony between humankind and the physical environment. Our limited world resource base is forcing humanity to build the later type of society.

The final chapter, entitled "An Economy for a New Age," presents the Bahá'í social and governmental system that will organize a low-entropy society dedicated to the unity of humankind. Robiati delimits the system that will allow the objectives of this new society to be achieved. He also presents some of the economic teachings the Bahá'í writings offer, such as, the world's resources will be controlled by a world government and agriculture is the basis of an economic system, to mention a few.

Several years ago, a popular business magazine featured a marketing quiz that consisted of a series of questions for the reader to answer. One question was "Who was the world's greatest salesman?" The answer was Paul, the disciple of Jesus Christ, because he had a perfect product to sell. Robiati is presenting a perfect organizational framework for a global society, one Bahá'ís believe is mandated by God. Since I am enamored with the system, my comments pertain only to the presentation and economic interpretations of the author.

Robiati does not mention the authority of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, or the Universal House of Justice, although all Bahá'í sources are carefully referenced. He skillfully weaves quotations for the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith and statements of the Universal House of Justice, particularly from *The Promise of Universal Peace*, into the body of each chapter. However, the theories of historians, physicists, and economists discussed in the chapters are not referenced.

As an economist, I would have preferred to see the author document his interpretations, in this case, of the classicists as well as the writings of Keynesian economists. Scholars in history of economic thought vary in their interpretations of classical and Keynesian bodies of thought. In both schools, the economists were looking for answers to the economic problems of the day, the later 1700s to mid-1850s and the 1930s, respectively. Several of the classicists' answers are somewhat similar to those of the present environmentalists. Thomas Malthus forecast recurring famine, war, and pestilence that would eliminate an overabundance of population in relationship to resources;<sup>1</sup> John Stuart Mill thought societies were doomed to a stationary

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1. *Principles of Political Economy*, 2d ed., Reprints of Economic Classics (New York: Augustus Kelley, 1964).

economic state;<sup>2</sup> and Karl Marx predicted an overthrow of the capitalist-exploiters by the workforce.<sup>3</sup> Keynes is given short shrift by Robiati. In *The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money*,<sup>4</sup> Keynes comments:

But apart from this contemporary mood, the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. (383)

Robiati does not make it clear that theoretical economists build abstract models which represent the way they suspect economies operate. These economic systems are oriented to the sociopolitical climate of the day. Economists often try to explain and to justify the operation of current economic systems.

The present national economic systems are for the most part inadequate, and a new global economic organization must be built. One of the most insightful points made by Robiati is that at present a country may solve some of its trying problems, but the solution is a makeshift one that camouflages a basic underlying problem which can only be solved by building an integrated global society.

The transitional process from the present to a new world commonwealth and economic system is vague unless the religious authority and personal spiritual qualities needed are clearly specified. Because this is the most difficult step for readers to grasp—the process of changing the hearts of humankind—it often is not emphasized. Robiati jumps from the present to the future without a clear explanation of the transition. After pointing out the many problems humanity now faces, he discusses the structure of a new world order, leaving the specific process of change at bay. For Bahá'ís, the solution to economic problems is not rooted in economic affairs but in understanding the concept of the unity of humankind and in developing the spiritual values associated with this concept. As people become part of local, national, and international communities based on these values, they will consult on social, economic, and governmental affairs to determine appropriate solutions to these problems.

Thermodynamic laws help to verify the inevitability of a integrated global economy, but they do not explain the process by which it will be accomplished. Nonetheless, the presentation of the world commonwealth designed by Bahá'u'lláh in the context of environmental and economic imperatives allows Robiati to reach a unique group of readers with a perfect product.

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2. *Principles of Political Economy*, Book 4, Ch. 6., W. J. Ashley, ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1923).

3. *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. from the 3d German ed., 1883, by Samuel More and Edward Aveling, Friedrich Engels, ed. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959).

4. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935.