



Pathways to Equity in Addressing Climate Change: A Bahá'í Perspective

Robert Sinclair Sarracino, Adjunct Faculty, Wilmette Institute, Wilmette, IL, USA; Principal Investigator Numerical Ice Simulation (ret.), Centre for Arctic Resource Development, C-CORE, St John's, NL, Canada, robertsarracino@gmail.com

Margery Dixon, Council Member, Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, Star Island, Portsmouth, NH, USA; Secretary, Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Harford County, MD, USA, margery.dixon@gmail.com

According to current scientific consensus, anthropogenic climate change has become one of the most serious existential threats to human civilization. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Bahá'u'lláh warned of the dangers inherent in the unbridled advancement of material civilization if a parallel advance in the moral and spiritual dimensions of civilization were neglected.

This article outlines a framework with three components for dealing with the crisis of anthropogenic climate change. The first component is to embrace justice and equity, rooted in an awareness of the essential oneness and wholeness of the human race. The second is the full embrace of sound science. The third is consultation at all levels of society regarding the technological and social measures to be taken, in which all have a voice and participate in forging solutions.

It then outlines Bahá'í approaches to climate change in light of this framework. It first profiles the worldwide Bahá'í community, then discusses the concept of the three protagonists in the civilization-building process, and finally outlines the framework for action, which characterizes Bahá'í work at the neighborhood and community level.



Introduction

With the possible exception of the prospect of nuclear war, climate change is arguably the greatest existential threat to the human race in historical times (IPCC 2023; United Nations 2021, 2022; Vergun 2021). The root cause of climate change is not difficult to discern: it is, in the words of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh ([1952] 1976, 342), a civilization that has been “allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation.” In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Bahá'u'lláh warned of the dangers inherent in the unbridled advancement of material civilization if a parallel advance in the moral and spiritual dimensions of civilization were neglected:

Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation ... The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men ... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation. (Bahá'u'lláh [1952] 1976, 342–43)

Identifying the root of the problem enables a clearer vision of the solution: to identify those elements that would bring civilization back into moderation and then to assiduously strive to translate those elements “from the realm of thought into that of reality” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1920).

Writing to the Hague in 1920, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the successor of Bahá'u'lláh, designated by Him as the Centre of His Covenant, talked about what was needed to secure enduring peace following the Great War: “For it is clear and evident that the execution of this mighty endeavour is impossible through **ordinary human feelings** but requireth **the powerful sentiments of the heart** to transform its potential into reality” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1920, emphasis added).

It is the “powerful sentiments of the heart” that religion is uniquely equipped to inspire in whole populations, provided religion can free itself from superstitious beliefs that run counter to scientific knowledge, and of the prejudices of sectarianism that, regrettably, still pollute the religious landscape. When so freed, religion becomes a powerful force for good. The Universal House of Justice (2002), the governing body of the worldwide Bahá'í Faith, writes:

When [religion] has been faithful to the spirit and example of the transcendent Figures who gave the world its great belief systems, it has awakened in whole populations capacities to love, to forgive, to create, to dare greatly, to overcome prejudice, to sacrifice for the common good, and to discipline the impulses of animal instinct.

The solution to the existential crisis of climate change, in the view of the authors, requires both the application of scientific knowledge on the one hand and the realization, expressed in the arena of action, of the eternal and unifying principles that lie at the foundations of all the world's great religions on the other hand. Science and religion, the Bahá'í writings state, are "**the two most potent forces in human life**" (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1974, 204, emphasis added). True civilization is characterized by both material and spiritual progress. Without this balance, it cannot serve the long-term interests of humanity.

The power of science resides in the power of its method, of course—but it also resides in its unity. The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw remarkable developments in science and in the new range of previously unimagined technologies that came from those new developments. Equally remarkably, from a cultural and social perspective, there has emerged in the modern world one universal science, infinitely diverse in its many disciplines but united in a single, all-embracing, progressive worldview, universally accepted and taught in all the schools of the world. Never, before the modern period, has there been such a universal knowledge system taught in all the schools of the world. And the reason is clear: in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1978, 110), "the sciences of today are bridges to reality."

Especially relevant to the issue of climate change is the support given to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) by the scientific community since the formation of the panel in 1988. During the past forty-five years, thousands of researchers from a host of disciplines have spent countless hours contributing to and reviewing the accuracy of the reports of that panel. In that succession of reports is the consolidated view of a worldwide scientific community on both the causes and impacts of climate change and the increasing levels of confidence in those causes and impacts. This is truly a remarkable development. The value of having such a consolidated view cannot be overemphasized. It can truthfully be said that the scientific community has risen to the challenge of the age.

Religion, however, despite its inherent power to unite humanity in great endeavors, has remained disunited. The Universal House of Justice (2002) notes: "In contrast to the processes of unification that are transforming the rest of humanity's social relationships, the suggestion that all of the world's great religions are equally valid in nature and origin is stubbornly resisted by entrenched patterns of sectarian thought."

The authors suggest that this refusal of the world's religious leadership to acknowledge the uniting power of religion writ large is the primary reason organized religion has become increasingly irrelevant to modern life and failed to exert a salubrious influence on human progress commensurate with the influence exerted by scientific progress. "The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land", Bahá'u'lláh ([1952] 1976, 200) noted, surveying the

religious landscape of the nineteenth century. Today, indeed, “the greater part of organized religion stands paralyzed at the threshold of the future” (Universal House of Justice 2002).

As the twentieth century progressed, one of the consequences of this failure to recognize the spiritual validity of all of the world’s great religions was the marginalization of religion in the international sphere. The following was part of a 2002 statement by the Baha’i International Community to the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in that year:

[I]t cannot be denied that the power of religion has also been perverted to turn neighbor against neighbor ... So long as religious animosities are allowed to destabilize the world, it will be impossible to foster a global pattern of sustainable development.

Given the record of religious fanaticism, it is understandable that the United Nations has been hesitant to invite religion into its negotiations. However, the United Nations can no longer afford to ignore the immeasurable good that religions have done and continue to do in the world, or the salubrious, far-reaching contributions that they can make to the establishment of a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable global order. Indeed, the United Nations will only succeed in establishing such a global order to the extent that it taps into the power and vision of religion. To do so will require accepting religion not merely as a vehicle for the delivery and execution of development initiatives, but as an active partner in the conceptualization, design, implementation, and evaluation of global policies and programs. The historically justified wall separating the United Nations and religions must fall to the imperatives of a world struggling toward unity and justice. (Baha’i International Community 2002)

What have been some of the consequences of the religious abandonment of the international field? An article written under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (Guivarch, Taconet, and Méjan 2021) notes:

Our own research shows that if the most dire projections of future economic damages in the current scientific literature hold true, climate change would reverse the gains of the past few decades and cause inequality between countries to rise again. Within countries, the impacts of climate change also risk worsening inequality.

While the effects of climate change are global, and their projected impacts concern every area in the world, a wide scientific literature suggests that climate risks disproportionately affect the poorest countries and people, who are more exposed and more vulnerable to their impacts.

This article outlines a three-part solution to the problem of climate change: the recognition of justice and equity as the necessary foundation that will seal and ensure a lasting solution; the embrace of sound science; and the embrace of consultation—at all levels of society, from the community level all the way up to the international level—regarding technological and social measures to be taken. It then discusses the efforts of the Bahá'í community along the lines of this three-part solution. It gives a summary of the global profile of the Bahá'í Faith; introduces the concept of the three protagonists in the civilization-building process as a useful construct to understand the levels at which change must be made and to provide a focus for holistic solutions to the issue of climate change; and finally outlines the framework for action that characterizes Bahá'í efforts being made at the neighborhood level.

A Framework for Addressing Climate Change

Justice and Equity

Equity is variously defined as “the quality of being fair and impartial” (Oxford Learners Dictionaries), “the situation in which everyone is treated fairly according to their needs and no group of people is given special treatment” (Cambridge Dictionary), and “justice according to natural law or right; specifically: freedom from bias or favoritism” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). In the Bahá'í view, equity is rooted in the essential oneness and wholeness of the human race. Bahá'u'lláh ([1941] 1973, 13) writes that “[j]ustice and equity are twin Guardians that watch over men” and that “[t]he purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men” (Bahá'u'lláh [1978] 1988, 67).

Thus, justice and equity are seen to form a bedrock upon which viable and enduring solutions to the manifold problems afflicting humanity can be based. Their establishment is the means by which the unity of the human race can be accomplished. It is, in fact, a lack of justice and equity in the governing of human affairs that has led to the current climate crisis. The crisis itself cannot be averted, in any lasting fashion, without advances in the appreciation and application of these two vital principles.

In a letter to Queen Victoria, Bahá'u'lláh praised her for having “entrusted the reins of counsel into the hands of the representatives of the people,” adding, “It behooveth them ... to regard themselves as the representatives of all that dwell on earth” (Bahá'u'lláh [2002] 2003, 90). In this same vein of thinking, Bahá'u'lláh ([1992] 2016, 31) enjoins those elected to govern the affairs of the Bahá'í community to “regard themselves as the guardians ... for all that dwell on Earth” and “to choose that which is meet and seemly.”

Personal morality, one of the foundational and eternal principles contained in all the world's religious scriptures, is no longer sufficient, as it is limited in its power to bring about change in today's very complex world. A new collective level of morality and ethics is needed: a level of ethics in which leaders of

thought and formers of policy transcend what may be best for them personally or for their particular constituents—those who elected them or funded their election—and think instead of what is best for the human race.

Never before in history has humanity been drawn together as tightly as in the modern period (United Nations 2009). The emergence of a universal science curriculum is one example; others include the development of a globe-spanning system of commercial air travel and a worldwide communication system “embracing the whole planet ... and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity,” a development foreseen by the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, in the 1930s and now utilized by nearly two-thirds of the global population (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1974, 203; Petrosyan 2023). Adoption of this new level of ethics is vital if civilization is to continue to advance and to thrive.

One of the great changes destined to take place in the world, the Bahá’í writings state, is an end to the “struggle for existence” in human life. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1978, 302) characterizes the struggle for existence in these terms:

[F]or as long as man is captive to nature he is a ferocious animal, as the struggle for existence is one of the exigencies of the world of nature. This matter of the struggle for existence is the fountain-head of all calamities and is the supreme affliction.

That the conduct of human affairs is still locked into this animal struggle for existence is evidenced by continued poverty in a world in which science has generated untold wealth, and in the growing disparity between the rich and the poor, with the ultra-rich commanding an ever-larger fraction of the world’s wealth (Oxfam America 2023). For there to be any lasting solution to the problem of climate change, this economic inequity must be remedied. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1978, 281) proceeds to predict that this change will happen. He foresees that affairs will so be changed as to put an end to this “exigency of the world of nature”; that “the world of humanity” will “be transformed into the Kingdom of God.” The question, then, is not so much whether this will happen but rather how soon, and how much damage will be done before sweeping changes are brought about.

Embrace of Sound Science

Although the root of the problem of climate change is what might be called a lack of spiritual or moral values, any solution must include a wider appreciation of science and, beyond the application of technical solutions, a utilization of sound scientific methodology. “Great indeed is the claim of scientists ... on the peoples of the world,” Bahá’u’lláh ([1978] 1988, 52) wrote in the nineteenth century. A letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice (2017) to three individuals who had expressed some skepticism about

the severity of climate change, whether climate change was anthropogenic, and the accuracy of some of the projections made by climate scientists, emphasized the science:

Scientific inquiry into the question of human contributions to global warming has gradually unfolded over a century of investigation and, more recently, with intense scrutiny. While there will naturally be differences of view among individual scientists, there does exist at present a striking degree of agreement among experts in relevant fields about the cause and impact of climate change. Sound scientific results, obtained through the employment of sound scientific methods, produce knowledge that can be acted upon; ultimately, the outcomes of action must stand the test of further scientific inquiry and the objective facts of the physical world.

The Universal House of Justice not only affirms the current conclusions of science regarding the “cause and impact of climate change,” it also outlines a course of action utilizing sound scientific methodology. Critically, science has produced “knowledge that can be acted upon.” The scientific process does not end there; in a sense, it has only begun. As individuals or communities act, they must continually assess the “outcomes of action,” and these outcomes must “stand the test of further scientific inquiry”: Which process will produce more knowledge, or corrections to existing knowledge? Which can guide further action?

As is discussed later in this article, this cyclical process of rational assessment followed by action, followed by further rational assessment leading to further action, is one in which Bahá'í communities are enjoined to engage in their work at the grassroots of society and in pursuit of social and economic progress.

Consultation

The Bahá'í writings enjoin consultation as “the means by which agreement is to be reached and a collective course of action defined” (Universal House of Justice 2017). Bahá'u'lláh writes ([1978] 1988, 168) that “the heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance” and that “[c]onsultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude” (Research Department of the Universal House of Justice 1980, 3).

Consultation, as it is conceived in the Bahá'í writings and practiced within the Bahá'í community, must be linked with compassion as a necessary concomitant. The primary objective of consultation is the realization of justice and equity. The attribute that links justice and equity to consultation is compassion. Consultation done properly has a strong rational component.

It is compassion, however, that awakens a higher nature than the rational; it awakens that quality religions have called “the divine.” In solving major social problems, at all levels, both the rational faculty and the remarkable human capacity for the “divine,” or what some might term the “transcendent,” must be brought to bear.

Critical to finding solutions to the problem of climate change is the participation of all concerned, governments and governed alike, from the highest levels of government down to the most fundamental level of society: the local community or neighborhood. Consultation must take place between national governments; within governments at the national, regional, and local levels; between governments and their citizenries; and among the members of the population themselves. Without a full exchange of views at all levels, any measures decided upon—suggested courses of action—will be resisted at some level; a resistance that will undermine actions that need to be taken. Equitable solutions require consultation among all concerned in the outcomes—that is, consultation must proceed in such a manner that all concerned in the outcome have a voice, with the diversity of views that naturally exists within the population freely expressed.

Bahá’í consultation eschews the adversarial approach and the kind of compromise of competing interests that, all too often, has proved to be a corrupting factor affecting parliamentary political debate. Rather, it is to be carried out in a spirit of unity in which the motive of all parties is to seek out the truth and outline a unified course of action. Integral to the consultative process is freedom of expression together with full and frank discussion. This may lead to a clash of differing opinions during the process, but this does not mean a clash of egos or a clash of wills. Consultation depends, for its efficacy, on adherence to the first two principles outlined: justice and equity, and the spirit of scientific objectivity.

There are several additional key elements to consultation. When a group engages in consultation, “every ... member should recognize that he has a duty to ensure that his voice is heard and that appropriate consideration is given to his views” (Universal House of Justice 1989). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1978, 87) writes that when “every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument,” consultation will succeed in avoiding “ill-feeling or discord.” Since all have contributed fully to the consultation, when agreement is reached, all the participants should whole-heartedly support the agreed-upon course of action. There are no “minority opinions” at the conclusion of consultation. Shoghi Effendi reiterated this salient principle: “The Assembly members must have the courage of their convictions, but must also express whole-hearted and unqualified obedience to the well-considered judgment and directions of the majority of their fellow members” (Research Department of the Universal House of Justice 1980, 16).

Richard Feynman ([1985] 2018) gives the following fascinating account of a consultation that took place regarding a particular scientific problem:

One of the first interesting experiences I had in this project at Princeton was meeting great men. I had never met very many great men before. But there was an evaluation committee that had to try to help us along, and help us ultimately decide which way we were going to separate the uranium. This committee had men like Compton and Tolman and Smyth and Urey and Rabi and Oppenheimer on it. I would sit in because I understood the theory of how our process of separating isotopes worked, and so they'd ask me questions and talk about it. In these discussions one man would make a point. Then Compton, for example, would explain a different point of view. He would say it should be this way, and he was perfectly right. Another guy would say, well, maybe, but there's this other possibility we have to consider against it.

So everybody is disagreeing, all around the table. I am surprised and disturbed that Compton doesn't repeat and emphasize his point. Finally at the end, Tolman, who's the chairman, would say, "Well, having heard all these arguments, I guess it's true that Compton's argument is the best of all, and now we have to go ahead."

It was such a shock to me to see that a committee of men could present a whole lot of ideas, each one thinking of a new facet, while remembering what the other fella said, so that, at the end, the decision is made as to which idea was the best—summing it all up—without having to say it three times. These were very great men indeed.

This account illustrates several important features of consultation: focus on the problem at hand, complete freedom of expression among the participants, dispassionate examination of the points presented, and final universal agreement on a course of action. Although Feynman seems to conclude that this was achieved because it was "great men" who were participating, the view of the authors is that it is not "intelligence," "the capacity for abstract (mathematical) thought," or "scientific expertise" but rather disinterested focus on the problem at hand in an atmosphere encouraging complete freedom of expression. The Bahá'í experience across diverse settings has been that virtually any consultative group whose members have the right set of attitudes can adhere to these principles.

Bahá'ís are enjoined to always blend consultation with scientific methodology. The aforementioned letter by the Universal House of Justice (2017) further notes: "A phenomenon as complex as climate change cannot be reduced to simple propositions or simplistic policy prescriptions. Even when there is agreement on some underlying facts, there may be a diversity of views about what to do in response to those facts."

It continues:

Consultation provides a means by which common understanding can be reached and a collective course of action defined. It involves a free, respectful, dignified, and fair-minded effort on the part of a group of people to exchange views, seek truth, and attempt to reach consensus. An initial difference of opinion is the starting point for examining an issue in order to reach greater understanding and consensus; it should not become a cause of rancor, aversion, or estrangement. By acting in unity, a conclusion about a particular course of action may be tested and revised as necessary through a process of learning. (Universal House of Justice 2017)

This provides an outline for how consultation can be pursued in a way that leads to “common understanding” and an effective “collective course of action.”

It should be noted that the Universal House of Justice (2017) found it remarkable, and an auspicious portent, that “at a time when nations have difficulty reaching agreement on many important issues, the governments of nearly every country on Earth have reached political consensus on a joint framework ... in the Paris accord, to respond to climate change in a manner that is anticipated to evolve over time as experience accumulates.”

In summary, the three elements of justice and equity; embrace of science, implying as it does utilization of scientific methodology; and consultation come together to help recognize a problem and forge enduring solutions. The framework presented here calls for an integration of spiritual principles with science and the more widespread adoption of scientific methodology in the application and monitoring of measures based on spiritual principles, to the degree that the integration of science and religion becomes normative, in principle and in practice.

The Bahá'í Community

The Bahá'í community is worldwide, drawing its membership from, and embedded in, societies and cultures in every corner of the world. Although still small in size, representing around one-tenth of one percent of the world's population, by the late 1980s, the Baha'i Faith had become the second-most widespread religion in the world by country (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1988). Despite its size, it represents a cross section of human society.

Foundational to the Bahá'í understanding of reality is not only the oneness of the human family, but also that all religions stem from the one same God. As children in one family have differing requirements at differing times, so it has been with the peoples of the world. Unique to the Bahá'í understanding is that humanity has now reached the much-anticipated stage of development where it is possible to understand that there is no need for conflict or contention, but rather mutual cooperation and responsible, sustainable development.

Shaping this perspective are the writings of the twin Manifestations of the Bahá'í Faith, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, which are considered divine revelation, together with the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, who was not a Manifestation of God but nevertheless is considered to have been divinely inspired. These comprise the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith. Added to these as authoritative are the writings of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, appointed to that position by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the writings of the Universal House of Justice, whose members are elected through a three-tiered system. The former, as a body of writings, is considered authentic interpretation of the Sacred Writings and the latter elucidations of both the Sacred Writings and the interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Within the Bahá'í Sacred Writings is prohibition against authoritative interpretation by anyone outside the authorized interpreters, as each believer should read and understand the texts for themselves. It is this diverse understanding based on the Sacred Writings that forms a bedrock for engaging in Bahá'í consultation.

Bahá'ís do not see themselves as separate in any essential way from the communities in which they live. As indicated, some of the most essential measures that must be taken to address climate change must be done on the international level, involving international cooperation among governments on the one hand and large-scale efforts by societies on the other. Bahá'ís, therefore, see their work at the neighborhood level as complementary with efforts being made on the world stage writ large.

In the following section, we provide an international profile of the Bahá'í Faith, discuss the Bahá'í understanding of the “three protagonists” in the civilization-building process and the necessity for a new set of relationships binding them, and finally talk about the nature of the efforts being made in Bahá'í-sponsored initiatives at the neighborhood level.

Bahá'í Programs and Organizations

Worldwide, some 1,300 Bahá'í communities are engaged in intensive programs of development. The neighborhoods in which Bahá'ís are working span the globe, from rural settings in Central and South America, across Central Africa, Southeast Asia, Papua New Guinea, and some of the islands of the Pacific to urban neighborhoods in large metropolitan areas in all parts of the world. There are several thousand Bahá'í efforts in social and economic development: over 900 sustained large-scale projects, over 600 schools, and over 70 Bahá'í development agencies. Although these initiatives are Bahá'í-inspired, in none of them is there a separation between members of the Bahá'í Faith and the general public. The neighborhood activities, for instance, are for people of all faiths and no faith. The programs of development are carried out in consultation, and in the consultative process, all voices are equal.

Bahá'u'lláh ([1978] 1988, 35) instructs His followers to “consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.” This is something Bahá'í communities take to heart.

The Bahá'í International Community (<https://www.bic.org/>) has been registered with the United Nations as a nongovernmental organization since 1948 and has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the United Nations Children's Fund. It is also accredited with the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Department of Public Information. In addition to collaborating with the United Nations and its specialized agencies, the Bahá'í International Community collaborates with United Nations member states, nongovernmental organizations, and academia.

The International Environmental Forum (IEF; <https://iefworld.org/>) is a Bahá'í-inspired professional organization for environment and sustainability. The IEF was started in 1997 and has grown to over 700 members in more than 70 countries. It sponsors an annual online conference on environmental issues, engages in educational activities, and has produced a number of papers. Most recently, it was an active supporter and participant in the Interfaith Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development's interfaith conference in Abu Dhabi and the COP28 Faith Pavilion.

The Wilmette Institute (<https://wilmetteinstitute.org/>), an educational institution organized under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, sponsors, in conjunction with the IEF, an annual online course on climate change, in addition to its many other courses on science and religion, philosophy, theology, history, art, and key social issues, such as racism.

The Association for Bahá'í Studies North America (n.d.), an organization formed under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, “promotes inquiry within the sciences and humanities to advance thought and practice that address the needs of contemporary society.”

Operating since 1999, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (n.d.) “provides a forum for the exploration of concepts and the analysis of processes that give shape to humanity's search for global peace and prosperity.” Among its activities, the institute sponsors annual courses for university students and graduates.

The Three Protagonists in the Civilization-Building Process

Bahá'í writings identify three protagonists in the civilization-building process: the individual, the institutions, and the community.

Throughout human history, interactions among these three have been fraught with difficulties at every turn, with the individual clamoring for freedom, the institution demanding submission, and the community claiming precedence.

Every society has defined ... the relationships that bind the three, giving rise to periods of stability, interwoven with turmoil. (Universal House of Justice 2010)

As humanity today is undergoing unprecedented changes in the intellectual, psychological, and social aspects of life, the relationships among these three protagonists in the civilization-building process are not developing apace, nor in any systematic or conscious fashion. Humankind's political life is locked into old patterns that are no longer relevant. Western-style democracy, for instance, remains an adversarial system, with political parties locked into concepts developed during the Enlightenment that see society as composed of competing elements that could be made to work together through a political process of debate and compromise.

Despite this stubbornly persistent legacy from the past, relationships among the three protagonists are evolving, although in a haphazard fashion, which has led to both uncertainty about the future and the very serious problems of excess. Humanity is engaged in a race between the destructive effects arising from our current course and our ability to adapt to the new realities emerging in the modern world. The Universal House of Justice emphasizes the learning that must take place to bring about new, harmonious relationships among these three "actors on the stage of history." It notes:

At the heart of the learning process is inquiry into the nature of the relationships that bind the individual, the community, and the institutions of society—actors on the stage of history who have been locked in a struggle for power throughout time. In this context, the assumption that relations among them will inevitably conform to the dictates of competition, a notion that ignores the extraordinary potential of the human spirit, has been set aside in favor of the more likely premise that their harmonious interactions can foster a civilization befitting a mature humanity. (Universal House of Justice 2013)

That same letter goes on to add:

[A] new conception of each appropriate for a humanity that has come of age is emerging ... The relationships that bind them ... are undergoing a profound transformation, bringing into the realm of existence civilization-building powers ... At a fundamental level these relationships are characterized by cooperation and reciprocity, manifestations of the interconnectedness that governs the universe. (Universal House of Justice 2013)

The past two centuries, having seen a vast intellectual advancement of the human race, have created the need for a new paradigm. The struggle for power among

these protagonists must give way to a dynamic and harmonious cooperation. Drawing on Bahá'u'lláh's analogy comparing the world of humanity to the human body, the Universal House of Justice (2013) writes:

Just as the appearance of the rational soul in this realm of existence is made possible through the complex association of countless cells, whose organization in tissues and organs allows for the realization of distinctive capacities, so can civilization be seen as the outcome of a set of interactions among closely integrated, diverse components which have transcended the narrow purpose of tending to their own existence. And just as the viability of every cell and every organ is contingent upon the health of the body as a whole, so should the prosperity of every individual, every family, every people be sought in the wellbeing of the entire human race.

There is no question that the worst effects of anthropogenic climate change can only be addressed, or mitigated, through large-scale interventions at the international and national levels, and most fruitfully by governments working in concert.

At the same time, however, one cannot escape what should be an obvious fact of humanity: the power to effect change, ultimately, rests with the individual. What is needed are fundamental changes in the patterns of thinking and operating that led to the problem in the first place—patterns that have prevented the efflorescence of the human spirit, an efflorescence that, in concert with principled international action, is necessary to ensure lasting change.

The document *Century of Light*, produced under the auspices of the Universal House of Justice, notes, with regard to the indigenous populations of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the islands of the Pacific:

One of the great strengths of the masses of humankind ... lies in an openness of heart that has the potentiality to generate lasting social transformation. The greatest handicap of these same populations has so far been a passivity learned through generations of exposure to outside influences which, no matter how great their material advantages, have pursued agendas that were often related only tangentially—if at all—to the realities of the needs and daily lives of indigenous peoples. (Bahá'í World Centre 2001, 108–9)

Without an efflorescence of the human spirit—without a general awakening of the individual in society—one problem may be solved in the short term, but the solution will bring only symptomatic relief. As in the case of a body afflicted with an underlying disease, symptoms will reappear in other limbs and take other forms.

An example is presented by the crisis of nuclear war. The potential catastrophe of nuclear war hung over the world for decades during the Cold War. At the end of the Cold War, the threat receded but never disappeared, and it is still with us. The only lasting and stable solution to this potential crisis was never applied: the creation of an international order that recognizes the essential oneness and wholeness of the human race, curtailing the sovereign power of nations to initiate warfare and working to bring about equity within the human family. Consequently, the underlying disease of excessive materialism has produced in the global body politic a new symptom: anthropogenic climate change, which again threatens the existence of the human species.

That the root problem is materialism and not simply individualism is asserted in *Century of Light* (Bahá'í International Community 2021, 89, 90):

Whether as worldview or simple appetite, materialism's effect is to leach out of human motivation—and even interest—the spiritual impulses that distinguish the rational soul ... In the absence of conviction about the spiritual nature of reality and the fulfilment it alone offers, it is not surprising to find at the very heart of the current crisis of civilization a cult of individualism that increasingly admits of no restraint and that elevates acquisition and personal advancement to the status of major cultural values.

What, then, is the proper role of the individual in a society in which the interactions of the three protagonists have been harmonized? In all societies, power has come from the individual. The prime awakener of this power, the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh suggest, is the system of morality and ethics arising from Revelation. The individual is seen as having a twofold moral purpose:

- to develop his or her own inherent potentialities
- to contribute to the transformation of society.

“All men,” Bahá'u'lláh ([1952] 1976, 215) writes, “have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.” Justice can be achieved in the world only as the individual citizen gains the ability, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh ([1932] 1970, 4), to “see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others” and learn to “know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor.” The ability to contribute to the transformation of society begins with self-knowledge. “Man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty” (Bahá'u'lláh [1978] 1988, 35).

Regarding the institutions, the Bahá'í Faith recognizes that while they provide guidance, the power of accomplishment comes from the individual. Institutions

must govern in such a way as to stimulate and encourage, along salutary lines, the development and expression of this power that lies latent in the individual members of society. In an open letter written anonymously to the people of Persia circa 1880, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ([1957] 1990, 111–12) wrote about the necessity to “establish schools throughout Persia, even in the smallest country towns and villages, and to encourage the people in every possible way to have their children learn to read and write,” noting that “[u]ntil the nerves and arteries of the nation stir into life, every measure that is attempted will prove vain; for the people are as the human body, and determination and the will to struggle are as the soul, and a soulless body does not move.”

The institutions of society—the governmental institutions—therefore must develop along new lines: “not to control but to nurture and guide” (Universal House of Justice 2013).

In the Bahá’í Faith, decisions are made by Spiritual Assemblies—democratically elected institutions—and not by individuals. The members of the institutions have a primary duty:

[t]o win by every means in their power the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve; to investigate and acquaint themselves with the considered views, the prevailing sentiments and the personal convictions of those whose welfare it is their solemn obligation to promote; to purge their deliberations and the general conduct of their affairs of self-contained aloofness, the suspicion of secrecy, the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness and of every word and deed that may savor of partiality, self-centeredness and prejudice; and while retaining the sacred right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, ventilate grievances, welcome advice and foster the sense of interdependence and co-partnership, of understanding and mutual confidence between themselves and all other Bahá’ís. (Universal House of Justice 1972, 10–11)

The assembly members themselves are as subject to the guidance of the institutions as all other members of the community. Outside of the duly constituted meetings of the assembly, they have no special authority, unless assigned specific duties. Shoghi Effendi ([1928] 1974, 63) writes that “the keynote of the Cause ... is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation.” Populations need what liberal democracy has called “the rule of law” to be operated on all levels. They need institutions whose members are held to obedience to the law to the same degree as the general population.

What, then, of the third protagonist in the civilization-building process, the community? Humans are social beings, communal beings. The community is the center around which unity is manifested, the collective in which the individual is

nourished and supported, the setting in which the efforts of the individual gain meaning. The mental health and social wellbeing of the individual is nourished when the community “takes on the challenge of sustaining an environment where the powers of individuals, who wish to exercise self-expression responsibly in accordance with the common weal and the plans of institutions, multiply in unified action” (The Universal House of Justice 2013).

One of the crises of the modern period is a crisis of community. In an opinion piece published in *The Washington Post*, the journalist E. J. Dionne (2023) writes about the “essential role” played by “[h]ouses of worship and other religious institutions” in “promoting social connectedness, mutual aid, and community building”:

What has brought this realization to life is widespread concern over the rise of loneliness and decline of forces that pull communities together. With religious disaffiliation soaring, especially among younger Americans, there is reason to worry that secular alternatives to religious civil society are not growing fast enough to fill the void. Even if secular social spaces proliferate, a society suffering from disconnection can ill afford to lose any of its community-building capacity.

In 2023, the Surgeon General of the United States, Vivek Murthy, produced a report, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*, subtitled *The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*. In the opening letter to the report, he writes:

In recent years, about one-in-two adults in America reported experiencing loneliness ... Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health. It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity. And the harmful consequences of a society that lacks social connection can be felt in our schools, workplaces, and civic organizations, where performance, productivity, and engagement are diminished. (Murthy 2023, 4)

To address this crisis, Americans need to reestablish community, “to make the same investments in addressing social connection that we have made in addressing tobacco use, obesity, and the addiction crisis” (Murthy 2023, 4):

We are called to build a movement to mend the social fabric of our nation. It will take all of us—individuals and families, schools and workplaces, health

care and public health systems, technology companies, governments, faith organizations, and communities—working together to destigmatize loneliness and change our cultural and policy response to it. It will require reimagining the structures, policies, and programs that shape a community to best support the development of healthy relationships. (Murthy 2023, 5)

There is another critical role of community: ultimately, community—not the individual nor the governing institutions—is the adjudicator of values and what is accepted as truth. Truth is discovered by the individual. But it is the community that puts the seal on truth, which informally decides what is true and good, and what is not. When community disintegrates, as is happening in many societies around the world under the onslaught of growing materialism and as a result of the failure of religion to adapt to the exigencies of the times, values go into free fall.

The philosopher of science Naomi Oreskes has pointed out the vital role of the scientific community in adjudicating scientific truth. Although it is the individual scientist (or research team) who makes scientific discoveries, it is the scientific community that, in aggregate and operating informally, determines scientific truth (Oreskes 2019).

In *Science as Social Knowledge*, Helen Longino (1990) gives a number of examples illustrating her thesis, showing how different background assumptions, even in the physical sciences, can lead and have led to different evidentiary conclusions from the same set of data. Naomi Oreskes (2019), in support of Longino, notes that it is the scientific community that determines scientific truth. Specifically, scientific truth is determined in any particular discipline by the community of experts in that discipline—that community that has the knowledge and training to generate data, formulate background assumptions that link data with evidence, and assess hypotheses in light of that evidence. The objectivity of science rests on the ability of the community of experts to identify the background assumptions and to evaluate them, as well as on its ability to assess the links between evidence and theory. (Sarracino 2023)

Key to the salutary influence of the community, however, is the kind of individual within it. The Bahá'í community is not a congregation. “One of the distinctive features of the Bahá'í Administrative Order ... is the responsibility it places upon the individual believer to participate in its activities” (Universal House of Justice 1989). This letter continues:

[T]he followers of Bahá'u'lláh are called upon, in their relationships within the community, to engage in consultation ... to offer their views and recommendations on all matters which pertain to the interests of the Faith

and its community ... This active involvement by every Bahá'í in the life of the community provides it with access to each individual's insight and wisdom and is a source of great strength to the organic unit. (Universal House of Justice 1989)

Work at the Neighborhood Level

As stated, the Bahá'í community is not a congregation. Likewise, community-building activities at the neighborhood level and Bahá'í-initiated socioeconomic projects do not treat their participants as passive receivers. When working at the neighborhood level, Bahá'ís work to a framework of action. There is a triple focus: community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society. The Universal House of Justice (2021) has emphasized three key areas of learning that will be vital in the years immediately ahead:

- how to raise up vibrant, outward-looking communities
- those communities learning how to bring about spiritual and material progress
- how to contribute to the discourses that influence the direction of that progress.

Work at the neighborhood level is carried out in a cycle of action, reflection, consultation, and study. This cycle ensures that, while engaged in continuous action, the action is reflected upon to generate learning, and that this learning leads to greater understanding, which in turn leads to new phases of corrected action. It is a scientific approach to learning in action, engaged in by a community working at the grassroots of society in attempts to generate meaningful change. The Universal House of Justice (2023) writes:

In place after place, the initiatives being pursued reveal a population learning how to take increasing responsibility for navigating the path of its own development ... What is required for all these complementary aspects of a community's wellbeing to advance is ... the capacity to engage in systematic learning in all these areas—a capacity that draws on insights arising from the Teachings and the accumulated store of human knowledge generated through scientific enquiry.

Although material advancement and wellbeing are of course important, Bahá'í projects are inherently holistic in their aims. Consideration of the environment is a vital feature of Bahá'í neighborhood activities throughout the world. Otherwise, one is simply perpetuating the kinds of activities and foci that led to the problems being addressed by the projects in the first place. All activities at the community or neighborhood level, whether

pursuing social, intellectual, or economic objectives, or a combination of these, arise out of consultation and are carried out both with the intent of strengthening the bonds that tie the community more closely together and with the environment in mind.

The Bahá'í Community and Civil Society

A question that might arise from what has been presented so far is, “Is this not utopian—an ideal that can never be realized in practice?” Despite the persistence and growth of religious fanaticism in the twenty-first century, there has also been significant progress in multifaith efforts and in civil society. The IPCC’s *Sixth Assessment Report* (2021, 2022) makes a number of references to the importance of involving religious groups in civil society:

Climate governance will be most effective when it has meaningful and ongoing involvement of all societal actors from local to global levels (very high confidence). Actors, including individuals and households, communities, governments at all levels, private-sector businesses, non-governmental organisations, Indigenous Peoples, religious groups, and social movements, at many scales and in many sectors, are adapting already and can take stronger adaptation and mitigation actions.

In advance of the recent COP28 conference, the Interfaith Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development held an interfaith conference in Abu Dhabi, producing the “Abu Dhabi Interfaith Statement on Climate Change,” which was presented at COP28. Notably, COP28 included a Faith Pavilion, the first at such a conference. “[T]he Global Faith Leaders Summit brought together over 150 representatives from science, religion, including Bahá'í, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhi, Indigenous traditions, and politics to enhance climate ambitions ahead of COP28 ... During the gathering, the Interfaith Statement was signed by 28 religious representatives” (Interfaith Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development 2023).

As mentioned, the Bahá'í community itself represents a cross section of humanity, and Bahá'í socioeconomic projects are all-inclusive and growing in number. In addition, one may consider the active support of, participation in, and contribution towards the development of civil society: “Civil society seems to be conceptualized as the arena within which a host of positive values are spontaneously manifested in the popular realm. These values include solidarity, participation, volunteerism, altruism, generosity, and justice. Civil society thus becomes a realm of freedom, where people take voluntary initiatives, self-organize at the grassroots to address social issues, participate in public affairs, and sacrifice their narrow interests for the common good” (Palmer 2018).

David A. Palmer (2018) goes on to note that “[t]he Bahá’í teachings and the community’s pattern of social engagement generally predispose Bahá’ís to support and identify with those elements of civil society that promote the enhancement of human dignity and reinforce unity and solidarity within and among communities.”

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, the Bahá’í International Community was chosen to represent global civil society. The participation of the Bahá’í International Community in civil society and its encouragement of the participation of religion and religious organizations in civil society have continued in the ensuing years.

Summary and Conclusion

The crisis of climate change has brought to the fore and made urgent the looming crisis of modern civilization, which, in the Bahá’í view, “result[s] from an excessive and enervating materialism” (Shoghi Effendi [1939] 1963, 24). It is a crisis that requires, to achieve a lasting solution, the development of a new normative relationship between science and religion, and organic changes in the way we humans do things at all levels: local, regional, national, and international.

The first change is to embrace the concept of the oneness of mankind—with all that entails—as an overarching vision: the health of the part must contribute, and does contribute, to the wellbeing of the whole, and the wellbeing of the whole is the only means to secure the enduring health of the part.

The second change is to adopt a framework consisting of three elements: justice and equity as an overarching concern; the embrace of sound science; and the process of free and full consultation that engages all concerned. Implicit in this is the adoption, as humanity works to address climate change and the many issues that arise from it, of a scientific-type methodology, including a cyclical process of consultation, action, and reflection followed by further consultation and (possibly) new lines of action. At every step, continual study is necessary so that actors, whether on the local, national, or international level, keep abreast of the latest scientific discoveries and developments.

The framework requires action on local, regional, national, and international levels and the development of a new pattern of relationships among the three protagonists in the civilization-building process: the individual, the community, and the institutions. Each must be respected, each must be given scope, and all must work together in harmony.

What is the role and future of humans in the cosmos? Physicist Marvin Chester, in a speculative 2012 article, “A Fundamental Principle Governing Populations,” develops a new general population equation based on what he sees as “an overriding principle of nature” governing “all population

behavior”—that “the effect on the environment of a population’s success is to alter that environment in a way that opposes the success.” This, to the authors, can be seen as a natural consequence of the “struggle for existence.” The flourishing of a species results in changes that oppose the continued flourishing of that species. One *could* look at anthropogenic climate change from that perspective: humans are animals—nothing more than animals—and consequently, destroying the environment that has allowed us to flourish is nothing more than what would be expected of any animal species.

The fundamental religious view, however, is that humans are more than animal. We have a transcendent nature; it is this nature that enables us to escape the struggle for existence. We can flourish, in the way that we ourselves have come to define “flourishing”—the creation of an ever-advancing civilization, advancing both materially and spiritually. We must rise to that station that can be attained only through realization of our true nature.

The physicist and cosmologist Paul Davies (1992, 232), in *The Mind of God*, writes,

We, who are children of the universe—animated stardust—can nevertheless reflect on the nature of that same universe ... What does it mean? What is Man that we might be party to such a privilege? I cannot believe that our existence in this universe is a mere quirk of fate, an accident of history ... Our involvement is too intimate ... Through conscious beings the universe has generated self-awareness. This can be no trivial detail, no minor byproduct of mindless, purposeless forces. We are truly meant to be here.

The changes required to solve the climate crisis are so far-reaching, they are and must be “the work of not only this generation, but of many generations to come” (Universal House of Justice 2021).

As dire as the crisis appears to be, there is great confidence in the eventual outcome. The long-term future of the human species is envisioned as incomparably glorious. Indeed, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts that humankind is transitioning to a cycle “destined to propel itself across the unborn reaches of time for a period of no less than five thousand centuries” (Shoghi Effendi [1938] 1974, 102), for the universe acquires meaning through the human spirit. The efflorescence of civilization through the triumph of the human spirit is intimately tied to the material and spiritual advancement of civilization. With the maturation of the human race, the far future is infinitely glorious.

Humanity, the Bahá’í writings assert, will not be refused “that culminating and blissful stage ... which is at once their inalienable right and their true destiny” (Shoghi Effendi [1941] 1980, 5).

Acknowledgements

This article derives from a presentation given at the sixty-eighth annual summer conference of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science entitled “The Wizards of Climate Change: How Can Technology Serve Hope and Justice?” at Star Island, New Hampshire, from June 25 to July 2, 2023. Robert Sinclair Sarracino gratefully acknowledges a Griswold Scholarship and a Star Island Corporation Financial Grant.

References

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. 1920. “Second Tablet to the Hague.” Writings and Talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. July 1, 1920. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/tablets-hague-abdul-baha/>.
- . (1957) 1990. *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- . 1978. *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. Chatham, UK: W & J Mackay Limited.
- Association for Bahá’í Studies North America. n.d. Accessed January 2004. <https://www.bahaistudies.ca/>.
- Bahá’í International Community. 2002. “Religion and Development at the Crossroads: A Statement to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.” State to the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development. August 26, 2002.
- Bahá’í World Centre. 2001. *Century of Light*. New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- Bahá’u’lláh. (1932) 1970. *The Hidden Words*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- . (1941) 1973. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- . (1952) 1976. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- . (1978) 1988. *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- . (1992) 2016. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- . (2002) 2003. *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*. Bundoora, VIC, Australia: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- Chester, Marvin. 2012. “A Fundamental Principle Governing Populations.” *Acta Biotheoretica*. 60 (3): 289–302. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10441-012-9160-6>.
- Davies, Paul. 1992. *The Mind of God*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Dionne, E. J. Jr. 2023. “Opinion: We Need a Truce in Our Wars over Religion. Here’s a Glimmer of Hope.” *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2010. www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/09/10/religion-politics-loneliness-community/.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica. 1988. “World Religious Statistics.” In *1988 Britannica Book of the Year*, edited by Daphne Daume. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- Feynman, Richard. (1985) 2018. *Surely You’re Joking, Mr Feynman*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Guivarch, Céline, Nicolas Taconet, and Aurélie Méjan. 2021. “Linking Climate and Inequality.” International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2021/09/climate-change-and-inequality-guivarch-mejean-taconet>.
- Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity. n.d. Accessed January 2024. <https://www.globalprosperity.org/>.
- Interfaith Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development. 2023. “Abu Dhabi Interfaith Statement on Climate Change for COP28.” <https://www.partner-religion-development.org/global-faith-leaders-summit-interfaith-statement-for-cop28/>.
- IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). 2021. *Sixth Assessment Report*. Geneva: IPCC.
- . 2022. *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Edited by

- Hans-Otto Pörtner, Debra C. Roberts, Melinda M. B. Tignor, Elvira Poloczanska, Katja Mintenbeck, Andrés Alegría, Marlies Craig, Stefanie Langsdorf, Sina Lösche, Vincent Möller, Andrew Okem, and Bardhyl Rama. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009325844>.
- . 2023. *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Core writing team Hoesung Lee and Jose Romero (eds). Geneva: IPCC. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647>.
- Longino, Helen. 1990. *Science as Social Knowledge*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Murthy, Vivek H. 2023. *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>.
- Oreskes, Naomi. 2019. *Why Trust Science?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Oxfam America. 2023. “Richest 1% Bag Nearly Twice as Much Wealth as the Rest of the World Put Together over the Past Two Years.” Press release. January 16, 2023. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-bag-nearly-twice-much-wealth-rest-world-put-together-over-past-two-years>.
- Palmer, David A. 2018. “Religion, Spiritual Principles, and Civil Society.” In *Public Discourse in an Age of Transition: Reflections on Bahá’í Practice and Thought*, edited by Ben Schewel and Geoff Cameron, 37–70. Guelph, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51644/9781771123310-004>
- Petrosyan, Ani. 2023. “Number of Internet Users Worldwide from 2005 to 2022.” Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273018/number-of-internet-users-worldwide/>.
- Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. 1980. “Consultation: A Compilation.” Thornhill, ON: Bahá’í Community of Canada.
- Sarracino, Robert. 2023. “What Does Spirituality Look Like?” *Journal of the Association for Bahá’í Studies*. Submitted for publication.
- Shoghi Effendi. (1928) 1974. *Bahá’í Administration*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- . (1938) 1974. *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- . (1939) 1963. *The Advent of Divine Justice*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- . (1941) 1980. *The Promised Day Is Come*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- United Nations. 2009. *Globalization and Interdependence: Role of the United Nations in Promoting Development in the Context of Globalization and Interdependence: Report of the Secretary-General*. New York: United Nations.
- . 2021. “Climate Change ‘Biggest Threat Modern Humans Have Ever Faced,’ World-Renowned Naturalist Tells Security Council, Calls for Greater Global Cooperation.” Press release. February 23, 2021. <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14445.doc.htm>.
- . 2022. “Climate Change the Greatest Threat the World Has Ever Faced, UN Expert Warns.” Press release. October 21, 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/climate-change-greatest-threat-world-has-ever-faced-un-expert-warns#>.
- Universal House of Justice. 1972. *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*. Hertfordshire: The Broadwater Press.
- . 1989. “[To a National Spiritual Assembly].” Department of the Secretariat, June 22, 1989. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/#19890622_001.
- . 2002. “To the World’s Religious Leaders.” https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/#20020401_001.
- . 2010. “To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors.” December 28, 2010. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/#20020401_001.
- . 2013. “To the Bahá’ís of Iran.” March 2, 2013. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/#20020401_001.

- . 2017. “[To Three Individuals].” Department of the Secretariat, November 29, 2017. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/#20020401_001.
- . 2021. “To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors.” December 30, 2021. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/#20020401_001.
- . 2023. “To the Bahá’ís of the World.” *Riḍván* 2023. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/#20020401_001.
- Vergun, David. 2021. “Defense Secretary Calls Climate Change an Existential Threat.” Department of Defense. April 22, 2021.

