

Toward a New World Order?

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If you have spent a considerable amount of time reading the Writings of the Baha'i Faith, it is likely that you have come across language regarding the relationship between the Faith and a new "World Order." One of the passages that is most frequently quoted in relation to this theme is this poignant statement by Baha'u'llah:

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.¹

Those who came across such language early in their investigation of the Faith may have been surprised, or even taken aback, at the use of this terminology in the context of religious scripture. Indeed, while some derivative of this phrase is found in countless passages in the Writings of Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, the Baha'i community is not the only one that uses this terminology. The term was frequently used by governmental leaders in public discourse during the post-WWI period in their arguments for greater international cooperation and support of the fledgling League of Nations (now the United Nations).

However, more recently it has become the language of conspiracy theory, evidence of a secret plot for world domination being orchestrated by a handful of nefarious individuals who wield

undue influence on global affairs.² (In my research on the subject, I even stumbled across websites pondering whether Ban Ki-Moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, is the Antichrist because of his use of “world order” language).

It seems prudent, therefore, to distinguish the meaning of the phrase as it is used in the Baha’i Faith from other, possibly less savory connotations. I’ll attempt to do this by discussing the “World Order” that Baha’is envision as it pertains to a number of subjects: politics and governance, economics, society, and religion.

Politics and Governance

One of the lenses through which Baha’is view the progress and evolution of humanity is the lens of unity. From this perspective, we understand mankind as progressing successively through various stages of affiliation and cooperation. Although the specific stages and their order may have varied from culture to culture, we can generally say that peoples around the world have traversed, or are in the process of traversing, the unities of the family, the tribe, the town/city-state, the empire (a loose conglomeration of city-states), and the nation-state. Each stage brings new challenges of coordination, but also unleashes humankind’s potential to a greater degree. There are surely a number of examples of governmental instability around the world, but the majority of nation-states are now fairly well established. Baha’is therefore view the final and inevitable stage of humanity’s evolution as the achievement of global unity. This is why Baha’is support efforts such as the United Nations (although not necessarily all of its policies and practices, a full discussion of which is outside the scope of this post) which attempt to achieve political and governmental unity on a global scale.

Many view this new “World Order” of international governance as a threat to national sovereignty. This fear appears to be driven by a paradigm of political competition and a “zero sum game” mentality, whereby the victory of one group (such as a political party, nation, etc.) is necessarily a loss for another. Sadly, this paradigm, even in democratic societies, is far too common given the widespread influence of partisanship, which necessarily pits different groups against each other.³

But the existence of a global system of government by no means necessitates the elimination of national autonomy, just as the establishment of states and provinces did not eliminate local control, nor did the creation of nations eliminate states’ rights. On the contrary, Baha’is believe the establishment of international governance is necessary to ensure that the rights of all individuals and communities are fully safeguarded against tyranny, despotism, and political repression.

Economics

Much of humanity has experienced tremendous growth in its material prosperity over the last two centuries, and Baha’is fully believe that both spiritual and material development are noble goals for humanity to pursue. However, this prosperity has not been enjoyed equally, and the

disparities between the wealthy and the destitute are tremendous and growing; the top 0.5% of the population controls more than a third of the world's wealth, while the bottom two-thirds of the population (roughly four billion people) control less than one-twentieth.⁴

One of the foundational principles of the Faith is the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty, so we view this growing inequality as something that must be combated. This does not mean we support measures to artificially equate the incomes of all people or promote economic systems such as communism which attempt to do so, but nor do we believe that the “unbridled capitalism” which has come to dominate the world economy is achieving a just distribution of resources.⁵

In the World Order Baha'is are hoping to build, all peoples of the world will have the ability and capacity to contribute meaningfully to the world's economy, abject poverty will be eliminated, and the extremes of wealth and poverty will be greatly reduced.

Society

Although we believe that international political unity is necessary to achieve world peace, Baha'is also believe it is insufficient. A necessary precondition of true unity and prosperity is the recognition by all people of the fundamental oneness of humanity. This consists of an elimination of all forms of prejudice, be they racial, ethnic, national, or of any other type, an appreciation for the incredible diversity of humankind, and a respect and protection of the freedoms which all individuals must be granted. This interpersonal and spiritual unity, rather than international political cooperation, is the true bedrock and foundation of the World Order Baha'is hope to achieve.

Religion

Although the implications of a new World Order for the three themes discussed above may seem innocuous, some may wonder what role the Baha'i Faith itself wishes to play in the unfoldment of this new age. Are Baha'is set on world domination? Do they want the whole world to become Baha'i? The short answer is: it depends what you mean by Baha'i. Just as it has become commonplace to view politics through the lens of competition and dichotomies, so do we often think about religion. You are either a Christian or a Buddhist, a Muslim or a Jew, a Zoroastrian or a Hindu, as if an acceptance of one faith necessarily entails the rejection of all others.

From the Baha'i perspective, this is one of the most destructive paradigms of present-day society. Instead, Baha'is view all of the major world religions as chapters of an ever-unfolding book which is the revelation of God. While social teachings may differ between religious traditions, at the foundation of all religions is a common set of spiritual principles: be kind, be just, be truthful, be generous, be compassionate, and the like. To Baha'is, what matters not is the religion by which one identifies himself or herself, but the degree to which one reflects these spiritual principles.

So do Baha'is want everyone to call themselves a Baha'i? It doesn't matter to us at all. What matters is that we all strive to embody these spiritual principles, recognize the commonalities in our respective Faith traditions, and use those commonalities as the foundation for a world civilization built on respect, collaboration, and unity.

1. Proclamation of Baha'u'llah, p. 118 []
2. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_World_Order_\(conspiracy_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_World_Order_(conspiracy_theory)) []
3. <http://myweb.wvu.edu/karlberg/articles/Democracy.pdf> []
4. <http://inequality.org/global-inequality/> []
5. Shoghi Effendi, Citadel of Faith, p. 154. []

[New World Order](#)[United Nations](#)[world peace](#)[World Unity](#)
About the Author



Matt Giani is a research scientist at the University of Texas at Austin. His research focuses on stratification and social mobility in education, with an emphasis on helping underprivileged students make successful transitions to college after high school. Matt draws his inspiration from his exuberant daughter Clara, his incredible wife Shadi, and the Baha'i teachings.