

Models and Idols

Towards a philosophy of the community of mind

Sháhbaz Fatheazam

Preamble

My sincere thanks go to the organisers of the Irfán Colloquium for making it possible to cross the globe and join you on this auspicious 10th anniversary of this initiative. A chill ran up my spine when I first received the invitation. I hadn't even come across the word 'colloquium' before. I had to look it up. Its meaning was revealing. The term colloquium means as much an informal gathering for the exchange of views as it does an academic seminar on a broad field of study. Such latitude definitely made me feel at home.

But first a personal introduction. Who am I? A non-academic venturing outside his field? Doubly insulting to all of you distinguished listeners. A safe specialist talking to a non-specialist audience on matters he knows nothing about? Hardly. A demolition expert of simplistic either-ors with more respect for academic complexity than the authority of the heart? Too brash and immodest. The public intellectual seeking influence or the timid seeker attempting at quality? Neither if the world continues to remain disenchanting. The value of gatherings such as this lies not so much in how well we clear suspicion from the intellectual mind but how well we portray sincerity to the rational soul. How we find truth is as important as how we tell it. The politics of Bahá'í scholarship lies precisely in balancing accuracy with sincerity and this tends to reduce conflict as undue emphasis on precision alone will always take power away from one group or the other. In our zest to get to the facts we must avoid being seduced by the siren song of our own agenda and to be led into making the facts fit our pet theories rather than fostering a framework which fits reality. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) said if the fact that two and two makes four were to become a matter of political relevance, there would be a faction to deny it. It is precisely to avoid fractioning scholarship that wisdom, spiritual perception and sincere language should be more than a mere appendix to knowledge. These should be our permanent referees. For a while knowledge and wisdom remained bitter opponents until

the staff of Hermes turned them into celebrated complements as symbolized by the caduceus.

With less mythical flare, we propose the same here today. We wish to see how we as a special emerging world community could meet and overcome the two major modern obstacles to truth — suspicion and skepticism. The fear of deception is real and doubt universal. Should there be no objective truth or reality can any human experiment last? If the greatness of man is a function of the greatness of what he loves maybe it is to the heart first that we must turn before examining the rules? Is there any philosophy that simultaneously addresses the human being as a rational agent but also as a package of passions and impulses? All these questions and more were too compelling to be left unanswered.

The question ‘Who am I?’ has, however, been left unanswered and remarks so far have responded more to the question ‘What must we be?’ however coarsely addressed. In any case, to be respectful to those here present I offer this line stolen from a distinguished Bahá’í scholar of the recent past. “We are not so wise nor so good as we should like to be; nor even so wise and good as we hope soon to become. God Himself alone is a perfect teacher.”¹

Introduction

The paper today, short and unsystematic — the limits of what can be said in a sixty-minute lecture show through — is not a reintroduction to Bahá’í community. The title ‘*Towards a Philosophy of the Community of Mind*’ should not be regarded as offensive in implying to mean that we have strayed so far from the ideal that it is necessary to provide the means to return to it. Nor is the presentation intended to be homiletical: sermons are too moralistic to be of value. But rather it is to be viewed as an exercise in tensions — to comprehend the incomprehensible, to objectify what we cannot know objectively. If the word community has been defined as ‘*a most elusive and vague term ... and without specific meaning*’ and ‘*essentially a mental construct*’ (*Dictionary of Sociology*, Penguin 2000, page 64) then imagine the difficulty of applying sublime concepts to a collection of people in a permanent state of becoming. ‘Community’ is becoming and ‘mind’ thinking. But thinking and being are too remote from each other for us to see them as anything else but two human states in eternal, fraternal conflict.² Nevertheless it is the coexistence of action and learning that modifies community and its traditions and any systematic study centered on this exchange can only be valuable. One final reminder. The word ‘philosophy’ in the title is but a synonym, albeit a pompous one, for meditation and does not represent any groundbreaking structural theory of social

change nor doctrine.³ Nor is the title as a whole an attempt at self-aggrandizement.

There are too many creating too many catchy terms and trademarks for these to be treated as anything but poor badges of scholarship and slogans in themselves have always been too spurious to be grounds for investigative reasoning quite apart from the fact that labels have lost their simplistic charm.⁴ Given that no adequate definition of community exists other than uninspiring minimalist references to a collection of people with a sense of belonging or with similar interests or restrictive definitions heavily dependent on which group views what for what purposes (the urban planner will define community in terms of boundaries, the politician in terms of constituents, the anthropologist in terms of culture and so on), we shall use the following text of the Universal House of Justice: "A community is ... more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress." (Ridvan Message 1996). The concept of community here is dynamic (a purposive functional unit) and theory related – building unity and effective development in areas of permanent concern of mankind (welfare in the wider context of progress and prosperity).

The text goes on to show how recurring patterns of Bahá'í community life manifest "the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members.... in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth.... It implies a collective will and sense of purpose." (idem) The concept of will and purpose are vital to our understanding of the notion 'community of mind'. The noted German sociologist Ferdinand Toennies (1855-1936) identifies two forms of human will: (1) the essential will defined as 'the underlying, organic, or instinctive driving force' in which community membership is self-fulfilling, and (2) arbitrary will which is deliberative, purposive, and future (goal) oriented, often associated with the wider society and State. Both types of wills, according to Toennies, can be found in two basic types of social groups – the community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*).

Community of Mind

The community of mind, a concept which Toennies also originates, is the ideal community, a format kinship represented by

friendship (*Community Society*, 42).⁵ According to Tönnies, a community based on similar interests (*Gemeinschaft*) has as its basis a real community and the only real form of life.⁶ He famously noted, "In community people remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in society they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors." *Gemeinschaft*, a "community of mind and feeling" results from likeness and from shared life-experience. In simple terms, it implies human relationships that are intimate and enduring, understanding each member to be a unique human being, a sacred soul, with dignity. Social bonds in such situations are characterised by sentiment, commitment and depth. Emphasis in *Gemeinschaft* was on kinship, locality and mind (sentiment). He argued that all three of these had been seriously disrupted in the transition to *Gesellschaft*. This social group is suggestive of the impersonal, instrumental and largely contractual relationships that are taken to characterise life in modern society. It is based on rationality rather than sentiment. These concepts serve as a useful device for giving expression to a dominant thought that a community-based social order is being destroyed by processes of industrialisation and urbanization and that, as a result, values were being undermined, the basis of solidarity within the society was being changed and an older closeness was being lost.

Bahá'í communities may be viewed today as similarly undergoing profound change as per the Toennies' dichotomy, shifting from a community sustained by spirit to a society sustained by instrument. A new 'culture of growth' is emerging which some view as alienating (but not as discouraging) as the process of urbanization is to family and neighborhood. Just as Toennies feared that the evolution from community to city would create an impersonal society destructive to common understanding and time-honoured customs so too many see the new culture of growth (to be defined shortly) as the evolution of one type of Bahá'í community to another, one less nourishing and impersonal, causing fears not dissimilar to the German sociologist, but infinitely less darksome: "The entire culture' he says, 'has been transformed into a civilization of state and *Gesellschaft*, and this transformation means the doom of culture itself if none of its scattered seeds remain alive and again bring forth the essence and idea of *Gemeinschaft*, thus secretly fostering a new culture amidst the decaying one." To this we can match a recent sentiment of despair from a British Bahá'í:

I have seen personally diverse manifestations of such discouragement. I see them in desperate exhortations to teach the Faith in which the sense of urgency is accompanied by an element of despondency and resentment. I see them in strong, faithful Bahá'ís who

choose to become inactive in the community on account of their perception of dysfunctionality.⁷

Metánoia – the New Insight

The problem of transition in Bahá'í community is heightened by the fact that whereas Toennies contrasts between a social order which rests on harmony (consensus of wills) and is developed and ennobled by religion, and another which rests on convention and agreement, safeguarded by political legislation, in the Bahá'í community there is a fusion of the two forms of social groups. Order and bonding are consecrated by a divine charter protected by divinely established social structure and laws. It is inevitable then that perplexity mounts when believers seek to acquaint themselves with 'the profound change in Bahá'í culture' when the change itself has been capitalized on through the formal agency of established order, in this case the Four Year Plan of the House of Justice launched in 1996 which may be viewed as a landmark enterprise in initiating a new community consciousness on a single focus – advancing the process of entry by troops. Where should allegiance lie? In the divided loyalty which emerges we are pressed to choose between the inner promptings of a free but dedicated spirit or the outer exigencies of a benevolent but formal order? A good example of the metaphysical debate over self and the polis outside of it is the culture shock of the new methods of Bahá'í activity against the old habits of the heart. "There are no shortcuts," writes the Universal House of Justice.

Systematization ensures consistency of lines of action based on well-conceived plans. In a general sense, it implies an orderliness of approach in all that pertains to Bahá'í service ... While allowing for individual initiative and spontaneity, it suggests the need to be clear-headed, methodical, efficient, constant, balanced and harmonious. Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning... (Ridvan Message, 1998)

Are not efficiency and systematization obvious tendencies of religion's secularization? Is there not a real danger of our religion falling into the age-old dilemma of intellectualization and disenchantment? Does there not exist a real possibility that our new culture of growth is ceding religion's mystery to the clarity and control of bureaucracy? The testing ground for adopting the necessary values and attitudes to establish true Bahá'í communities lies in this: that while individuals receive their share from a common center of belief and root their strength of faith from this common center, the center itself displays both the conditions of Gesellschaft-like civilization in which peace and order are maintained through

rules as much as conditions of *Gemeinschaft* family solidarity where its members share a morally significant history, collectively striving to realize ideals and aspirations governed by sentiments of trust, cooperation and altruism. Can the religious ethic of brotherliness sustain itself in the face of the increasing changes to its form?

The development of a 'systematic' image of community is not anathema to religion (nor new).⁸ As Weber points out in 'Science as Vocation' (1919), such organization of the modern self does not necessarily take power away from religion; it allows people to take a corrective stance in response to the senselessness in the world. He suggests that religions of redemption tend toward systematic, comprehensive rationalizations of problems and their solutions, in contrast to magical religions which are remedial in a non-systematic way. The new culture of growth is developing a distinctive form of collective enterprise without necessarily forfeiting our Faith's distinctive and vital function. But sustainable growth by building on the necessary capacity at the levels of the individual, the institution, and the community is a three-legged stool in need of balance. This can be achieved commanding a new insight best described by the Greek word *metánoia*, literally repentance (*Woodhouse English-Greek Dictionary*, 696) but more generally used to mean to change one's mind as in respect for the new. Change is only meaningful if we alter the mental model that shapes the way we think about individuals, institutions, and community that shall benefit from change.

Metanoia wrongly understood is a guilt ridden awareness of all that is going wrong in our lives and society. Metanoia properly understood is a push forward toward something better for us and for our world. It is not change for change's sake but positive change *with deep understanding* of the implications. We see it in the first syllable, "meta" in Greek meaning "with," and "noia" meaning understanding. Therefore if progress, process, and development are inevitable in Bahá'í community and are to be accompanied by this new insight, what value/attitude typology is there to adopt to promote and foster a community that best expresses the essential will while maintaining intact the unifying principles of the arbitrary will?

Culture of Growth

Before examining this issue it is important we look more closely to the concept 'culture of growth' first mentioned in the January 9th, 2001, Message of the UHJ to the Continental Board of Counsellors. The phrase "culture of growth" at face value seems redundant. The right culture is a significant determinant of a community's ability to

grow and prosper. Culture shapes our thoughts, feelings and action. Imagine, for a moment, the negative impact on young businessmen in Ghana forestalled in involving themselves in affairs of international business simply because of the traditional respect to elders who do not wish for the younger generation to be involved in events beyond their national boundaries?⁹ Or the obstacles to upward mobility and self-improvement which the resignation of the poor in certain societies represents? Or the low priority given to the education of girls because of gender inequality? The point here, reinforced with countless other studies, is that culture matters in any collective behaviour, be it social or economic, albeit representing a very complex story.¹⁰ The most pervasive and harmful tendencies in culture are to revert to the familiar and to revere the past, at the price of neglecting the present. One cabinet member of an African country, for example, when questioned on the issue of underfunding the AIDS programme in his country and how he could look at some of the accomplishments of Uganda in this area he replied that they, and “not Uganda had possessed the third highest standard of living in Africa” twenty-five years ago. Clearly blind pride and a lack of openness that stands in the way of learning and innovation may not be prevalent in Bahá'í communities but we are not immune from such error. Another obstacle is the error induced by conservatism. To continue with ritual and repetition rather than decipher the real meaning of tradition is unjustified. It is tantamount to forsaking the tribulations of the Prophet in providing precisely that new gestalt to break down ritualistic conservatism.

Growth depends on changing the way we think about growth. The same for progress, prosperity or any other idea behind man's quest for community. Introspection is important. A modern community stresses a continuous process of self-analysis. The Universal House of Justice shows its foresight when it writes that “the periodic reevaluation of the effectiveness of the teaching work is an essential factor in promoting the growth of every community.” (Lample p. 132). As one distinguished scholar from Stanford put it “A modern nation is self-correcting”. (Inkeles *One World Emerging*, 24). So how people actually think or feel are important concepts.¹¹ Specialists acknowledge now after five decades of frustrated development, for example, that mental models may offer the best way to understand and attack the problem of poverty. Our mental states influence the way we behave and precede culture as the key variable. Peter Senge, in his groundbreaking book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) defines mental models as “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action”. (p 8). Nobel laureate Douglas North writes that human beings use ‘both ... mental models ... and institutions “ to “shape the performance of

economies.” Columnist and economist Paul Krugman admits that “Economists are notoriously uninterested in how people actually think or feel.” But again it is counterproductive to discuss a particular value/attitude typology without being clear of what we mean by growth. Have a conducive mentality for what? Progress in which area? Expansion where? Consolidation and improvement to what end? Progress is commonly defined as a movement towards economic development, social justice, and political freedom. As Bahá’ís we do not disagree with this interpretation but find it imperfect. Its shortcoming is its imbalance.¹²

Progress is not so much a ‘movement towards’ a desired material objective but a ‘turning to’ a dominant spiritual force – the efficient cause which gives finality to all human effort as well as true balance. Material progress is activity, spiritual progress is reflexivity.¹³ Take the latter away and the work of the Cause becomes the work of an international aid agency and not that of a ‘healing Agency, this leavening Power, this cementing Force, intensely alive and all-pervasive ...’ The words of Shakespeare are revealing: “Take but degree away, untune that string, and hark, what discord follows. Each thing meets in mere oppugnancy.” (Troilus and Cressida Act I, scene II): The fairest testimony of mankind to itself today – its state of disequilibrium and disharmony where vision is befogged and systems have lost their virtue despite all efforts to redeem it.

The central issue, therefore, in our discussion on culture, community and growth should not be so much me–you, us and them, but between the me here and now and the me there and then. How I grow daily turning to the heaven of holiness is as vital as how the community grows periodically moving towards prosperity. How I recognize my limitations in understanding truth will turn more effective my work in translating ‘that which hath been written into reality and action.’ (TB 166) The two processes are interdependent and are the defining attributes of simultaneously building an ideal society and perfecting the behaviour of individuals – the key to resolving Tonnies’ dilemma of society and community. Not dissimilar to Shoghi Effendi’s message captured in his ‘double crusade’: “first, to regenerate the inward life” of our own communities, “and next to assail the longstanding evils that have entrenched themselves in the life” of nations. (ADJ 34)

Idols

The mental model needed to carry out this double crusade (to be defined shortly) cannot be beset with certain natural tendencies or defects (idols) which prevent us from achieving a full and accurate

understanding of the ethics of community. (The word “idol” here is used not in the sense of false god but from the Greek *eidolon* meaning image or phantom). Many centuries ago a bright Englishman introduced a famous doctrine which serves us well to this day.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626), perhaps in his charge to establish the basis for the emerging scientific philosophy of empiricism, highlights in his book *Novum Organon* (1620), four different classes of idols (Book I Aphorisms 39-68) that we must recognize to counteract falsehood and avoid dogma and ignorance. One of the four, Bacon's 'Idols of the Tribe' refer to the natural weaknesses and tendencies common to human nature. Only the Idols of the Tribe are not the result of nurture. All the others are acquired through intercourse with other men and the particular environments in which thinking takes place. We chose *Idola tribus* because they are innate, they cannot be completely eliminated, but only recognized and compensated for. Some of Bacon's examples are: reverting to the familiar, wishful thinking (according to Bacon, we have a natural inclination to accept, believe, and even prove what we would prefer to be true), and our tendency to rush to conclusions. Spelling out the ways in which the Idols of the Tribe come to bear on the human understanding, persistently creating bias and twisting its workings in specific directions in specific directions, Bacon observed: 'The human understanding resembles not a dry light, but admits a tincture of the will and passions, which generate their own system accordingly – for man always believes more readily that which he prefers.'

Preference here is given to Bacon rather than other modern theories of unlearning,¹⁴ principally because of its datedness and how, independent of the period, man always incubates misleading assumptions as self-created barriers to truth owed to fear, prejudice, and principally, in the case of religion, fixed antagonism. We carry 'an enchanted glass, full of superstitions and imposture', which robs the full potential of the inquiring mind and weakens the beneficial leverage of mental models designed to see the world anew. The mental model we are referring to are the concepts of trust and resignation set in the context of a trustless world and a technology dependent society with the emphasis being made not so much on the central importance of these values to personal spiritual development and social stability but that trust and resignation are indispensable states of mind in the compelling saga of the quest for true community. We shall see how both of these attitudes are consequential to the behavioural implications of steadfastness in the face of a disobedient self and the lure of irresponsible freedom bent on interpreting rules in peculiar ways.

Trust and Resignation

In the Book of My Covenant (*Kitáb-i-'Ahdí*) two key words appear early on in the text – ‘trust’ and ‘resignation’:

Although the Realm of Glory hath none of the vanities of the world, yet within the treasury of trust and resignation We have bequeathed to Our heirs an excellent and priceless heritage. Earthly treasures We have not bequeathed, nor have We added such cares as they entail. (TB)

Trust and resignation, the needed value/attitude typology referred to earlier, are sister obligations, a sacred dyad, the duality principle on which depends our outcome as true agents in connexion with God, where social virtue (trust) and personal quality (resignation) seal a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical aspects of Bahá'í communities.

In our daily lives we accept and trust the judgement of highly trained professionals to cure us, to educate us, to protect us. Trust is a binding, stabilizing, critical factor of social order and progress. How much so to trust in the judgement of the Divine Physician. The Manifestations of God are

the very life of the world, and the skilled physician of each ailing soul ... relate thou the Teachings of the Abhá Beauty to the urgent needs of this present day, and thou wilt see that they provide an instant remedy for the ailing body of the world. Indeed, they are the elixir that bringeth eternal health. (SWAB 59)

To apply the teachings to the needs of the age we must forsake our ‘idle fancies and vain imaginings’ and trust the judgement, vision and understanding of the Prophet. ‘... whatsoever are the effective means for safeguarding and promoting the happiness and welfare of the children of men have already been revealed by the Pen of Glory.’ (TB) This is not just a pious and spontaneous religious outburst but a comprehensive statement to believe in and a most effective ethical value to be shared, especially by those who hold positions of responsibility in the Cause of God to maintain order and organization in a divine trust committed to our charge by God’s Messenger for today.¹⁵ No society is possible without order and Bahá'u'lláh's concept of order is centralized in the Covenant which has its genesis in Revelation, authority necessarily superior to human reason. As such “carries with it Assurance beyond Doubt, Evidence beyond Exception.”¹⁶ The consequence of this axiom is the assent of reason to authority – the immediate faith (well captured by the Hebrew word *emunah* or “trusting in the Covenant”) – and virtues

like loyalty, honesty and dependability or trust must necessarily begin to flourish.

The Bahá'í model of society not only encourages and protects such ethics but depends on them for its prosperity. The evolution of technology, the fermenting of new social relationships and the consolidation of global networks depend on the prevalence of trust. But more importantly trust in the Covenant avoids the disaggregating forces of progress in the secular world as well as guard against heliocentric tendency of religion to coercive power. These may be avoided if both community and the institutional framework remain faithful to the Covenant and conduct their business on its axis *even though they may not know, or cannot fully understand, the connections or benefits.*

There is a broader implication of dependency, however, which is expressed in the peculiar spiritual vision of Bahá'u'lláh of human reality:

They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way ... inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favour, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets. (KI 3-4)

The Kitáb-i-'Ahdí has branded in the word Covenant an attitude to trust very different from current legal-rational codes of conduct and moral-ethical guides to collective behaviour, no matter how precise, creative, or even technologically fully proven these have been made out to be. In the Bahá'í way of life humility is the cornerstone of trust relationships. Given our overwhelming limitations as human beings and the need to respect the rules as active members of a diverse community we have a spiritual obligation to distance ourselves from any corrupt inclination of fame and popularity which false notions of rank and position breed. In the Book of His Covenant, we find the standard against which to measure our worth not as haughty creatures but as humble servants conscious of the gift that our virtues are not intrinsically our own but rather manifestations of the attributes of God.

'Say: all things are of God.' This exalted utterance is like unto water for quenching the fire of hate and enmity which smouldereth within the hearts and breasts of men. By this single utterance contending peoples and kindreds will attain the light of true unity.

The greater the humility of the holders of trust the greater the probability that trust shall succeed as a social virtue; the richer the quality of servitude the more abundant the results of service; the more absent ambition, the more present the “esteem and real affection” of subject to ruler. The effective discharge of duty and leadership in the Cause is not dependent on proficiency or power but humility and service and this breeds resignation.¹⁷ Patience and resignation are the hard-earned marks of a true believer because they represent the highest form of belief as evidenced by sacrifice. But for trust, however, resignation cannot exist. Acquiescence implies self-deliverance to a trusting power. Any other combination is compulsion not resignation and where there is compulsion there is no joy (*“Compulsion and felicity cannot be together”*) with all its implications for social rupture and alienation. Trust must be established first for resignation to follow; I must trust the law before I am able to resign and be patient to its outcome. And the patience I bear must be true and forbearing, anything else is resignation’s forgery, a cheap, chalked image of a master design. In Bahá’u’lláh’s mystical work, the Seven Valleys, we read of the fruit of patience:

... without patience the wayfarer on this journey will reach nowhere and attain no goal. Nor should he ever be downhearted; if he strive for a hundred thousand years and yet fail to behold the beauty of the Friend, he should not falter.... In their search, they have stoutly girded up the loins of service, and seek at every moment to journey from the plane of heedlessness into the realm of being. No bond shall hold them back, and no counsel shall deter them.
(SVFV 5)

By dominating the ego and its ‘evil passions and desires’ (referred to in the Book of His Covenant as *nafs* and *havas*) – precisely the two imposters in Bacon’s tribe of Idols – we are free to surrender. Trust in authority higher than our own and resignation to circumstances beyond our control has as its basis the strength of certitude and conscious faith and not the powerlessness of passive fatalism or self-denial. This is the poverty of resignation and creates obdurate mental models that impede progress and victimize its participants. ‘It is good to suffer in this life because in the next life you will find eternal reward’. Or ‘We must not challenge the will of God’. Such impoverished mind-sets need to be reoriented to promote prosperity. Nor does resignation mean to be imprudent. The words of a fisherman from Galilee resound to this day “Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” Mathew 10:16

Bahá’u’lláh has swept away the belief in the virtue of living a hard life as invented by Stoics or argued by Cynics.¹⁸ In the Bahá’í

Covenant resignation is not an end in itself but a means for patient obedience to be learnt. Submission to the Will of God in the last analysis helps us accept outcomes contrary to our expectations – a state of mind which our natural pride disallows with insolence. As the lesson of Abraham offering his son Isaac for sacrifice in the Old Testament teaches us no sacrifice is too hard when God demands it. Resignation is trust in the mystery of the standard, “*He doeth what He willeth, ordaineth what He pleaseth.*” (Qur’án 2:254)

This is valid in our daily lives as much as it is in our administrative duties as Bahá’ís or in our research as scholars. Well-intentioned effort and praiseworthy achievement vanish in the Cause when those responsible for such acts become proud and arrogant, ‘the most deadly of sins’ and dismiss contrariness with airy condescension. Blatant disrespect, even its lesser manifestation grudging compliance, are tantamount to forgetting our part of the bargain as loyal covenanters (no partnership withstands the cult of the petty personality for any length of time) aside from displaying a poor understanding of the ultimate aim in the life of every soul – to attain spiritual excellence.

Whoever has his eyes fixed on the goal of attaining the good pleasure of God will accept with joy and radiant acquiescence whatever work or station is assigned to him in the Cause of God, and will rejoice to serve Him under all conditions. (UHJ, Ranks and Functions in the Bahá’í Cause, letter dated 03/27/1978)

It is to this aspect of contentment and resignation that part of Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet Madínatu’r-Ridá (City of Radiant Acquiescence), revealed in Baghdád, advances. To be pleased with the believers and to be humble before them is explained in the Tablet as an important attribute of “contentment and radiant acquiescence.”

To show pride towards them is to show pride to God; for man cannot attain the good-pleasure of his Creator unless he obtains the good-pleasure of His loved ones.

Bereft of God’s love, service in the Covenant is barren. Without radiance and resignation efforts in promoting the interests of the Cause lose efficacy. Applying the mental model of trust and resignation all human calculation is suspended. It is the dialectic of faith at its most refined (we are conscious of our choice but on the strength of the seemingly absurd) of which we can only form a conception and not a comprehension. The incommensurable, however, is recognizable given its heroic quality, memorably defined by Kierkegaard: “The knights of infinite resignation are readily

recognizable, their gait is gliding, bold.” (*Fear and Trembling* 1843, 67).

Final Words

To correct the antithetical tendencies of society and community and to understand the new culture of growth that is sweeping before us (the world-wide reception to a sequence of courses offered by training institutes and the movement of geographic clusters from one stage of growth to the next has hardly been an easy learning experience not to mention trying) and avoid being the ‘magical religion’ in the Weberian sense we must question our accumulated beliefs, methods, knowledge, systems, habits, stories and traditional patterns of community behaviour. We become comfortable with our limited models, despite their obvious incompleteness. We are hesitant with the new because of our misconceived loyalties. The new culture is a credence good – it has to be taken on faith. Its quality cannot be determined by inspection, in advance of purchase. That is why monitoring input is so important. If the quality of the output cannot be determined readily, the next best way of ascertaining quality may be to monitor input quality. Not to screen the three active participants of social change but to approach individuals, institutions, and the community with compassion and understanding and raising each of them to a new level of spirituality.

With regard to the ideal society, all philosophers whether classical or revolutionary attest to the ascendancy of the spiritual bond over all others in maintaining the fabric of society. The community of mind is the closest to such an image. It is a community whose language is a spiritual language; it is not spoken, it is felt. It is a community that recognizes the fundamental needs of human existence and self-expression but no longer blames the order or society for its defects. It regards as shameful for its members to have to rely on others to obtain their inner sense of justice. This makes of us slaves and others our master. The root of the Latin word ‘societas’ is to share, to unite, man’s carbon copy of an ancient divine exhortation: “... let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” (Philippians 3:16) and the Master’s oft-repeated desideratum: “... that we may unite even as the waves of one sea and become merged together as the rays of Thine effulgent Light; that our thoughts, our views, our feelings may become as one reality, manifesting the spirit of union throughout the world.” (BP 138) By combining social perception (Tonnie) with philosophical perspective (Bacon) and by acknowledging the Bahá’í categorical imperative of trust in the Divine Covenant and its institutions, we have not today constructed the community of mind so much as tried to portray the need to be masters of the art of composition when attempting to

bring communities as close as possible to the divine original. In bringing all lives, all ends, all values and all means into total articulation with one another we must, first and foremost, be artists and not technicians, poets and not statesmen, rational souls and not public intellectuals. Skepticism be replaced by estheticism, workers by seekers. In short, a community composed of men and women with 'fire in their minds'. "The passion ending, doth the purpose lose." (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*)

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NOTES

¹ George Townshend, in *George Townshend*, page 223.

² The mythological saga of the Titan brothers Prometheus and Epimetheus, meaning ‘forethought’ and ‘afterthought’ respectively, and delegated by Zeus to create mankind may well symbolize the tension of thinking before acting and acting before thinking that characterize community in history and its reshaping under everchanging conditions.

³ The title of the presentation must not be confused with the concept ‘philosophy of the mind’ which is concerned with the nature of mental phenomena in general and the role of consciousness, sensation, perception etc. Standard problems include those of free will, personal identity, mind-body problem and so on.

⁴ At a January 2002 session of the Astronomical Society meeting, a young astronomer named Brian Mason, of Caltech, presented the lead paper in one of the main cosmology sessions. His discussion paper bore the title, “Measurements of the CMB Power Spectrum to $L = 4000$ with the CBI”. Whatever happened to Einstein’s blunt “The Foundation of the General Theory of Relativity” or “The Big Bang Cosmology”? ‘*God in the Equation: How Einstein Transformed Religion*’ Corey S. Powell, page 242.

⁵ Tönnies’ major work, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (first published in 1887), is available in English translation (edited and translated by Charles P. Loomis) as *Community and Society* (1957).

⁶ Not dissimilar to the Aristotelian ideal of the intimate, reciprocating local community bound by shared ends.

⁷ See letter from an individual believer to the UHJ, dated August 9th, 2002 posted on the Internet <http://bahai-library.org/uhj/enrollments.growth.html>

⁸ The idea of a systematic approach to Bahá’í activity first appears in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to the Bahá’ís of the Central States, revealed on March 29, 1916 where he counsels that the teaching effort should be conducted ‘systematically and enthusiastically’.

⁹ Such pressure of course can have the opposite effect as in the case of Chinese merchants who had no choice but to excel at making money because Confucianism formally placed the merchants near the bottom of the social scale. Plato had similar disregard for the commercial class relegating them to the lower abdomen together with craftsmen and husbandmen in his analogy of comparing the activities of the State with bodily functions (Republic).

¹⁰ The fact that the same values do produce different consequences in different circumstances is just one of the paradoxical relationships between culture and economic behaviour.

¹¹ Sociologists as early as the 1900s questioned the cultural origins of economic development beginning with Max Weber’s famous work *Die*

protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism) 1922; then followed by anthropologists such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict (her teacher) in the 1940s, to be completed in the 1980s with the most prominent contribution to the value of culture in understanding societies written by Lawrence Harrison, entitled “Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind – the Latin American Case” (1985) where he concludes that culture has been a primary obstacle to development.

¹² Social observers refer to development along exclusively material lines and focus on three drivers: technology (scientific advance), goods (economic output), and freedom (political, cultural and social emancipation). The materialist stance is highlighted by a World Bank publication, *The Quality of Growth* (2000), which equates quality of life with higher per capita income, equitable education and job opportunities, greater gender equality, better health and nutrition, cleaner and more sustainable natural environment, more impartial judicial and legal system, broader civil and political freedom and a richer cultural life.

¹³ Reflexivity does not simply imply reflection, but a “self-confrontation created by the dynamics of modernisation” (Giddens, Beck “*Reflexive Modernization*”, 1995). The disposition for reflexivity is created by the constant flow of information characterizing modern communities and which forces these simultaneously to revise themselves. The spiritual dimension is the collective self-confrontation with eternal spiritual principles.

¹⁴ Systems thinking (and its sensibility for subtle interconnectedness), feedback concepts of cybernetics and servo-mechanism engineering theory are all famously discussed and applied in Peter M. Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline: the Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*, 1990, Doubleday.

¹⁵ Reference here to elected Bahá’í representatives and scholars may not be uncalled given that so much responsibility is borne by these legitimately qualified defenders of social order and progress, especially scholars, whose high attainment “make it possible for them to contribute in important ways to the advancement of civilization [and] are deserving of society’s recognition and gratitude.” Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, March 14, 1996.

¹⁶ John Locke, quoted in Wendy M. Heller’s exposition “Covenant and the Foundations of Civil Society”, published in BW 1995-96. If faith constitutes the supreme degree of assent possible by human reason, this poses a serious challenge especially to Bahá’í scholars who must “try to avoid the snare of allowing a divorce between their faith and their reason.” See the Memorandum on Scholarship in the Universal House of Justice letter dated January 3rd, 1979.

¹⁷ Much debate today is being centred on the concept of the servant-leader as the management paradigm of the future where the philosophy of service is present in the practice of leadership. Embedded in

teamwork and community, the servant-leader asks the questions, “Whom do we serve?” and “For what purpose?” testing the idea that those served grow as persons, “become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants.” See *The Power of Servant Leadership*, edited by Larry C. Spears. See also a seminal article by Jim Collins entitled “Level 5 Leadership, the Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve”, *Harvard Business Review*, January 2001 issue.

¹⁸ The common ground of Stoicism and Cynicism is the manner in which both respond to the inevitable cycle of senescence and decay. Their gesture that living in accordance with Nature reduces man’s wants is not a celebration of life but its depreciation, and therefore contrary to Bahá’í belief.