
Injustice Against Bahá'u'lláh and the Evolution of Human Rights

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Introduction

At this time in history when “justice is awakening,” a yearning for it lies at the heart of the evolving moral and legal framework for the protection of individuals from government injustice associated with religious belief, race, gender, cultural and civilization orientations, and age. While justice is not the only value vital to removing injustices, the range of meaningful application of the concept is extremely wide. Its postulates include human rights as a means of preventing abuses by oppressive governments.

In connection with a primary purpose of the Prophets' advent, which, according to the Bahá'í writings, is to “*transform ignorance into wisdom, injustice into justice, error into knowledge, cruelty into affection,*”¹ and the persecution of the Bahá'í Faith that drew into its vortex the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith (1817-1892), this paper suggests that His response to the wrongs inflicted upon Him by the tyrannical mid-nineteenth century rulers of Persia and the Ottoman Empire is a part of humanity's quest for global justice, of which the remarkable evolution of human rights is an element. It is impossible to understand the transformation without looking to His exceptional life story.

¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Divine Philosophy* (Boston: The Tutor Press, 1916), p. 110.

Divine Guidance through Words and Deeds

The whole story of the cause and effect relation began in 1844 when Bahá'u'lláh accepted the Faith of the Báb, the Founder of the Bábí Faith (1819-1850), Who proclaimed He was the Herald of the dawning Bahá'í Dispensation. Clergy and officials were terrified of the Báb's claim. Thousands across Persia embraced His Faith. On July 9, 1850, the government had Him bound and shot by 750 soldiers in the public square of Tabriz, Iran.

Stepping into a new religious life, a century before the modern human rights movement began in the years following World War II, Bahá'u'lláh fearlessly championed the Faith of the Báb, of which His own Revelation was its destined "fruit and flower." It was during the Bábí period that He was first incarcerated in the house of a religious leader in Tehran. After that He was imprisoned in the residence of the governor of Ámul, pelted with stones on the streets by a fanatical mob intent on taking His life, and tortured in the mosque of that city.

Bahá'u'lláh's mission began in 1852, fulfilling the messianic promise of the Báb. From the very birth of the Bahá'í Faith in the dark, damp, filthy and pestilential "Black Pit" subterranean prison in Tehran, where He was chained, Bahá'u'lláh was relentlessly persecuted by despotic government officials and vicious clerics. Soon after, He was exiled to Baghdad, where in 1863 He declared He was the One Whom the Báb had promised would provide the divine guidance needed for humanity's unification. What historians call the "law of unintended consequences" is clearly illustrated by the fact that after the Báb was executed and Bahá'u'lláh exiled from His country, it was thought the Bahá'í Dispensation would not be manifested. What might be learned from this reality?

Over the forty-eight years of intense persecution, He was falsely accused, summarily arrested, ruthlessly sentenced without any regard to His innocence, savagely imprisoned, subject to the bastinado (a particularly painful torture which involves beating the soles of the feet with a cane), chained, betrayed, poisoned and stripped of material possessions. He was set upon by assassins in Baghdad, in Adrianople, and approached by yet another assassin in 'Akká. His banishments took Him from Tehran to Baghdad, to Constantinople, to Adrianople and then to the fortress prison-city of 'Akká. Of His final exile in 1868, intended to blot Him from the face of the earth, and where He spent the last twenty-four years of His Ministry, He wrote that the despotic 'Abdu'l-'Azíz, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, made Him "*with glaring injustice, enter the Most Great Prison.*"²

² Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 22.

There, He died an Exile in 1892. He marked it as “*the most desolate of cities of the world, the most unsightly of them in appearance, the most detestable in climate, and the foulest in water.*”³ Of this fourth and final banishment, in response to His claim that He was the latest Manifestation and to His teachings of ‘justice and right,’ the Bahá’í Writings make clear the transformative consequence: “*His enemies intended that His imprisonment should completely destroy and annihilate this Cause, but this prison was, in reality, of the greatest assistance, and became the means of its development.*” And: “*The Almighty . . . transformed this Prison-House into the Most Exalted Paradise, the Heaven of Heavens.*”⁴

Regarding the proposition that Bahá'u'lláh's response to the cruelties is a fundamental source for removing forces of injustice that encompass the world, it could be asked: What insights might be gained regarding the efficacy of divine revelation, the value of justice as a virtue of character and the ruling principle for the organization of society by becoming acquainted with the sufferings of Bahá'u'lláh? Might the reality that all the Prophets endured grievous hardships, sorrows, pains, and afflictions in order to transform, in measures suited to wisdom and various conditions, injustice into justice inspire deeper appreciation for the spiritual dimensions of the universal quest for justice?

Offering a compelling perspective, the Bahá’í Writings express: “*The Prophets . . . were, each and every one subjected to the bitterest afflictions that the world has to offer and were targets for all the cruelties and aggressions of mankind.*”⁵ “*Not one Prophet of God was made manifest Who did not fall a victim to the relentless hate, to the denunciation, denial, and execration of the clerics of His day.*”⁶ “*Each nation hath plotted darkly against their Messenger to lay violent hold on Him.*”⁷

What cause-and-effect relation lies behind the tribulations, anguish, grief, and pain inflicted upon Bahá'u'lláh by desperate oppressors, and the modern evolution of human rights? What might be determined about fairness and equity for all from the fact that He taught of justice through the injustice He bore? In one of His Tablets, He wrote: “*My purpose in coming to this corrupt world where the tyrants and traitors, by their acts of cruelty and oppression, have closed the doors of peace and tranquility to all mankind is to establish . . . the forces of justice, trust, security and faith.*” In that same Tablet, He declared that, as a result of His advent, there shall “*be such a standard of justice . . . and such a lack of treachery and degradation of others in the future that the rights of people will not be violated.*”⁸

³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 186.

⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1994), p. 35.

⁶ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust 1931), p. 165.

⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2002), p. 123.

⁸ Bahá’u’lláh quoted in Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, vol. 2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1977), p. 14.

First of all, according to the Bahá'í Writings, *“the human condition of the Holy Manifestations is subjected to tests, and when Their strength and endurance have by this means been revealed in the plenitude of power, other men receive instructions therefrom, and are made aware of how great must be their own steadfastness and endurance under tests and trials. For the divine Educator must teach by words and also by deed, thus revealing to all the straight pathway of truth.”*⁹ Thus, as indicated more fully below, the afflictions Bahá'u'lláh bore were a part of a teaching *“by deed,” “instructions,” “revealing to all the straight pathway of truth.”*

It has also been determined that the injustice enabled Him *“to release fresh powers of life that would have otherwise lain latent, to pour forth Divine energies which in their boundlessness will utterly overwhelm the forces of evil . . . enable us in some degree to measure the immensity of His love for mankind, to appreciate the sacrifice He made for love of us. The story of them enables us to keep in remembrance the heinous blackness and cruelty of the world of man . . . it enables us to realize the meaning and the need of Divine redemption.”*¹⁰

Reflections on Bahá'u'lláh's response to the injustice may increase appreciation that it is often the personal dimension of righteous lives that touches hearts and moves individuals to action. Indeed, the riveting stories in the scriptures of the Prophets' ordeals have a powerful, quickening effect on minds and hearts. They carry revolutionary significance. They are astonishing accounts of Individuals asserting that all They did was in the name of divine justice. Individuals, *“Luminous Stars of divine guidance,”*¹¹ who may be regarded as the first universal men in world history. Individuals Who first revealed unto humanity conceptions of the unity of religion and the unity of mankind. Wronged Ones Who took the side of the oppressed and denounced on grounds of justice the wrongs of kings and clergy to their very faces. Abraham, for example, following grievous tribulations, of which His exile is especially meaningful to our exploration, was chosen to become a blessing for all the nations *“in order that . . . his children . . . after him . . . keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.”*¹²

The Manifestations have provided instructions, encouragement, and inspiration by words and deeds that have nurtured some of history's great movements: *“Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream”* (Amos); *“Seek justice, undo oppression”* (Isaiah); *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice”* (Micah); *“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled”* (Jesus); *“be ye securers of justice, witness for God”* (Muhammad); *“These great oppressions that have befallen the world are*

⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 56.

¹⁰ George Townshend, “The Sufferings of Bahá'u'lláh And Their Significance”, *Bahá'í World Vol. XII, 1950-1954* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956), p. 867.

¹¹ Shoghi Effendi in Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1999), p. 1.

¹² Genesis, 18:19.

preparing it for the advent of the Most Great Justice;” “No radiance can compare with that of justice. The organization of the world and the tranquility of mankind depend upon it . . . The canopy of existence resteth upon the pole of justice . . . the life of mankind dependeth on justice;” “It ill beseemeth the station of man to commit tyranny; rather it behoveth him to observe equity and be attired with the raiment of justice under all conditions . . . that . . . perchance the evidences of injustices may be blotted out and the splendor of the light of justice may shed its radiance upon the whole world.”¹³

Perhaps, stories of the Manifestations releasing fresh power of life, through the violent rejections of the validity of Their missions, are so enduring because the maltreatments provide a sense of the monstrousness of attacks upon Them. This seems particularly so in light of the Bahá'í perspective that *“the supreme and most important happening in the human world is the manifestation of God.”*¹⁴

These stories offer startling images of the malfunctioning of the human spirit and of the depth of degradation to which mankind can sink. They reveal cause and effect consequences for humanity's advancement that ruthless repudiators could not arrest. It does not seem an exaggeration to say that as long as questions are raised about justice and injustice, there will be interest in how the Prophets bore afflictions in a manner so transcendent that it increases man's capacity to correct wrong-doings. Houston Smith has put it well: “It is to a remarkable group of men whom we call the Prophets more than to anyone else that Western civilization owes its . . . conviction that the future of any people depends in large part on the justice of their social order.”¹⁵

The statement is, from a Bahá'í perspective, applicable to both Eastern and Western civilizations. The following observation, which Houston Smith related to the “prophets of Israel,” is certainly, from this same view, applicable to all the Prophets:

The prophets . . . are one of the most amazing groups of individuals in all history#.#. . One thing is common to them all; the conviction that every man simply by virtue of the fact that he is a human being, a child of God, has rights that even kings cannot erase. The prophets come upon the stage of history like a strange, elemental, explosive force. They live in a vaster world than those about them, a world in which pomp and ceremony, wealth and splendor account for nothing, where kings seem small and the power of the mighty is as nothing compared with purity, justice and mercy. So it is that whenever men and women have gone to history for encouragement and inspiration in

¹³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 170

¹⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 112.

¹⁵ Houston Smith, *The Religion Of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 272.

the age-long struggle for justice, they have found it, more than anywhere else, in the prophets.¹⁶ (Smith, 1963, pp. 276-277)

It is in this sense that the Bahá'í Writings indicate that Bahá'u'lláh's manifestation is an expression of the coming of age, the maturation of mankind, and that He has *"infused a new spirit into the whole creation. It is for this reason that the world hath been moved to its depths, and the hearts and consciences of men been quickened."*¹⁷ Commenting on the vastness and distinctiveness of Bahá'u'lláh's trials, George Townshend has written: "All the founders of religions have had to endure rejection and wrong, and as mankind grew more and more mature and the victory of God nearer, these wrongs, these sufferings have grown more and more severe continually . . . the suffering, the rejections, the betrayals, . . . which were the common lot of all the High Prophets, reached their culmination in Him."¹⁸

Members of the Bahá'í Faith believe that the creative energies latent within the revelation, set loose in part by Bahá'u'lláh's tribulations, have fostered the development of the current human rights culture. In His address, for example, to the rulers of the world, Bahá'u'lláh taught that *"an equal standard of human rights must be recognized and adopted."* He wrote, *"[T]hey that perpetrate tyranny in the world have usurped the rights of the peoples . . . and are sedulously pursuing their selfish inclinations."* He made clear it does not *"beseemeth the station of man to commit tyranny, rather it behoveth him to . . . be attired with the raiment of justice under all conditions."* He advised the world's rulers not to *"connive at injustice."* They must rather *"set their hearts firmly upon justice."* They should *"be the emblems of justice"* amongst men. He warned they should *"tread . . . the path of justice;"* *"be vigilant, . . . not do injustice to anyone"* and *"preferreth justice and fairness to injustice and tyranny."* He also proclaimed: *"God hath committed into your hands the reins of government . . . that ye may rule with justice . . . (and) safeguard the rights of the downtrodden and punish the wrongdoers."*¹⁹

These passages speak for themselves, highlighting justice as a virtue of character, and that official power must be exercised through righteousness. Uttered at a time when the absolutist doctrine, "the King can do no wrong," prevailed, under which it was generally accepted that monarchs ruled by divine fiat, the passages appear to affirm Abraham Heschel's observation that, "The prophets' preoccupation with justice and righteousness has its roots in a powerful awareness of injustice . . . their comprehension of social, political, and religious evils."²⁰ Such insights could advance belief in the spiritual foundation of human rights. The passages also

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.276-7. The Bahá'í Writings depict the Prophets as *"the most accomplished, the most distinguished, and the most excellent"* of all men. Each was *"charged by God to act in a manner that would best meet the requirements of the age in which He appeared."* Each *"had His own rank in the world of existence, and each hath represented a stage in the development of humanity."*

¹⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938), p. 169.

¹⁸ George Townshend, *op. cit.*, p. 865.

¹⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

²⁰ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 260.

acknowledge that a strong human rights culture cannot take hold unless the political culture is supportive of human rights.

The Spiritual Foundation of Human Rights

Whether it is thought that the current state of human rights culture reflects mostly Western values, which give primacy to individuals, and, thus, run counter to traditional values that are strongly embedded in the context of the community, the nature and direction of the human rights evolution warrant close consideration. Unlike the views that the source of rights is natural law or certain aspects of human nature (such as intuition), the perspective of the Bahá'í Faith is that it may be rightly asserted that human rights ultimately derive from a transcendent Supreme Being, described as the “*God of justice,*” “*the King of the realm of justice.*” It asserts that the world religions have progressively provided an enduring source and true direction for the attainment of global justice, and, thus, the rights of man, through the Manifestations’ teachings and sufferings. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh emphasized that the cruel afflictions He bore were part of a divine, evolutionary, and transformational course for the establishment of universal justice. In other words, attaining universal justice and the prevention of human rights abuses are intertwined and mutually reinforcing objectives.²¹

In the article “*The Human Rights Discourse: A Bahá'í Perspective,*” it is explained that the task of understanding the foundation of human rights and of applying appropriate standards, such as the value of justice, is just beginning.²² It is true that the parameters of the discourse are not yet firmly established. However, given that conversations about the rise of rights involve convictions regarding the direction and dominant end of the movement, the Italian political philosopher Norberto Bobbio provides a meaningful perspective about the evolution.

He traces the “first philosophical stage” back to the Roman Stoics reflections on the human condition. In their writings, the idea was advanced that fair treatment should be accorded man based on the intrinsic dignity of the human person. The second stage occurred when this philosophical tradition found a powerful expression during the American and French Revolutions, and their respective Bill of Rights and the Rights of Man. These novel political movements proclaimed a commitment on the part of the governments to give citizens certain basic rights. The third and modern evolution stage has been the transformation of these revolutionary ideals into international, legal instruments.²³

²¹ Richard Falk, *Human Rights Horizons: The Pursuit of Justice in a Globalizing World* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 10.

²² Matthew Weinberg, “The Human Rights Discourse: A Bahá'í Perspective”, *The Bahá'í World 1996-97* (Haifa: World Centre Publications 1998), p. 247. See Nazila Ghanea, Alan Stephens and Raphael Walden, editors, *Does God Believe in Human Rights?* (Martinus Nijhoff: Leiden, 2007) for a good assessment of the role of religion in international human rights jurisprudence. Among the points in the article by John Barnabas Leith, “A More Constructive Encounter: A Bahá'í View of Religion and Human Rights,” p. 121, are: “The principle of the oneness of humankind is the core of Bahá'u'lláh’s teachings and is seen as foundational to everything else Bahá'u'lláh wanted his followers to accomplish in the public realm. As a result, the oneness of humankind features centrally in Bahá'í statements and actions on human rights.” (p. 123); “The motivating vision of the Bahá'í community is the development of a peaceful and united global civilization. Promotion of universal human rights is integral to the rest of the work the community does to help make this vision a reality.” (p. 144)

²³ As presented in Richard Falk, *Human Rights Horizons, op cit.*, p. 60.

In connection with the suggested initial stage, it is important to bear in mind that when the Romans conquered the Greeks they took over the Greek religions. They adapted them to their own practical minds, which was less poetic and less spiritual than the Greek manner of thinking. Still, the discovery that certain ideas in the ancient Greek city-states, such as those involving the equal freedom of speech and equality before the law, which led over the centuries to the concept of natural rights, were influenced by religious teachings throws light on the fascinating relationship between religion and the search for a new world order. Clearly, the rights' evolution lies much further back in human history than the secular stages outlined by Bobbio.

While the quest to locate the foundation of human rights raises questions about secular and religious sources, members of the Bahá'í Faith believe that the truest accounts of history are those revealed by the Prophets. For They are endowed with divine knowledge of past and future events. In the *Lawh-i-Hikmat* (Tablet of Wisdom), for example, Bahá'u'lláh provides new insights into the intellectual achievements and beliefs of ancient Greek philosophers and sages, which could, it is hoped, stimulate discussion about contemporary issues of justice and injustice. He describes how Greece, through divine intervention, was made a “*Seat of Wisdom for a prolonged period.*” He goes on to reveal that “*The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets.*”²⁴

Esteem is expressed in the Tablet for “*those men of knowledge who have brought to light such things as promote the best interests of humanity.*” Bahá'u'lláh added that such souls were aided by divine forces. Some may find surprising the statement that “*the sages of aforesaid acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy and the Revealers of heavenly mysteries.*” Empedocles, Hippocrates, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are commended in the following terms: “*These men . . . stand out as leaders of the people and are pre-eminent among them, one and all acknowledged their belief in the immoral Being.*”

Finally, it seems appropriate to mention here that in the *Lawh-i-Hikmat*, where it is asserted that learned men of the world confess and bear witness to that which has been revealed in the holy books, where the profound influence of the Word of God for the spiritualization of humanity and the betterment of the world is set out, Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “*We exhort mankind in these days when the countenance of Justice is soiled with dust.*” He refers to Himself as the “*Celestial Bird*” Whose “*wings have been battered with the stones of idle fancy and bitter hatred, and it is cast into a prison built of unyielding stone*” (‘Akká). He urges an examination of His afflictions: “*Ponder in thy heart upon the tribulations I have sustained, the imprisonment and*

²⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

the captivity I have endured, the sufferings that have befallen Me and the accusation that the people have leveled against Me.”

It is quite meaningful that long before the promising efforts today toward rectifying present injustices and those of the past, Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “*The day is approaching when God will have raised up a people who will call to remembrance Our days, who will tell the tale of Our trials, who will demand the restitution of Our rights from them that, without a tittle of evidence, have treated Us with manifest injustice.*”²⁵ His words in the prayer entitled the *Tablet of Ahmad* also come readily to mind: “*Remember My days, during thy days, and My distress and banishment in this remote prison (Adrianople).*”

The view of the Bahá'í Faith is that human rights provisions found in international, regional, national and other legal instruments are ultimately grounded in the successive revelations of divine teachings. It is expressed in this way: “*Universal benefits derive from the grace of Divine religions, for they lead . . . to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, . . . to surpassing kindness and compassion, . . . to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity . . . to unflagging efforts in the service of mankind. It is religion . . . which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization.*”²⁶

Perhaps, the general unawareness of the transformative influence of the Prophets' advents and the effects of Their tribulations may explain why it is still thought a surprising “mystery,” and an “unwitting achievement” that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 by an assemblage of nations, most of whom at that time were oppressive to some degree with social and decision-making structures that institutionalized injustices.²⁷ Although the emergence of a framework for assessing political behavior on an international level may constitute one of the greatest achievements of international society since the end of World War II, such views underscore the fact that many individuals are unprepared to consider that a transcendent, divine source grounds human rights.

Unfortunately, it cannot be denied that the positive influence of religion has been obscured because, in many instances, religious institutions have led communities in directions which are contrary to their own teachings. This has played a major role in creating conditions and practices in which unjust treatment, based on religious intolerance and other forms of prejudice, has taken root. The Office of the Bahá'í International Community explained in its statement, “*Promoting Religious Tolerance*” (February 25, 1991): “History is replete with examples of antagonistic attitudes which have arisen not through ignorance, circumstance, or even policy, but rather

²⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952), pp. 129-130.

²⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

²⁷ Richard Falk, *Human Rights Horizons*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 58.

because of people's sincere attachment to beliefs about the deepest questions of life, which have differed irreconcilably from those of their neighbors. This perennial feature of humanity's religious life is very much an influence in the present human rights landscape.”

Regarding the penetrative influence of religion, the Bahá'í Writings state: “*By the Lord God . . . even the minutest details of civilized life derive from the grace of the Prophets of God. What thing of value to mankind has ever come into being which was not first set forth either directly or by implications in the Holy Scriptures?*”²⁸ And that: “*Religion must be the cause of justice . . . for religion is a divine foundation, the foundation ever conducive to life.*”²⁹ “*As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom. Its robe is the revelation vouchsafed unto it by God. Whenever this robe hath fulfilled its purpose, the Almighty will assuredly renew it. For every age requireth a fresh measure of the light of God.*”³⁰

²⁸ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, op. cit., p. 96.

²⁹ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 343.

³⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, op. cit., p. 148.

The Spiritual Dimension of Human Progress

Beyond the issue of the rise of human rights lies the concept of human evolution as a whole. While there are disagreements about the ultimate source or cause of human progress, Charles Van Doren's insightful work, *The Idea of Progress*, discusses several theories.

The “cosmogenic progress” view correctly holds that human progress is basically brought about according to God's will and general design for man and the world. Man enjoys ameliorative change because the Creator intends it. Unfortunately, it is asserted that the requisite prophetic advents have been limited to Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The view is also expressed that human progress is the result or manifestation of a “cosmic process,” that has nothing to do with God. It is believed that the principle of progress is natural rather than divine. The alternative “anthropogenic progress” view of human evolution holds that the source of human progress is man himself, who has advanced in human history without the help of God or through those claiming to be His Prophet.³¹

The Bahá'í Writings make it clear that the numerous holy teachers sent unto peoples throughout the ages have contributed to humanity's advancement. In this cycle, however, of the manifestations of world religions, human progress has resulted from the successive and progressive Dispensations of Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

Underlying this perspective is the view that mankind as a whole is passing through an “Age of Transition,” in which a process of disintegration and integration is transforming the world from its present state of disunity to a condition of unity and justice. The transformative process is leading humanity towards a new global order, “*Divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, equitable in principle, challenging in its features.*” The transition will eventually give way to the establishment of global justice, with a consistent complex of norms and standards regulating and limiting both human and state behavior. Laying out one of the most important tasks of justice, Bahá'u'lláh has written: “*The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men.*”

Regrettably, within the process the ancient function of injustice prevails, which, among other things, creates and perpetuates conditions that foster disunity, hatred, misunderstandings and selfish abuses of power. The forces of disintegration also darken the “*lamp of religion,*” the consequence of which, according to Bahá'u'lláh, is that “*chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquility and peace cease to shine.*”

³¹ Charles Van Doren, *The Idea of Progress* (London: Praeger, 1967), pp.22, 26-33, 76-87.

Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), who was appointed the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, describes the process in the following terms: "As we view the world around us, we are compelled to observe the manifold evidences of that universal fermentation which, in every continent of the globe and in every department of human life, be it religious, social, economic or political, is purging and reshaping humanity in anticipation of the Day when the wholeness of the human race will have been recognized and its unity established."³²

As stated earlier, the Bahá'í Faith holds that mankind's evolution is linked to the spiritual education it has received through the progressive revelation of divine teachings, principles, laws and processes and through the Prophets' sufferings. It is thought that much of what has been achieved over many centuries towards the gradual but certain evolution of a just society has derived directly or indirectly from these sources. Indeed, the Manifestations have provided in stages a knowledge of divine justice, which has given a direction to human life, cultures, and civilizations. According to the Bahá'í Writings, Bahá'u'lláh has appeared at this time in human history, so that, as promised in all the scriptures, divine revelation will "banish injustice from the world."³³ From His teachings and deeds, "*Justice and truth will encompass the world.*"³⁴

Undoubtedly, the horrors of ethnic cleansing, religious fanaticism, prejudices of every sort, the victimization of indigenous peoples, women, and children, and other grievous injustices have contributed to the widespread skepticism about the role and value of religion. However, the Bahá'í Writings disclose that the force of religion's creative powers is also manifested indirectly through progressive movements and organizations, such as those that promote human rights, economic justice, child advocacy, ecological protection and universal literacy.

For example, Shoghi Effendi has written: "There are so many movements in the world . . . akin to various Bahá'í principles; indeed we can almost say that the principles of Bahá'u'lláh have been adapted by thinking people all over this planet."³⁵ Even more remarkable is the insight 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), Who held the position of authorized interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, provides: "*The reading of history brings us to the conclusion that all truly great men, the benefactors of the human race, those who have moved men to love the right and hate the wrong and who have caused real progress, all these have been inspired by the force of the Holy Spirit.*"³⁶

³² Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, op. cit., p. 170.

³³ A letter from the Universal House of Justice dated Naw-Rúz, 1979, to the Bahá'ís of the World, quoted in National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í of Canada, *Pioneering in a World Community, Quickeners of Mankind: a compilation of Writings of the Bahá'í Faith* (1980), p. 9.

³⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 39.

³⁵ Published in Helen Hornsby, *Lights of Guidance* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 425.

³⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 172.

He commended, for example, a high ranking Western political figure who expressed admiration for some teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, for, “*servicing the Kingdom of God for he is restless and strives day and night that the rights of men may be preserved safe and secure . . . under the protection of Righteousness and Justice. This purpose is indeed a lofty one. I trust that the incomparable Providence will assist and confirm such souls under all conditions.*”³⁷ In this regard, the Universal House of Justice, the highest administrative institution of the Bahá'í Faith, has explained that the “powers released by Bahá'u'lláh match the needs of the times.”³⁸ And that “from whatever direction we gaze, the power of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is visibly at work in the world.”

³⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selection from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

³⁸ The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon* (Riviera Beach: Palabra Publications, 1992), p. 138.

Causes of Injustice

Another distinction of Bahá'u'lláh's response to the injustice was His remorseless unveiling of oppression. He expressed, for example, that His enemies rose up against Him with relentless determination to take His life and to exterminate His Cause, some for the "*lack of knowledge and understanding*," some for the "*lust of leadership*," and some for the realization of their "*selfish inclinations*." The Bahá'í Writings attest that the selfish pursuit of power is a root cause of injustices in such terms as the following: "*Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world has been laid waste. It hath become desolate.*"³⁹

The Bahá'í Writings go on to say that "*the primary cause of oppression and injustice, or unrighteousness, irregularity and disorder, is the people's lack of religious faith and the fact they are uneducated.*"⁴⁰ Therefore, the Manifestations spoke of injustices and justice, reward and punishment, and Their delights and sufferings as a means of educating the people.

It is also indicated that a breeding-ground for injustice are prejudices of every sort, including prejudice of action. This may explain why Bahá'u'lláh has made it incumbent for Bahá'ís to live the principles of the oneness of humanity.

³⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in a letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 27 March 1978, cited in Matthew Weinberg, "*The Human Rights Discourse: A Bahá'í Perspective*," *op. cit.*, p. 260.

⁴⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Situations of Injustice

Looking back, the irony is startling that Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and the other Manifestations came unto people who gloried in their expectations that the prophetic light of truth would soon appear among them. Yet, these same people relished trampling down the weak and lowly. They worshipped power and venerated oppressors who commanded might. They viciously moved against anyone who challenged their special privileges, their insatiate appetites for power, their self-serving inequities, and their frightening injustices.

In order to appreciate more fully the transformation from injustice to justice, brief references are set out below as to some events that transpired at the advent of Bahá'u'lláh. It merits reiteration that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the “*fruit and flower*” of the Bábí Dispensation. For the Báb revealed these prescient words before His wrongful execution: “*Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh . . . For He will assuredly be made manifest.*”

In his brilliant “Epilogue” to the *Dawn-Breakers*, the narrative history of the beginnings of the Bahá'í Revelation, Shoghi Effendi points out that the royal and ecclesiastical repudiators were confident that with the execution of the Báb and the imprisonment and exile of Bahá'u'lláh the Faith of the Báb had failed in accomplishing its purpose. They were certain that any potency of which it was possibly endowed would remain fruitless.

The Faith the Báb proclaimed . . . had indeed reached its lowest ebb . . . The wings of death seemed to be hovering above it. Extermination, complete and irremediable, appeared to be threatening its very life . . . , the figure of Bahá'u'lláh alone shone as the potential Deliverer of a Cause that was fast speeding to its end#. . . The fresh impetus which, despite his calculations, the personality of Bahá'u'lláh, and above all, the inherent strength of the Revelation which He personified, had lent to the Cause . . . was one Násiri'd-Dín Shah had never imagined . . . ; the stupendous claims advanced by Bahá'u'lláh . . . the public declaration of that claim (in Baghdad) . . . and its proclamation in challenging Epistles to the crowned heads of the earth . . . were among the chief factor that convincingly revealed to the eyes of the Shah the invincible character of a Faith he believed himself to have bridled and destroyed.⁴¹

The false charges brought against Bahá'u'lláh by the leaders, viewing Him as a threat to their own positions, constituted a grievous injustice. Consistent with the pattern seen at the advent of every Prophet, They found His claim “*at variance with their own faith and creed.*” Thus, as He has written, malicious “*accusations of imposture, folly, waywardness and misbelieve*” were hurled against Him. The fact that an accusation generally implies doubt and raises a logical and imperative presumption that it may be countered by factual proofs before judgment—otherwise it is tantamount to a guilty verdict—was entirely ignored. The cunning accusations, all the

⁴¹ Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, *op. cit.*, pp. 660- 663.

outcome of intrigues and malevolent motives, were the initial, the most shrewdly calculated and provocative form of the ordeals. In many ways, they were at the heart of the mobilization of opposition against Him. His cunning accusers utilized exaggerations, ridicules, and innuendos to stigmatize Him, to give Him a bad name.

The lie that He was opposed to Islam and all the Prophets gone before, and that He had deliberately led others astray carried tremendous provocation. Bahá'u'lláh demonstrated that it was similar to the charges of seditious crimes laid against previous Manifestations in this way: “*And if anyone asked them: ‘For what crimes were they (the Manifestations of God), imprisoned they would answer and say: ‘They, verily, sought to supplant the Faith with a new religion.’ . . . if this be My crime, then Muhammad . . . committed it before Me.*”⁴² As to the charge that He was not the Author of divine verses, He revealed: “*This is a grievous injustice. Others are incapable of apprehending their meanings, how much more of revealing them.*”⁴³ He conclusively invalidated every form of the accusations, as seen specifically in certain passages in the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, the *Kitáb-i-Badí'*, The *Suriy-i-Mulúk* and the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.

Another interesting feature of the injustice, which is relished in modern day practices, was the persecutors uses of what are called “accusations in a mirror”⁴⁴ By this is meant that calumniators skilled in the use of deceit know that one of the most effective means to destroy the prestige or support of an innocent person is to accuse that individual of doing exactly the wrongs they themselves are doing or are planning to do. Such malicious accusations were repeatedly used against Bahá'u'lláh in the vicious campaign of misrepresentation. Aware of the methods used to perpetrate religious and political domination, Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the *Kitáb-i-Badí'*: “*It has always been the practice of Covenant-breakers to accuse the Manifestation and His followers of the very crimes which the Covenant-breakers have themselves committed.*”⁴⁵ He specifically disclosed that Mírzá Yahyá, His half-brother and the leader of the internal opposition, had seized the pen of calumny and attributed unto Him what he had himself committed.⁴⁶

On several occasions, Bahá'u'lláh was maligned in the press. For example, it was reported in a newspaper that He had “fled from the land (of Tehran) and gone to Iraq,” when he was in fact exiled to that land.⁴⁷ The extent to which hateful and inciting words were published against Him is without parallel in religious history. It certainly has significance for today that the Bahá'í Writings advise journalists to be “*attired with the raiment of justice and equity;*” to

⁴² Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴⁴ Referred to as such in Bill Berkeley, *The Graves Are Not Yet Full* (New York: Basic Books), pp. 270-271.

⁴⁵ Bahá'u'lláh in Nader Saeidi, *Logos and Civilization, Spirit, History and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2000), p. 205.

⁴⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

be “*painstaking in their inquiries and ascertain all the facts in every situation, then set them down in writing.*”⁴⁸ Little wonder then that, following the false statements about Him in such journals as the *English Churchmen* newspaper, the *Evangelical Christendom*, and the *Times of London*, the most influential newspaper of that day, Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “*Concerning this Wronged One, most of the things reported in the newspapers are devoid of truth.*”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, op. cit.*, p. 49. See Roger White, “Bahá'u'lláh and the Fourth Estate”, *The Bahá'í World* (1979-1983), vol. 18, p. 975.

⁴⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, op. cit.*, p. 40.

Due Process

In addressing the moral and legal requirements of just and humane governance, Bahá'u'lláh has used language lawyers and human rights workers would recognize. As to determining culpability, He repeatedly called upon the leaders to meet with Him, so that His innocence could be proven. For example, He wrote: *“Some of the divines who have declared this Servant an infidel have at no time met with Me. Never having seen Me, or being acquainted with My purpose, they have nevertheless spoken as they pleased and acted as they desired. Yet every claim requireth a proof.”*⁵⁰ He wrote to Ali Pasha, the Ottoman Prime Minister: *“From the outset, a gathering should have been convened at which the learned men of this age could have met with this Youth in order to determine what offence these servants have committed.”*⁵¹ Revealing principles of fairness that are associated throughout the world today with the sound administration of criminal justice, Bahá'u'lláh advised that authorities should search and investigate and inquire thoroughly into a situation before delivering judgment and administering punishment.

Internationally accepted norms of justice hold that those suspected of crimes should be formally indicted and tried by a competent, impartial official. It is an imperative of justice that culpability be based on a fair assessment of the actions and intentions of individuals regardless of their status. There is strong, universal condemnation against punishing the innocent. However, following the attempted assassination of Násiri'd-Dín Shah in 1852 by two irresponsible Bábís intending to avenge the Báb's execution and the bloody massacre of thousands of their fellow believers, Bahá'u'lláh was falsely denounced as the prime mover of the attempted regicide. He was chained in a pestilential, pitched dark, underground prison for four months. It is said that Násiri'd-Dín Shah then prided himself on the thought that he was the wrecker of the Cause, that He had crushed it. Remarking upon the cruel imprisonment, which constitutes an astonishing demonstration of the divine transformation of injustice into justice, Shoghi Effendi has pointed out, in connection with the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, and the inherent strength of the Revelation which He personified, that:

the first glimmerings of the dawning Revelation . . . could already be discerned amidst the gloom that encircled Bahá'u'lláh in the Síyáh-Chál of Tihrán. The force that . . . was at a later time to unfold itself in all its glory and encompass the globe was already pulsating in the veins of Bahá'u'lláh . . . The still voice . . . announced to the Prisoner the Revelation of which He was chosen to be the Mouthpiece, (while) . . . the monarch . . . was already preparing the celebration of the extinction of the Faith his Captive had championed. That imprisonment which he who had caused it, believed to have branded with infamy the fair name of Bahá'u'lláh, and which he regarded as a prelude to a still

⁵⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, op. cit., p. 115.

⁵¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, op. cit., p. 171.

more humiliating banishment to 'Iraq, was, indeed, the very scene that witnessed the first stirrings of that Movement of which Bahá'u'lláh was to be the Author.⁵²

The royal tribunal found that Bahá'u'lláh had not been in any way involved in the conspiracies to murder the Monarch. It exonerated Him from all blame. Still, Násiri'd-Dín Shah, designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the "*Prince of Oppressors*," sentenced Him to life imprisonment. Later, he ordered His banishment forever from Persia to Baghdad. The official Tehran gazette, *Vaqáyi'ul-Ittifáqiyih*, published Bahá'u'lláh's innocence. It stated: "though Mírzá Husayn 'Ali-y-Núr, known as Bahá'u'lláh, and at least three others had been found not to have participated in any intrigues or conspiracies, Násiri'd-Dín Shah condemned him to life imprisonment."⁵³ It has been noted that the official gazette "was unaware of the deadly irony of its statement that those proven innocent were given a life term." Of his innocence and unjust exile to Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "*If I have transgressed against him (the Shah), why, then, did he release Me? And if I were innocent of guilt, wherefore did ye afflict Us with such tribulations as none among them that profess your faith hath suffered?*"⁵⁴

It is said that the Nasiri'd-Dín Shah imagined that in banishing Bahá'u'lláh he had "sounded "the death-knell" of what was thought a "hateful heresy," which had struck "terror to the hearts of his people." It has been recorded that the Shah had become convinced, "*Now that the Báb was no more; . . . now that Bahá'u'lláh Himself, the one remaining hope of a leaderless community, had been driven into exile, . . . the spectre that had haunted him ever since he had ascended the throne had vanished forever. Never again, he imagined, would he hear of that detestable Movement which, if he were to believe his best counsellors, was swiftly receding into the shadows of impotence and oblivion.*"

As to His final banishment to the penal colony of 'Akká, as mentioned above, Bahá'u'lláh said, "*Sultán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz banished Us to this country in the greatest abasement, and . . . his object was to destroy Us and humble Us . . . without any justification, or reason, (he) arose to oppress Us and sent Us to the fortress of 'Akká . . . that We should become the object of the hatred of every one. The Hand of Divine power . . . swiftly avenged Us.*"⁵⁵

Much of the story of the injustice in human society pre-dates the provision of penal law found in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the Book of Bahá'í Law, which provides provisions for a future system of criminal justice. The way has been left open for supplementary legislation by the Universal House of Justice. It is made clear in the Bahá'í Writings that "*The structure of world stability*

⁵² From Shoghi Effendi, "Epilogue," published in Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, op. cit., pp. 658-9.

⁵³ Kazem Kazemzadeh and Firuz Kazemzadeh, "Bahá'u'lláh's Prison Sentence: The Official Account", *World Order* (Winter 1978-79), p. 11.

⁵⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, op. cit., p. 228.

⁵⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, op. cit., p. 196.

and order hath been reared upon . . . the twin pillars of reward and punishment."⁵⁶ It is uncertain the extent to which such familiar legal protections in the criminal law as those against self-incrimination, the requirement of witnesses, or the prohibition against double-jeopardy would be continued in a future world order. However, Bahá'u'lláh has expressed the sanctity of human life in this way: "*What! Would ye kill him whom God hath quickened . . . Fear God, and lift not the hand of injustice and oppression to destroy what He hath Himself raised up.*"⁵⁷

The cruelties Bahá'u'lláh experienced demonstrate what it was like to live in a world in which those with high status could with impunity falsely accuse, imprison, exile and execute those with different views. They show the need for a global system of justice in which all are equal before the law and those accused of a crime have a fair opportunity to confront the accuser on a level playing field, to challenge the evidence against them and to demonstrate it was planted, false or mistaken.

Shoghi Effendi has written further on the unjust sentence and the cruel edict of exile in the following term:

How vain were his (the Shah's) imaginings, how vast his own delusion! The Cause he had fondly imagined to have been crushed was still living destined to emerge from the midst of that great convulsion (the treacherous massacre of Bábís) stronger, purer, and nobler than ever. The Cause which, to the minds of that foolish monarch, seemed to be speeding towards destruction was but passing through the fiery tests of a phase of transition that was to carry it a step further on the path of its high destiny. A new chapter in its history was being unfolded, more glorious than any that had marked its birth or its rise. The repression which that monarch had believed to have succeeded in sealing its doom was but the initial stage in an evolution destined to blossom in the fullness of time, into a Revelation mightier than any that the Báb Himself had proclaimed. The seed His hand had sown, though subjected, for a time, to the fury of a storm of unexampled violence and though later transplanted to a foreign soil, was to continue to develop and grow, in due time, into a Tree destined to spread its shelter over all the kindreds and peoples of the earth . . . a movement which was first to be made known in the city of Baghdad and at a later time to be proclaimed from the prison-city of 'Akká###. Little did Násiri'd-Dín Shah imagine that by the very act of pronouncing the sentence of banishment against Bahá'u'lláh, he was helping in the unfolding of God's irrepressible Purpose and he himself was but an instrument in the execution of that Design . . . a revival of the very forces he had sought so strenuously to exterminate.⁵⁸

It is interesting to note that ten years after the arrest, imprisonment and order of exile, the Sultan's edict ordering Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Baghdad to Constantinople accentuated the miscarriage of justice. The order stated that He was one of the individuals who "had

⁵⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), p. 46.

⁵⁸ Shoghi Effendi, "Epilogue," *The Dawn-Breakers*, *op. cit.*, pp. 657-9.

attempted some years ago an assassination plot against . . . the . . . Shah.”⁵⁹ Finally, in connection with the overall cause-and-effect, and particular with the banishment to ‘Akká, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá discloses: “*It is difficult to understand how Bahá'u'lláh could have been obliged to leave Persia, and to pitch His tent in this Holy Land, but for the persecutions of His enemies, His banishment and exile.*”⁶⁰ His complete innocence was gradually recognized by all elements of the town’s population.

⁵⁹ Necati Alkan, *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the Late Ottoman Empire-Reformers: Bábís' and Bahá'ís* (Istanbul: The Press Isis, 2008), p. 61.

⁶⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

Acceptance of the Injustice

The most important of the cause-and-effect connection is that Bahá'u'lláh, like the Prophets before, accepted the injustice. This seems the most important consideration for any objective contemplation of the ferocious tribulations. In His words: *“The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner . . . that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness . . . We have accepted to be abased . . . that ye may be exalted, and have suffered manifold afflictions, that ye might prosper and flourish.”*⁶¹ The idea of consent itself, and the extent to which this extraordinary phenomenon is set out in the Bahá'í Writings, may constitute the most compelling proof that a basic feature of the Prophets' ways and works and circumstances in transforming society is that They, Representatives of the Almighty, of Their own transcendent accord, accept the vicious executions, tortures, banishments, and other humiliations heaped upon Them.

Related to this noble response is the fact that His acceptance of the abasements shows many heavenly attributes. He praised God for His afflictions. He welcomed them as a part of divine love and wisdom. His courage, calm, confidence, and acquiescence remained unshaken. As to His meekness and servitude, He wrote to the Iranian Minister in Constantinople:

Dost thou imagine, O Minister of the Shah . . . that I hold within My grasp the ultimate destiny of the Cause of God? Thinkest thou that My imprisonment, or the shame I have been made to suffer, or even my death and utter annihilation, can deflect its course? . . . Powerful is He (God) to manifest His Cause, and to exalt His testimony, and to establish whatsoever is His Will, to elevate it to so eminent a position that neither thine own hands, nor the hands of them that have turned away from Him, can ever touch or harm It . . . If this Cause be of God, no man can prevail against it; and if it be not of God, the divines amongst you, and they that follow their corrupt desires. . . will surely suffice to overpower it. . . Ye perpetrate every day a fresh injustice, and treat Me as ye treated Me (the Prophets before) in times past, . . . If I be slain at your hands, God will assuredly raise up one who will fill the seat made vacant through My death, for such is God's method carried into effect of old, . . . Despite what thou hast done I entertain—and to this God is My witness—no ill-will against thee, nor against anyone, . . . It is not Our purpose in addressing to these words to lighten the burden of Our woe, or to induce thee to intercede for Us with any one. No, . . . we have set forth the whole matter before thee, that perchance thou might realize what thou hast done, might desist from inflicting upon others the hurt thou hast inflicted upon Us, and might be of them that have truly repented to God.⁶²

⁶¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, op. cit., pp.99-100.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 230.

As to His superhuman courage in the face of bitter woes, including attempts upon His life, He writes: “*not for a moment did I allow Myself to be hidden from the eyes of men, nor did I consent to shield My person from their injury.*”; “*know ye that I am afraid of none except God. In none but Him have I placed My trust;*” “*I will fear no one though the powers of earth and heaven be leagued against Me.*”⁶³ He was “*conspicuously fearless in His advocacy of the rights of the downtrodden.*” While His acceptance of the afflictions follows the pattern set by the Prophets before, the extent, however, of Bahá'u'lláh's tribulations, along with the vastness of His revelation, unfolded in part by the sufferings, are distinguishing feature of His Ministry.

From all of the above, the connection between the wrongs and the quest for global justice, which, as said earlier, includes the evolution of human rights, is not difficult to discern. Confidence that the rise is a consequence of the injustice Bahá'u'lláh suffered is heightened by the divine assurance expressed by Himself in the Bahá'í scripture: “*Say: because He bore injustice, justice hath appeared on earth, and because He accepted abasement, the majesty of God hath shone forth amidst mankind.*”⁶⁴

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

Conclusion

This limited contemplation of Bahá'u'lláh's endurance of the cruelties inflicted upon Him attempts to show that members of the Bahá'í Faith believe that He has laid out in words and deeds what is required for the acquisition of virtues and the attainment of global justice in such fullness that their constant manifestations would become valued by individuals and nations. Thus, from a Bahá'í perspective it is felt that humanity may look to the future with confidence, for “*Man can withstand anything except that which is divinely intended and indicated for the age and its requirements.*”⁶⁵

It is suggested that contemplations of the injustice Bahá'u'lláh bore could advance understanding that the evolution of human rights is a meaningful component of a divine process for the transformation of human injustice into justice. It is hoped that the contemplations would strengthen conviction that revelation is the ultimate source of human rights. Not just for considering only in an intellectual sense that religion is “the very basis and root-principle of culture and civilization.” But far more importantly, endeavoring to understand it in the sense of feeling the wonder and the transformative reality of religion; that its story is not completed and finished.

It may be that Professor E.G. Browne's “memorial testimony for posterity,” the “moving experience” of his visit with Bahá'u'lláh, will become more widely renown as a unique and illustrious testimony of the purpose and character of divine revelation. Attesting to religion's “mighty and wondrous spirit, which works with invisible but ever-increasing force for the transformation and quickening of a people who slumber in a sleep like unto death,” the distinguished Cambridge University Orientalist voiced in 1890 his astonishment of the Prisoner's destined influence, which tyrannical kings nor vicious ecclesiastics had not destroyed: “The face on Whom I gazed, I can never forget, thought I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow. . . No need to ask in whose presence I stood as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain.”

Indeed, sincere contemplations of the remarkable reversals of the injustice Bahá'u'lláh bore might strengthen understanding that holy words and deeds provide instructions, encouragement, and inspiration for considering the love, glory and the compassion of the Almighty. May it provide insight that through the Prophets' teachings and tribulations God still walks with humanity to bring forth in the land that which is, according to the Bahá'í scriptures, “*the best beloved of all things*” in His sight—Justice.

⁶⁵ *Bahá'í World Faith: Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956), p. 234.

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