Toward a Bahá'í Political Philosophy: Manifestation, Authority, and the Form of Civilizational Unity

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Abstract

This article constructs a systematic political philosophy of the Bahá'í Faith, arguing that its teachings uniquely unite metaphysical origins with a political consummation. Drawing on concepts of Telos (final cause) from philosophical traditions including those of Aristotle, Hegel, and Heidegger, the paper posits that the Manifestation of God not only serves as the source of a new Revelation but also as the legislator and architect of a global civilization. The article contends that unity is the central teleological concept, which must be institutionally structured through the Bahá'í Administrative Order and the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. This framework culminates in the Bahá'í Commonwealth, a divinely guided polity that transcends secular models of governance by re-envisioning politics, rights, and the role of the individual as a spiritual subject rather than a partisan actor. Ultimately, the paper presents the Bahá'í political model as a fulfillment of historical aspirations for a just and unified world, offering a coherent alternative to the foundational crises of contemporary political thought.

Introduction: From First Principle to Final Form—The Telos of Revelation and the Politics of Unity

This article is the direct continuation of "Presupposition of Revealed Truth: On First Principles, Revelation, and the Ground of Rationality." There, Revelation was treated as **archē**—the principium that founds intelligibility, orders reason, and discloses the normativity of truth. Here, I turn from origin to fulfillment, from ground to completion, from principium to **telos**. No order that begins in Revelation can be whole unless it also yields the form toward which it tends. The question, then, is not whether Revelation has an end, but what end coheres intrinsically with its beginning and unfolds from it without remainder.

The telos advanced here is twofold and inseparable: (1) unceasing recognition of the Manifestation of God—both present and future—and (2) the realization of human unity through divinely revealed institutions and law**.** Recognition without unity remains disembodied and transient; unity without recognition severs itself from its living source. Hence the Revelation-centered polity must be at once contemplative and institutional: vigilant preparedness for the next Manifestation and concrete structuring of unity as political-ethical form. To confess the Manifestation as the ground of reason and being is to acknowledge Him as legislator and world-orderer, the One through whom history receives shape. Consequently, the end is not an abstraction but a progressive concretion: knowledge of God through His Manifestations conjoined with the unification of humankind through a covenantal order of law and institutions.

Teleology, so conceived, is not an external aim imposed upon life from without, but the inner completion of the same principle that originates it. Classical and modern accounts (from

Aristotle's energeia and formal cause to Hegel's self-unfolding Idea and Heidegger's thinking of destiny) recognize that fulfillment gives definiteness to becoming; yet absent a revealed first principle, such visions drift toward abstraction, voluntarism, or historicist indeterminacy. By contrast, Revelation enacts the unity these philosophies only intimate: it discloses a divine will with epistemic, moral, and institutional warrants, and it architectonically orders communal existence through law, the institutions of the Covenant, and the discipline of consultation. The will that grounds intelligibility must ground order; the principle that secures truth must realize justice—gradually, without erasing contingency or mystery.

Prominent secular paradigms (liberal, historicist, procedural) have secured real gains—curbing domination, organizing cooperation, and refining institutional checks—yet by bracketing an explicit final cause they tend to *manage* conflict rather than *consummate* unity. The Bahá'í paradigm, by contrast, binds origin to end: Revelation grounds intelligibility and furnishes a teleology that guides law and institutions through consultative, non-coercive stages. It refuses the false alternatives of confessional domination and value-neutral governance by mediating plural legal traditions through revealed constitutional forms, proportioned to public reason and historical prudence. Thus its horizon is staged—nearest as a juridical-political rapprochement among states (the Lesser Peace) and ultimately as the civilizational integration of humankind—while its movement is devotional and institutional at once, grounded in recognition and realized as form.

Three terms govern what follows. *Revealed constitutionalism* names a non-clerical, consultative, elected order in which legislation is divinely authorized yet historically adaptive, enacted by Houses of Justice within defined jurisdictions; it is categorically distinct from theocracy. The *Bahá'í Commonwealth* denotes a future, federated constitutional horizon in which differentiated organs—legislative, executive, judicial—cohere under unity-through-law. *Double rendering* designates the duty to articulate reasons internally (in the idiom of Revelation and covenantal virtue) and externally (in public-reason terms—peace, non-domination, equity, material welfare) so that shared goods, not sectarian coercion, underwrite compliance.

From archē—the Manifestation as the ground of intelligibility—to telos—unity instituted as law and order—Revelation carries thought from the criterion of truth to the architecture of justice. "Unity" here is not utopian sentiment but a divinely legislated structure that emerges through conflict and complexity, under covenantal institutions, by means of consultation, and with a view to the next divine Advent. Political philosophy, in this register, does not abolish history's struggles; it transfigures them by orienting reason, authority, and collective life toward their common end: unceasing recognition of the Manifestation of God and the ever-deepening realization of the oneness of humankind in the concrete forms of divine law and institution.

2. On the Necessity and Definition of *Telos*

Telos is not a bolt-on objective appended to otherwise finished realities but the intrinsic principle of completion by which a thing is intelligible as what it is, ordered in its coming-to-be, and

measured in its excellence. In Aristotle's architectonic, the "for-the-sake-of-which" is internal to form and act: ends are not external triggers but causes of intelligibility that specify what counts as success or failure in a life, a practice, or a polity. Without final causality, activity stalls in the indeterminate "not-yet," and reason loses the criterion by which to discriminate better from worse trajectories; practical reason itself presupposes orientation to goods that are constitutive, not merely instrumental. Early modern suspicions of teleology (whether reducing it to heuristic "as-if" judgments or translating it into biological teleonomy) do not dislodge this normative function: efficient descriptions of processes cannot replace the reason-giving role of ends in ethics, politics, and knowledge. At the same time, teleology must not be conflated with eschatology. A metaphysical account of final causality identifies the inner completion of forms; a revealed eschaton names history's consummation under divine initiative. The claim advanced here is that Revelation uniquely unifies these registers: it discloses the determining ends of human life and society while also instituting, through law and covenant, the concrete historical path by which those ends are realized. Hence the twofold telos that will govern what follows—unceasing recognition of the Manifestation of God (present and future) and the realization of human unity as a juridical-institutional world order—is not an external program but the inner unfolding of the very principium disclosed in Revelation.

In the Bahá'í horizon, creation itself is described as the divine love's outpouring toward knowability. A Holy Tradition, often cited by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, states: "I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be known. Therefore I created the Creation that I might be known." This sets the axis of teleology: the end of creation is knowledge of God. Because the divine Essence remains "invisible, incomprehensible, inaccessible," the path of knowledge is opened by God's Manifestations, those "holy Dawning-Places of Primal Unity," in whom the names and attributes of God are disclosed and by whom the world is educated. Accordingly, Bahá'u'lláh prays: "Thou didst bring mankind into being to know Thee and to serve Thy Cause…" (Ishráqát), and legislates the criterion of inquiry itself: "We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge; and yet behold how ye have allowed your learning to shut you out, as by a veil, from Him…" (Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib; cf. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*). The heart's very structure is teleological: "The hearts of humankind were created to recognize Me, their tongues to praise Me, and their eyes to behold My Beauty" (Lawḥ-i-Aḥbáb). Revelation thus renders explicit what philosophy intimates: final causality is a relation of recognition, grounded in and ordered to the Manifestation.

Because recognition can be eclipsed by habit, interest, and inherited form, preparation for future Revelation is itself a constitutive element of telos. The seeker must undergo purification and detachment—"must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly—their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth" (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*). Bahá'u'lláh distinguishes knowledge that "welleth out from the fountain of divine inspiration" from that which is "a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts": "'Fear ye God; God will teach you'; … 'Knowledge is the most grievous veil between man and

his Creator.'" (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*). The same tablet warns of an abiding historical peril: "Leaders of religion, in every age, have hindered their people from attaining the shores of eternal salvation…" and "The denials and protestations of these leaders of religion have, in the main, been due to their lack of knowledge and understanding…" (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*). Hence the vigilance proper to a Revelation-centered reason: "Let not names shut you out as by a veil from Him Who is their Lord, even the name of Prophet…" (Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib). In short, the telos of recognition is not exhausted by assent to a present dispensation; it requires a disciplined readiness that refuses to let past forms obscure a new Advent.

Teleology therefore includes an educative principle by which the Word of God takes root, grows, and bears institutional fruit in history: "The Word of God may be likened unto a sapling, whose roots have been implanted in the hearts of men. It is incumbent upon you to foster its growth through the living waters of wisdom, of sanctified and holy words…" (Lawḥ-i-Dunyá). Revelation not only discloses the end (knowledge of God in and through His Manifestations); it also institutes the means—laws, virtues, consultative discipline, and forms of collective life—through which that end becomes social order. Thus, "He it is Who hath… enabled you to recognize Him Who is the Almighty… [and] unveiled to your eyes the treasures of His knowledge" (Lawḥ-i-Ashraf): recognition flowers into civilization.

The second, inseparable pole of telos is unity—no mere sentiment but a world-ordering form that Revelation defines, commands, and progressively realizes. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes of the civilizational horizon in unmistakable terms: "All will dwell in one common fatherland, which is the planet itself" (Tablets of the Divine Plan, 8th Tablet); "…the surface of the earth is one native land. Every one can live in any spot on the terrestrial globe. Therefore all the world is man's birthplace." (Tablet to The Hague); and "ALL countries, in the estimation of the one true God, are but one country, and all cities and villages are on an equal footing." (Tablets of the Divine Plan, 10th Tablet). The same vision speaks of "…causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland" (Tablet of the Seven Candles). Unity, in this register, is the teleological configuration of human plurality: a juridical, political, economic, linguistic, and spiritual form of life through which the oneness of humankind is enacted.

In view of these two inseparable ends—unceasing recognition and unity—telos acquires historical thickness. It is not a punctual eschaton but a staged fulfillment: the Word takes root; knowledge is purified; institutions emerge; peoples and states are drawn, by consultation and law, toward concord. The same tablets that ground learning in recognition also diagnose why telos is resisted: when "names" are allowed to veil the Named; when leaders prefer prerogative to truth; when devotion to the dead forms of sanctity eclipses fidelity to the living Presence—"Numerous indeed are the servants who… make pilgrimage to the sites where the Embodiments of My names are buried, and yet who, when the Dayspring of those names… appeared, rejected and repudiated Him. They are assuredly of the lost!" (Lawḥ-i-Aḥbáb). Teleology, therefore,

includes the painful clarification by which Revelation separates recognition from mere nostalgia and orders piety toward obedience to the living command.

3. Unity as a Teleological Concept

Unity is not an optional ethic appended to doctrine, nor a merely hortatory ideal for social feeling; it is the intrinsic final cause—the inner completion—of a Revelation-centered order. As a teleological concept, "unity" names the determinate form toward which Revelation itself orders knowing, willing, and living: it is the consummation of origin (archē) in an enacted end (telos). Metaphysically, teleology differs from eschatology: the former identifies the principle of completion without which no practice, institution, or polity is intelligible as what it is; the latter names the historical fulfillment of that principle. What is decisive in the Bahá'í horizon is that Revelation **unifies** these registers: it discloses the end (unity grounded in unceasing recognition of the Manifestation of God) and **institutes** the concrete means—law, consultation, education, and Houses of Justice—by which that end is historically realized. Hence the move from ethical exhortation to architectonic form: "The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries" (*Ishrāqát*). As Roshan Danesh notes, Bahá'u'lláh's vision is of **"**'houses of justice' existing throughout the world, elected bodies that would serve governance functions" (Danesh, "Church and State in the Bahá'í Faith," 21). In theological terms, Sen McGlinn observes that "the pattern underlying the Bahá'í Faith as a religious organisation ('The Bahá'í administrative order') is also the pattern for the Kingdom on earth (the 'World Order')" (McGlinn, "A Theology of the State," 714). At the same time, to forestall category mistakes: as Mikhail Sergeev emphasizes, Bahá'u'lláh "repudiated the entire notion of an absolutist state, and of a theo-cratic one" (Sergeev, *Bahá'í Teachings and the Principle of Separation*, 79). The unity Revelation aims at is therefore neither confessional domination nor procedural neutrality, but the divinely willed form in which recognition and justice become a lived, institutional order.

Ontologically, unity is grounded in the singular, unknowable Divine Essence from which all being flows. Bahá'u'lláh affirms in Lawḥ-i-Tawḥíd and Ishráqát that God is "exalted above every mention or description" and is the Hidden Treasure from whom all creation emanates. 'Abdu'l-Bahá clarifies that all beings and realities, though diverse in appearance, share a common origin in this sanctified Unity, and that the attributes of God are reflected in the created world like rays from a single sun (Some Answered Questions, §§273, 319, 503). Diversity of forms, names, and functions thus rests in the indivisible reality of the One. Because the Essence of God remains forever hidden, however, this ontological foundation is not exhaustively systematizable: "So lofty is the station of the one true God that no pen can ever hope to portray, nor tongue to describe it." Unity therefore retains an apophatic dimension—manifest yet inexhaustible, commanded yet never fully comprehended.

The Manifestations of God reveal and embody this ontological unity. Though They appear in different ages and cultures, They are, as Bahá'u'lláh declares, "one soul and the same person" (Kitáb-i-Íqán). "If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith." Plurality across dispensations is unified in essence; differences are of degree and historical circumstance, not of truth. Unity is therefore neither static nor homogenizing: it unfolds amid human limitation, and must be cultivated, interpreted, and enacted over time in the face of misunderstanding and resistance.

Epistemologically, unity is both goal and measure of true knowledge. Revelation is not merely moral counsel; it is the very condition of intelligibility. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains in the Commentary on the Hidden Treasure (§91), the knowledge of God is impossible through reason or tradition alone and is made accessible only through the Manifestations, the perfect mirrors of the Divine Essence. Knowledge derived from sense perception, rational inference, or inherited custom is partial and frequently divisive; only knowledge illumined by Revelation can unify understanding. Hence Bahá'u'lláh proclaims that "Knowledge is as wings to man's life" (Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib) and that, when illumined by the "Day-Star of knowledge," it becomes a cause of unity and certitude rather than dissension and error (Lawḥ-i-Burhán). Even revealed knowledge, however, does not yield cognitive closure; it is received through human interpretive capacities that must be exercised within the parameters of the Covenant—through humility, consultation, and detachment from ego. Unity in knowledge emerges as a spiritually grounded, disciplined process.

Ethically, unity requires the habituation of virtues that mirror divine Names and order relations—truthfulness, trustworthiness, purity, justice, compassion—and the renunciation of habits that perpetuate division. Bahá'u'lláh states: "The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch" (Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd). He commands love for all humanity, the eradication of prejudice, and fellowship: "Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship" (Kitáb-i-Aqdas). Such formation is not reducible to sentiment; it entails struggle, education, and spiritual discipline—the slow transformation of the self in relation to others.

Because unity cannot remain a private disposition, it demands political and institutional embodiment. Revelation provides not merely inspiration but form. Bahá'u'lláh reveals laws, principles, and institutions—foremost the House of Justice, whose members are "Trustees of God among His servants" and "recipients of divine inspiration from the unseen Kingdom" (Ishráqát)—to "promote the highest interests of the whole of humanity" and act "according to the needs and requirements of the time." These institutions safeguard unity and secure justice, the foundations of enduring peace. Their non-clerical structure, consultative method, and ethical grounding constitute a spiritual pedagogy for public life.

Justice, Bahá'u'lláh writes, is "the light of the world" and "the best beloved of all things" in His sight; upheld by "the twin pillars" of reward and punishment, it is essential for "order in the world and the tranquility of the nations." Justice harmonizes diversity, preserves rights, and binds responsibility to freedom; without it, unity degenerates into tyranny or sentimentality. Yet justice is not mechanical legalism: it is a spiritual capacity, a way of seeing that links command to concrete action. Hence Bahá'í institutions are not merely administrative—they are educative, forming persons and polities in the image of divine attributes.

Consultation is the ordained method by which unity thinks. Described as "the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way," it is required in collective affairs. Leaders must "hold fast to the cord of consultation" and adopt decisions conducive to the "security, prosperity, wealth and tranquillity of the people." Consultation embodies the dialectic of unity and diversity: distinctive voices are offered, but decisions arise through harmonization. It does not eliminate disagreement; it transfigures it into an instrument of insight and concord.

Even as institutions guide human affairs, the soul's ultimate orientation remains toward the One who discloses the divine purpose in every age. The telos of Bahá'í life is not exhausted by world unity or social harmony; it is enduring readiness to recognize and obey the Manifestation of God—both Bahá'u'lláh now and the Promised One to come. Bahá'u'lláh warns: "Let them, at all times, fix their gaze upon the essentials of His Cause, lest when He, Who is the Quintessence of truth, the inmost Reality of all things, the Source of all light, is made manifest, they cling unto certain passages of the Book, and inflict upon Him that which was inflicted in the Dispensation of the Qur'án… For, verily, powerful is He, the King of divine might, to extinguish with one letter of His wondrous words, the breath of life in the whole of the Bayán… and with one letter bestow upon them a new and everlasting life" (Kitáb-i-Íqán). Faith in Bahá'u'lláh confirms Revelation while preparing recognition of the next Manifestation.

Unity as Revelation's fulfillment also entails a transformation in how humanity inhabits the world. Heidegger helps name why: modernity tends to treat order as Herstellen—a project of production, planning, and control—whereas the human way of being is fundamentally Wohnen, dwelling. Dwelling is not passivity; it is a gathered inhabitation of the fourfold—earth, sky, mortals, and the holy—where measure, limit, gratitude, and receptivity orient our making. In this key, Bahá'í unity cannot be engineered as a technical output without falsifying its nature. Revelation discloses a world to be dwelt in by bringing unity forth (poiesis) from hiddenness into presence as form—law, consultation, education, Houses of Justice—that can be inhabited rather than merely operated. Heidegger's thought clarifies two decisive contrasts. First, building belongs to dwelling: authentic institutions are not external tools but sites that gather relations the way a bridge gathers banks, paths, waters, and journeys into a world. Read theologically, consultation is such a "gathering thing": it assembles speech and silence, reason and prayer, disagreement and concord into an ordered clearing in which truth is recognized and unity enacted. Second, Revelation resists Gestell (enframing)—the reduction of beings to standing-reserve and of persons to programmable resources. Gestell can mimic unity with metrics,

coordination, and compliance, yet it hollows out meaning; Revelation summons a unity learned as dwelling: saving the earth (ecological care and temperance), receiving the sky (measure and openness), acknowledging our mortality (humility and responsibility), and awaiting the holy (unceasing readiness for the Manifestation). Thus the administrative order is not machinery for social management but an inhabitable architecture of life: places, practices, and norms in which recognition becomes the style of our living and justice the measure of our togetherness.

Finally, because unity is teleological form rather than sentimental aspiration, it admits principled comparison without syncretism. Thus Qur'án 49:13— "People, we have created you male and female and made you nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another…" (as cited in Juan Cole, *Peace Movements in Islam*, 40)—attests a perennial truth: diversity is ordered to recognition. Bahá'í teleology universalizes this insight by legislating the concrete forms—consultation, universal education, auxiliary language, Houses of Justice—through which such recognition becomes a just and durable world order.

4. The Necessity of Institutional Unity—From Ethical Intention to Divine Structuration

The aspiration toward human unity, when grounded only in moral sentiment or spiritual yearning, is ethically commendable yet structurally insufficient. Political experience, religious history, and—decisively—the Bahá'í Revelation converge on a single claim: affective commitment, however elevated, cannot generate, sustain, or actualize unity unless it is given durable form. Teleologically, if the end of Revelation is unceasing recognition of the Manifestation of God and the realization of human oneness, that end must be instituted—ordered by laws, stabilized in offices, disciplined by consultation, and safeguarded by covenant. To invoke telos without form leaves fulfillment to sentiment; to invoke form without telos hardens administration into mechanism. The Bahá'í writings explicitly affirm and enact this necessity through a divinely ordained world order whose metaphysical, epistemic, and covenantal foundations distinguish it from secular or merely spiritual models of pluralism. Enactment, however, never occurs in a vacuum: institutions must contend with power, inherited antagonisms, competing interests, and the inertia of cultural resistance; legitimacy is lived rather than presumed. Fidelity to Revelation's end therefore entails both devotion and design—unceasing recognition translated into the structuration of unity.

Bahá'u'lláh identifies both the deficit and the demand with precision: "How bewildering, how confusing is such behaviour! No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united. The evidences of discord and malice are apparent everywhere, though all were made for harmony and union. The Great Being saith: O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch" (Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd). The impediment is not the desire for unity but the absence of a binding, transcendent form capable of coordinating hearts, judgments, and structures. Hence His further declaration: "The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to

foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men… This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation" (Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd). Unity thus functions both as foundation and as end; to will it is to institute it.

Revelation also specifies the generators of historical form and their adaptability: "Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time" (Bishárát; cf. Ishrāqát). Final causes require flexible means; accordingly, authority is grounded not in voluntarism but in divine law: "They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples" (Kitáb-i-Aqdas). Unity is neither spontaneity nor technics; it is law-in-time, entrusted to institutions that legislate what is not explicitly revealed, precisely "according to the needs and requirements of the time." In this way, unceasing recognition finds its inseparable correlate: unity through divinely revealed institutions and law.

At the level of public peace, Revelation removes divisive ordinances and ordains integrative instruments. "The first Glad-Tidings which the Mother Book hath, in this Most Great Revelation, imparted unto all the peoples of the world is that the law of holy war hath been blotted out from the Book" (Bishárát); "We have abolished the law to wage holy war against each other. God's mercy hath, verily, encompassed all created things, if ye do but understand" (Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib). Positively: "O members of parliaments throughout the world! Select ye a single language for the use of all on earth, and adopt ye likewise a common script… This will be the cause of unity… and the greatest instrument for promoting harmony and civilization" (Kitáb-i-Aqdas); "It behoveth the sovereigns of the world… to adopt one of the existing languages or a new one… Thus the whole earth will come to be regarded as one country" (Bishárát). These are not pious aspirations but teleological instruments—the legal-technical forms through which unity is enacted at scale. Recognition of the Manifestation thus flowers into juridical universals because Revelation aims to form the world.

Institutional unity presupposes an ethic of citizenship: "In every country where any of this people reside, they must behave towards the government of that country with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness" (Bishárát). Bahá'u'lláh honors just authority in terms that transcend expedience—"The sovereigns of the earth have been and are the manifestations of the power, the grandeur and the majesty of God… Regard for the rank of sovereigns is divinely ordained…" (Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib)—and commands constructive patriotism: "It is incumbent upon every man, in this Day, to hold fast unto whatsoever will promote the interests, and exalt the station, of all nations and just governments" (Lawḥ-i-Dunyá). Teleology here binds devotion to public law: recognition of the Manifestation yields loyalty to justice and obedience to order, not clerical domination or sectarian withdrawal.

Correspondingly, the Bahá'í order is non-clerical. "The pious deeds of the monks and priests… are remembered… In this Day, however, let them give up the life of seclusion…" (Bishárát). The hermeneutic reception of Revelation is likewise democratized: "The understanding of His words… are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit" (Kitáb-i-Íqán). The point is not anti-intellectualism but the de-sacralization of caste and the relocation of authority in divinely appointed institutions. Bahá'u'lláh then ordains the method by which unity thinks: "The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding" (Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd); "hold fast to the cord of consultation and adopt and enforce that which is conducive to the security, prosperity, wealth and tranquillity of the people" (Lawḥ-i-Dunyá); and to rulers: "We have also heard that thou hast entrusted the reins of counsel into the hands of the representatives of the people. Thou, indeed, hast done well…" (Lawḥ-i-Malikih). In sum, recognition takes deliberative form; unity is taught to reason.

This order is neither authoritarian nor anarchic. Its constitutional core is the Universal House of Justice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes that it is "ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error," must be "elected by universal suffrage," and that "unto this body all things must be referred. It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text… [and] hath power to repeal the same." "Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself… The House of Justice is both the initiator and the abrogator of its own laws" (Will and Testament). Its protection is conferred infallibility: "If that House of Justice shall decide unanimously, or by a majority… that decision and command will be guarded from mistake… the body of the House of Justice is under the protection and unerring guidance of God: this is called conferred infallibility" (*Some Answered Questions*, 1984 ed., 172–73). The phenomenon may be more accurately described as divinely authorized legislation: authority that is democratically constituted, periodically renewed, and morally constrained, yet protected in its legislative function. The aim of such authority is explicitly the people's good: "O MY FRIENDS! Walk ye in the ways of the good pleasure of the Friend… His pleasure is in the pleasure of His creatures" (Persian *Hidden Words*, no. 43). On this logic, a global institution, mirrored at national and local levels, is elected to seek the people's good rather than to aggrandize itself. Believers therefore receive conferred infallibility as a functional protection for a legislative body whose members are chosen for moral qualities, rotated in fixed terms, and bound to service.

With respect to models of church–state relationship, Roshan Danesh articulates an epistemic and gradualist account: any movement toward a Bahá'í polity proceeds by voluntary, democratic, and constitutional means; the Universal House of Justice itself presents an open and contingent understanding of its public role; legislation observes a "politics of delay," introducing norms only when social meanings would render them unifying rather than divisive; unity is non-coercive; and social transformation typically advances from shared meanings, to behavioral norms, and finally to legal-political forms. These theses clarify contemporary praxis. By contrast,

the writings also present a recognizable constitutional architecture. Bahá'u'lláh commends a principled synthesis of republican and monarchical forms: "Although a republican form of government profiteth all the peoples of the world, yet the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God… If the sagacious combine the two forms into one, great will be their reward" (Bishárát, Fifteenth Glad-Tiding). In the Tablet of Salmán II (unofficial trans.), He anticipates a time of maturity in which no single soul bears sovereignty alone, except one who, out of love of God, undertakes it for the sake of the Cause. Read together with the Will and Testament's design—a permanent interpretive head (the Guardian) and a deliberative legislature (the House of Justice)—the template resembles a parliamentary monarchy in function: consecrated interpretation alongside elected legislation. Although the line of Guardians ceased, the normative structure—interpretation and legislation as distinct yet complementary functions—continues to orient the horizon of institutional form, while current practice proceeds gradually and constitutionally.

Debate in the secondary literature often reduces to integrationist versus separatist poles. By *integrationist* is meant readings that envisage Bahá'í assemblies simply becoming civil governments; by *separatist*, readings that propose complete institutional separation and confine Houses of Justice to inward ecclesial functions. Strong separatism is normatively inadequate: the *Aqdas* contains civil and penal rulings whose intelligibility presupposes legislative, judicial, and executive capacities within a coherent constitutional frame. Otherwise, conflicts multiply—e.g., is premeditated murder adjudicated under state law or the *Aqdas*? Which authority enforces? A pure two-track model either engenders a government within a government or empties Revelation's legal corpus of public force. Crude integrationism is likewise inadequate: it collapses functional differentiation and risks clerical domination. Danesh's caution is instructive: it is "hard-pressed" to demonstrate strict separation from the primary texts, yet it is equally mistaken to conflate civil organs with Bahá'í institutions. The more adequate articulation is teleological coordination: Revelation institutes a constitutional pattern ordered to unity, such that civil organs and Houses of Justice ultimately converge within one public order—not through sacral despotism, but through divinely authorized legislation, democratic election, consultation, and the rule of law.

Sen McGlinn usefully distinguishes between pattern and identity. The Administrative Order functions as the pattern for the coming world order—signaling teleological continuity between religious organization and civilizational form—while the *Aqdas* also implies a civil state distinct from the religious order. Distinct organs, however, need not entail dual sovereignties in perpetuity. The texts envisage functional differentiation within a single constitutional commonwealth—legislation by the House of Justice, adjudication and execution by civil organs—rather than a permanent, watertight separation of jurisdictions. Mikhail Sergeev's emphasis is likewise apposite: Bahá'u'lláh "repudiated the entire notion of an absolutist state, and of a theo-cratic one." Divinely authorized legislation by an elected body is therefore not "theocracy," but the juridical expression of a teleology of unity realized non-coercively,

gradually, and democratically. For the present, precision is required: “This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them” (Will and Testament) describes a teleological horizon. Contemporary practice appropriately involves distinct civil organs; the House’s legislative remit is chiefly religious/community and formative, while foreshadowing broader public functions in a matured world order when a single constitutional frame can house both functions with due safeguards.

Because authority without virtue corrupts, the order is ethically safeguarded by procedure. Shoghi Effendi forbids canvassing and personalities in elections; electors study qualifications and character, not names (letter to the Spiritual Assembly of Akron, 14 May 1927). In decision-making, “There are no dissenting votes in the Cause… When the majority… decides a matter the minority… should accept this” (on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 19 Mar 1950). The Will and Testament seals the rule of law: “That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the truth and the purpose of God Himself.” This discipline does not suppress conscience; it constitutes a pedagogy of unity—schooling communities to seek truth together through consultation, to obey impersonal law, and to rotate authority through periodic election. Doctrinally, the Will and Testament links the House and the Guardian in a constitutional dyad—interpretation and legislation—as distinct, complementary offices. Although the Guardianship did not continue beyond Shoghi Effendi, the dyad clarifies the normative structure and its functional analogy to a parliamentary monarchy; in the present stage, the Universal House of Justice alone discharges the legislative function, while the interpretive function is secured through the writings and through consultative disciplines under the Covenant.

Historically, the emergence of this order has been contested, as is every attempt to instantiate a new civilizational form. Shoghi Effendi notes public misrepresentations “regarding the validity of institutions that stand inextricably interwoven” (*The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, 3) and records efforts—East and West—seeking to derail or replace the Administrative Order (*God Passes By*, 340). Such resistance is a feature of transition rather than an anomaly, and its overcoming is a reminder that the enactment of a revealed telos requires patience, courage, and renewed recognition—fidelity to the Manifestation expressed as loyalty to the institutions He founded.

Finally, Revelation’s legal-institutional economy is neither static nor limitless. It abolishes what divides (e.g., holy war), ordains what unifies (e.g., an auxiliary language; consultation), and entrusts developmental legislation to a protected body capable of abrogation and adaptation. The aim is distinctly teleological: to escort a plural humanity—by principled stages and with prudence—toward the form of unity. Because telos includes unceasing recognition, the Covenant cultivates vigilance—detachment from finality and readiness for the next Manifestation—so that institutions remain means of fidelity, not objects of devotion. Ontology, epistemology, ethics, and constitutional design thus converge: the Manifestation of God is not merely a moral teacher but the legislator of unity, the founder of institutions, and the author of structures by which the human world is renewed. Unity, accordingly, is Revelation’s praxis—rooted in recognition,

secured by covenant, enacted as order—realized not by the absence of struggle but by its transfiguration into justice and peace.

5. The Manifestation of God as Legislator and the Form-Giver of Political Order

To The Manifestation of God as Legislator and the Form-Giver of Political Order
To grasp the telos of a Bahá'í political philosophy we must begin with the Manifestation's inseparable role as spiritual teacher and divine legislator. While all Manifestations guide humanity ethically, the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh discloses the Manifestation not only as the bearer of truth but as the architect of civilization. "The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind" and reveals laws "according to the exigencies of the time" (Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd). These laws are not ancillary to Revelation; they are its historical form and the vehicle of its civilizational efficacy. At the same time, Revelation orders distinct domains—spiritual, moral, ceremonial, and political—according to their scope rather than collapsing all concerns into a single juridical system. In teleological terms, the Manifestation's lawgiving renders recognizable, durable, and teachable the twofold end previously identified: unceasing recognition of divine authority and the realization of human unity through institutions and law.

Bahá'u'lláh affirms in the Kitáb-i-Íqán that all Manifestations reveal laws suited to their age; what distinguishes His legislative function is its universality, structural completeness for this prophetic cycle, and explicit world-forming intent. He announces a new World Order: "mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System" (Lawḥ-i-Dunyá). Accordingly, He abrogates many ceremonial ordinances of former dispensations (e.g., priestly caste, ritual seclusion), universalizes core spiritual obligations (e.g., prayer, fasting), and inaugurates civil laws proportioned to an age of global interdependence. The ceremonial is largely abrogated; the moral is universalized; the political is institutionalized—each ordered to unity, justice, and spiritual development. In this way, the Manifestation's legislation supplies the formal cause through which Revelation's final cause is realized.

Lawgiving here answers a philosophical necessity: it embodies ontological and epistemic truth in institutions and norms so that truth does not dissipate into sentiment or technique. Bahá'u'lláh names Himself the "Fountain of His laws," "the Ordainer," and the One Who has "sent down His Book that it may be a lamp unto the whole world" (Ishráqát). Without such structuration, systems grounded merely in feeling or speculation tend toward instability (cf. Gilson's warning that piety without metaphysical clarity can "wrong nature," whereas philosophy without Revelation forgets origin and end). Distinguishing the domains of law—spiritual (worship and purification), moral (truthfulness, justice, chastity), and political (obedience to government, consultation, inheritance)—prevents the confusion of conscience, character, and civic order. Thus, legislation is the appointed means by which the intelligibility disclosed by Revelation attains historical form directed to its telos.

Within this architecture, the Universal House of Justice is named "the Trustees of God among His servants" and the "daysprings of authority in His countries" (Ishráqát). Its competence is legislative with respect to matters not explicitly revealed and intentionally flexible so as to adapt enduring principles to changing conditions ("for each day there is a new problem…" Bishárát; cf. Ishrāqát). Its protection is "conferred infallibility"—that is, a corporate, non-personal protection promised to the body as such when it legislates in its sphere (Some Answered Questions, 1984 ed., 172–73)—which may be described, in conceptual terms, as a mode of divinely authorized legislation. The House of Justice thus serves as the locus of dynamic law, safeguarding unity without foreclosing maturation. In teleological perspective, this corporate protection secures the continuous recognition of divine authority within the very process that gives civilizational shape to unity.

Authority in this system is neither derived from popular will alone nor inherited by custom; it is ordained by Revelation and safeguarded by the Covenant. The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá anchors post-Ascension authority in a constitutional dyad: the Guardianship (interpretation) and the House of Justice (legislation). While the historic line of Guardians did not continue beyond Shoghi Effendi, the normative structure it articulated—interpretation and legislation as distinct yet mutually oriented offices—still illuminates the constitutional horizon of the World Order. The analogy is instructive: the design resembles a parliamentary monarchy in which a consecrated interpretive office and an elected legislative chamber coordinate under law. Present practice rightly proceeds with the House of Justice as the supreme legislative body of the Faith and with interpretation grounded in the authorized texts and the corpus of authoritative Bahá'í guidance; the constitutional grammar remains legible even as its historical instantiation unfolds gradually.

A further prudential point concerns enforcement. At present the Bahá'í community operates no penal apparatus and does not exercise civil or criminal jurisdiction over the general public; its institutions govern the internal life of the community through consultative processes, moral suasion, and administrative sanctions proportionate to religious membership. In a matured commonwealth foreshadowed by the texts, executive and judicial functions would cohere with the legislative role of the House of Justice within a single constitutional order, with functional differentiation of organs and the rule of law; in the meantime, the legislative remit of the House of Justice is primarily religious/community and formative while guiding public-minded action by principle and example. This maturational cadence exemplifies the same teleology: recognition first forms meanings, then norms, and finally institutions.

This teleological and constitutional reading also clarifies contemporary debates. Roshan Danesh emphasizes gradualism, a "politics of delay," and non-coercive unity: laws should be introduced when their social meanings conduce to unity; change proceeds from shared meanings to behavioral norms to political forms; and any transition in public role must be voluntary, democratic, and constitutional. These points are fully consonant with Bahá'u'lláh's insistence that laws be applied "according to the needs and requirements of the time" (Bishárát) and with

His abolition of coercive religious violence (Bishárát; Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib). Where Danesh presses further—that the writings commit us to a permanent multiplicity of church–state models without a normative template—the textual economy suggests otherwise: it discloses a recognizable constitutional pattern (e.g., Houses of Justice, consultative governance, law-in-time) designed to mature toward a single commonwealth grounded in unity-through-law, even as proximate institutional arrangements vary by stage and context.

Mikhail Sergeev's clarifications are likewise pertinent. He underscores the scriptures' repudiation of absolutism and of clerical theocracy, and he highlights Bahá'u'lláh's commendation of consultative government as a replacement for autocracy. He also notes textual vectors toward a blended form of global governance in which "all matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice" (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, as cited in the secondary literature), not as sacral despotism but as constitutional ordering in which religious principles guide public law without erasing functional differentiation or democratic participation. In this register, "divinely authorized legislation" via an elected body is not theocracy; it is a revealed constitutionalism whose end is the people's good and whose means are consultation, election, and law.

Governance, so conceived, mediates divine attributes into public life by constitutional means. Justice is 'the light of the world,' and reward and punishment are 'the sources of life to the world' (*Ishrāqát*); yet justice is not mere legalism, nor unity regimentation. Bahá'u'lláh's law aims at inner transformation *and* outer coordination: 'The precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples' (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*), and 'the heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion' (*Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd*). Hence the claim is constitutional, not voluntarist: legislation remains adaptive to time and place without ceasing to be revealed.

Finally, obedience to these institutions is a spiritual act ordered to the same telos. Recognition of the Manifestation and obedience to His laws are "the first duty prescribed by God for His servants" (Kitáb-i-Aqdas). The laws are "the lamps of My loving providence," and "true liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments" *(Lawḥ-i-Dunyá)*. Such obedience prepares as well as preserves: rooted in Bahá'u'lláh's authority, the laws and institutions cultivate humility, detachment, and vigilance—conditions necessary for recognizing the next Manifestation. The Covenant thus keeps the path of recognition open even as it stabilizes unity through law. In sum, the Manifestation is not merely a moral teacher; He is the legislator and form-giver of a divine civilization whose polity embodies the telos of unity while remaining open to development and faithful to the distinctive roles of spiritual, moral, and political law.

6. The Bahá'í Commonwealth as the Political Telos of Revelation

The Bahá'í Commonwealth is neither a merely spiritual fellowship nor a value-neutral civic shell. It is a *revealed constitutional* form—elected, consultative, accountable—in which divinely authorized legislation proceeds without clerical rule or sacral despotism, giving institutional embodiment to Revelation's twofold telos: unceasing recognition of the Manifestation of God

and the civilizational realization of the oneness of humankind. In Bahá'u'lláh's own architecture of history, this fulfillment unfolds in stages. The Lesser Peace denotes the initial, political unification of states achieved by the concert of governments; the Most Great Peace designates the comprehensive spiritual-civilizational consummation in which the principles, laws, and institutions of Revelation order public life. Bahá'u'lláh calls the rulers to "be reconciled among yourselves" and to establish a collective security by which "should anyone among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him" (a charter for the Lesser Peace), and He simultaneously identifies the "union of all [peoples] in one universal Cause, one common Faith" as the "sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world" (the horizon of the Most Great Peace) (Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, Call to the Nations; The Promised Day Is Come). Shoghi Effendi encapsulates the relation: the Lesser Peace arises "through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá'í plan," whereas the Most Great Peace "must inevitably follow as the practical consequence of the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes and nations," preserved "by the divinely appointed ordinances… associated with His holy name" (Shoghi Effendi, "The Unfoldment of World Civilization"; letters cited by the Universal House of Justice).

This double horizon frames the Commonwealth's emergence. It proceeds by persuasion, attraction, and the gradual convergence of norms rather than by coercion or conquest. To prevent category mistakes, it is crucial to distinguish the present community-administrative domain from the future civil domain of the world commonwealth. In the present domain, Bahá'í institutions neither wield a penal apparatus nor exercise sovereignty. They teach, exhort, consult, legislate on matters not explicitly revealed that concern the internal life of the community, and—where necessary—impose administrative sanctions such as the temporary withholding of administrative rights. Obedience is secured by conscience and covenant, not by police power (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament). In the future civil domain—when the unity of humankind is juridically embodied as public order—the rule of law requires impartial enforcement: courts competent to adjudicate, executive organs able to secure compliance, and sanctions proportionate to justice and safeguarded by due process. These two domains occupy different jurisdictions yet are continuous in principle: each is non-partisan, consultative, accountable, and subordinated to justice rather than subordinating truth to force (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd; Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh).

The language of commonwealth (res publica) clarifies the normative claim. In classical theory, Cicero defined a commonwealth as a people's affair constituted by association in justice and a partnership for the common good; should justice fail, "there is nothing left to be called either people or nation" (Republic 1.2). Hobbes reconceived the commonwealth as an "artificial person" constituted by covenant, whose end is peace and common defense (Leviathan chs. 17, 19). Hooker grounded social stability in consent— "mutual subjection one to another"—as the sinews that bind a body politic (Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity I.x.4). The Bahá'í Commonwealth fulfills and transfigures these strands: it is not founded on human contract alone but on divine

legislation; not ordered to a parochial good but to the consummation of human unity; not coercive uniformity but principled unity-in-diversity. In Shoghi Effendi's terms, it belongs to the "New World Order, Divine in origin, all-embracing in scope," for which the present Administrative Order is at once "harbinger, nucleus and pattern" (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh).

Institutional form follows from this telos. Bahá'u'lláh ordains Houses of Justice as legislative loci "according to the needs and requirements of the time," promises them divine assistance, and charges them to translate immutable principles into timely norms (Bahá'u'lláh, Bishárát; Ishrāqát). In the fully matured order delineated by Shoghi Effendi, the world commonwealth will include "an International Executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth; a World Parliament… elected by the people… and confirmed by their governments; and a Supreme Tribunal whose judgment will have a binding effect"—together with the demolition of economic barriers, the stilling of religious fanaticism, the extinction of racial animosity, and the promulgation of a single code of international law under a system of collective security (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh). Within this architecture, the Universal House of Justice functions as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth, legislating on matters not explicitly revealed, while local and national bodies—today styled Spiritual Assemblies—are transitional designations for the Local and National Houses of Justice to be established as conditions permit (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament).

Two clarifications preserve constitutional coherence. First, names track jurisdictional maturity. The *Aqdas* ordains Houses of Justice; the current usage of 'Spiritual Assembly' reflects a prudent economy of growth. In a civil order, names will normalize toward the revealed designations—Local and National Houses of Justice under the Universal House of Justice as apex (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*). To avoid over-specifying nomenclature not fixed by text, this essay uses 'global' and 'national/local' descriptively only. Second, present and future domains remain distinct. Today, the Universal House of Justice's remit is primarily religious/community and formative; in a matured commonwealth, legislative, executive, and judicial functions will be coordinated at civil scale in ways consistent with Revelation and safeguarded by consultation, transparency, and justice (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh).

Because Revelation legislates public as well as personal matters, a purely "two-track" model (religious norms internal; civil norms external) becomes unstable once unity is juridically embodied. Consider only civil law: the Aqdas makes the writing of a will obligatory and provides apportionments of inheritance in cases of intestacy; it legislates on marriage and divorce (including waiting periods and consent), on economic obligations (e.g., Huqúqu'lláh), and on public order (e.g., the prohibition of sedition and riot)—all of which presuppose legislative interpretation, judicial adjudication, and executive execution in a single, coherent order (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas). To affirm these provisions while denying their eventual civil

embodiment either empties Revelation's legal corpus of public force or creates a de facto government within a government. The Bahá'í Commonwealth avoids both extremes by uniting divinely authorized legislation with democratic election, consultation, and the rule of law, thereby subordinating force to justice without sacralizing despotism (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament; Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh).

The modus operandi of this emergence has been carefully articulated. As Roshan Danesh emphasizes, Bahá'í notions of maturation involve gradualism, a politics of delay (laws are applied when social meanings will make them unifying rather than divisive), and non-coercive unity (no recourse to "holy war," no manipulation of partisan mechanisms) (Danesh, "Church and State in the Bahá'í Faith"). These principles explain why the Administrative Order develops internally while the Lesser Peace advances externally through states. Where Danesh infers from this an enduring multiplicity of models without normative template, the textual horizon adopted here is narrower: Revelation discloses a recognizable constitutional architecture—Houses of Justice at local, national, and universal levels; a world legislature, executive, and tribunal; consultative method; collective security—within which prudential variation can occur but which is not morally indifferent among forms (Bahá'u'lláh, Bishárát; Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh). With Mikhail Sergeev, it is therefore possible to repudiate clerical theocracy and absolutism while affirming the legitimacy of divinely authorized legislation exercised by elected institutions under covenantal safeguards (Sergeev, Bahá'í Teachings and the Principle of Separation between Religion and State). The resulting picture is neither a sacral despotism nor a secular positivism, but a constitutional order constituted by Revelation and developed democratically through consultation and service.

Because authority without virtue corrupts, procedural rectitude functions as the ethical armature of the Commonwealth. The Bahá'í writings elevate consultation as the "lamp of guidance" and "bestower of understanding," binding deliberation to truth-seeking rather than to faction (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd). Shoghi Effendi requires an ethos of rectitude and transparency, warning administrative bodies to purge their conduct of "dictatorial assertiveness" and "partiality," and he prohibits candidacy and campaigning to keep elections focused on spiritual qualifications rather than personalities (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh; Principles of Bahá'í Administration). From these norms one may extrapolate, for the civil domain, procedural guarantees consonant with Bahá'í principle—public notice of norms, reasons-giving in policy justification intelligible to non-adherents, minutes recording decisions (not personalities), avenues of reconsideration and appeal along the consultative chain, audit and financial accountability, and conflict-of-interest/recusal rules. Present community practice already anticipates much of this through hierarchical appeals (Local to National to Universal), the expectation of sufficiently informative minutes, and standards of rectitude and impartiality; a matured commonwealth extends these habits to the civil sphere in forms proportioned to public authority (compilations in Lights of Guidance; Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice).

The international dimension is specified with equal clarity. In addition to a world legislature and executive, the Bahá'í writings envisage a Supreme Tribunal for the adjudication of disputes among states, whose members are selected through nationally representative processes and whose judgments, whether unanimous or by majority, possess binding effect—backed, if necessary, by collective enforcement (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablet to The Hague). The point is not the militarization of peace but the justiciability of international obligations; the Tribunal juridifies the principle of collective security first announced in Bahá’u’lláh’s summons to the kings (Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day Is Come). In Shoghi Effendi’s summary, the “commonwealth of all the nations of the world” will abolish economic barriers, suppress the causes of religious and racial strife, and institute universal norms—such as a world auxiliary language—that sustain unity without erasing diversity (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh).

Legitimacy in this order is covenantal rather than merely contractual. Authority flows from the Manifestation’s legislation and is safeguarded by the Covenant; it is also democratically constituted (election without candidacy or partisanship), periodically renewed, and morally constrained by revealed standards of justice, compassion, and truthfulness (Bahá’u’lláh, Ishrāqát; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Will and Testament). The Universal House of Justice’s protection—conferred infallibility in its legislative sphere—does not sacralize officials; it secures the law’s guidance for a community asked to elect “manifestations of the fear of God” and “daysprings of knowledge and understanding,” rotating membership at fixed intervals and binding office-holders to service (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Will and Testament; Some Answered Questions). Normatively, decisions that order common life must be intelligible internally in the idiom of Revelation and externally in public reasons accessible to non-adherents—peace, non-domination, protection of conscience, equity, and material welfare—so that shared goods rather than sectarian claims underwrite compliance. This “double rendering” reflects the Qur’ānic and Abrahamic ambition of a public reason capacious enough to welcome multiple communities and it tracks Bahá’u’lláh’s substitution of consultation for adversarial politics (Bahá’u’lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd).

Critically, the Commonwealth’s governing principles are revelatory rather than ideological. Justice is ontological before it is procedural; diversity is the very condition of unity; obedience is fidelity to truth rather than servility; force is subordinated to law and law to righteousness (Bahá’u’lláh, Ishrāqát; Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat). Bahá’u’lláh abolishes theological coercion and religious war and replaces them with an order grounded in the sovereignty of God and the oneness of humankind (Bahá’u’lláh, Bisháráat). Transformation of hearts precedes and then sustains transformation of structures: the Commonwealth unfolds organically—from internal institutional development, through the Lesser Peace, toward the Most Great Peace—in a sequence Shoghi Effendi repeatedly describes as the Administrative Order serving as nucleus and pattern for a federated world polity (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh).

Finally, this polity is federal in scope and organic in principle. It preserves cultural diversity while establishing juridical unity, eschewing both assimilationist uniformity and fragmentary pluralism. The Manifestation is its architect—not by dictating every detail but by instituting principles and founding structures that render divine unity politically sustainable. Hence Shoghi Effendi's insistence that, in the Golden Age of the Faith, the Bahá'í World Commonwealth will attain its "full stature," mirroring "however faintly" the radiance of the Abhá Kingdom (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*; *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*). In this sense, the Commonwealth is the political telos of Revelation: a revealed constitutional form—elected, consultative, and non-clerical—in which legitimacy is both revealed and ratified through consent, and whose institutions are expressions of divine will ordered to the regeneration of the world. It completes the arc from *principium* to *telos*: the truth disclosed becomes the justice realized, and the unity declared becomes the civilization built. On this clarified footing, comparison with classical republics, liberal democracies, monarchies, socialist states, and contemporary international systems can proceed: the Bahá'í Commonwealth reframes sources of legitimacy (revelation and consent), the mode of governance (consultative, non-partisan, rectitudinous), and the end of politics (the unity and flourishing of the human race) (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*; *The Advent of Divine Justice*).

(1) *"Isn't this theocracy?"* No. The order is elected, consultative, and non-clerical; divinely authorized legislation via Houses of Justice is constitutional (rule-bound, accountable), not priestly domination. The *Aqdas* and the *Will and Testament* specify differentiated functions; the stage-contingent public horizon avoids both dual sovereignty and sacral fusion. (2) *"What about non-Bahá'ís?"* The framework affirms freedom of conscience, forbids coercion of belief, and insists on full civil equality and public reasons intelligible to all; rights function as the civic grammar of justice in an order oriented to unity, with reciprocity between liberties and duties. (3) *"How does transition avoid domination?"* Through gradualism, persuasion, demonstration, and institution-building proportioned to social meanings; reforms proceed "according to the needs and requirements of the time," earning legitimacy by justice, transparency, and service. (4) *"Equality vs. UHJ eligibility?"* The doctrine of the equality of women and men stands alongside specific revealed institutional roles; this is acknowledged without dilution and situated within the broader constitutional telos of unity-through-law already traced from family formation to civic order.

7. The Meaning of Politics in the Bahá'í Faith—Continuity, Break, and Fulfillment

A clarified vocabulary is prerequisite. Here, politics denotes the ordering of common life—institutions, norms, and laws oriented to shared goods—while partisan politics denotes competitive party activity, factional mobilization, and electoral canvassing. Bahá'í abstention concerns the latter; it does not entail withdrawal from politics as the science and art of just governance (Universal House of Justice, "Messages"; Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh). For avoidance of doubt, three terms govern what follows: revealed constitutionalism (non-clerical, consultative, elected, and divinely authorized legislation on matters not explicitly revealed); double rendering (internal, revelatory reasons accompanied by public reasons accessible to all); and stage-contingency (institutional forms proportioned to

historical maturity). Without this lexicon, comparison misfires: a revealed polity is judged by party metrics or by statecraft bracketed from teleological ends.

Classical theory frames the first major horizon. For Aristotle, politics (politikê) is architectonic: it coordinates the practical sciences for the sake of the highest human good within a community—"every community is established with a view to some good" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a18–b7). Politics here is ethical teleology made public; the *polis* exists to cultivate virtue, and justice is a substantive distribution ordered to the common good. Roman theorists retain this orientation: Cicero defines the *res publica* as "the affair of a people," not any aggregate but an "assemblage of people… associated in an agreement with respect to justice and a partnership for the common good," such that when this agreement dissolves "there is nothing left to be called either people or nation" (Cicero, *Republic* I.2). Politics is intelligible only in relation to a substantive account of justice and a shared telos.

Medieval traditions deepen the theological register. In Christian and Islamic scholasticism, sovereignty is ultimately divine; legitimate governance is that which conforms to (or at least does not contravene) divine law. *Respublica* functions as a normative ideal of rule under law—applicable to monarchies, republics, and mixed constitutions—while the ends of governance remain teleological: the salvation and flourishing of persons and communities in right relation to God (Aquinas, *ST* I–II, q.90–97; al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State*).

Early modernity effects a structural break. Machiavelli sunders politics from classical virtue, recasting it as *virtù*—the prudential, sometimes ruthless, mastery of contingency (*Prince*). Hobbes grounds order in a fear-motivated covenant that constitutes an artificial sovereign for peace and defense (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 17, 19). Locke prioritizes natural rights, limited government, and consent (*Second Treatise*); Rousseau theorizes the general will (*Social Contract*). From these currents emerges the modern state as a legal-rational apparatus ruling territory by positive law and monopoly of force. Liberalism, socialism, nationalism, and democratic theory diverge in purpose but converge in secularization: sovereignty becomes human, law immanent, and justice procedural or ideological.

Late-modern refinements preserve this secular frame even as they moderate it. Rawls seeks legitimacy without comprehensive metaphysics by positing an "original position" behind a "veil of ignorance," from which principles of "justice as fairness" are chosen (Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*). Public reason brackets ultimate truths to stabilize plural societies. From a Bahá'í standpoint, the affirmation of equal moral worth and fair cooperation is welcome; the bracketing of metaphysics is not, because justice is revealed as a metaphysical and spiritual principle, not merely a contractarian equilibrium (Bahá'u'lláh, *Ishrāqát*). Habermas's discourse theory similarly aims at legitimacy through coercion-free deliberation (*Between Facts and Norms*). Bahá'í consultation shares a family resemblance in its commitment to mutual reason-giving and the avoidance of domination, yet its ground and **telos** differ: it is anchored in virtues such as humility, detachment, and love of truth and is ordered to the will of God, not to procedure alone

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd*). Foucault's genealogies expose the productive operations of power within discourse and institutions (*Discipline and Punish*). This diagnostic acuity is indispensable; yet from a Bahá'í perspective, deconstruction is insufficient. Revelation proposes reconstruction: a covenantal architecture that limits power, abolishes clergy, and institutionalizes consultation, transparency, and accountability (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*).

Against this background, Bahá'í politics is neither a nostalgic return to antiquity nor a confessional absolutism. It is a revealed transfiguration of the political: the art commanded and taught by Revelation for ordering human relations in accordance with the will of God for unity, justice, and peace. Bahá'u'lláh states that "the progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God" (*Ishrāqát*). His Tablets to rulers insist upon justice, consultation, moderation, and universal welfare. Politics, in this horizon, is sacred responsibility rather than autonomous will.

The revealed content is concrete. Bahá'u'lláh abolishes holy war and theological coercion (Bishárát), calls for an auxiliary world language (Aqdas; Bishárát), commends representative consultation ('entrust[ing] the reins of counsel … to the representatives of the people') (Lawḥ-i-Malikih), and entrusts Houses of Justice to legislate 'according to the needs and requirements of the time' on matters not expressly revealed (Bishárát; Ishrāqát). These prescriptions institute a consultative constitutional order in which divinely authorized legislation—non-clerical, elected, rule-bound, and publicly justifiable—translates immutable principles into adaptive norms, a trust safeguarded by the Covenant.

'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms and interprets this orientation. He enjoins loyalty to just governments and abstention from partisan entanglements, while encouraging constructive civic engagement, especially in constitutional and republican settings ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Treatise on Leadership*; *The Secret of Divine Civilization*). Religion and politics are "two radiant stars" that "aid one another," yet their confusion corrupts both; clerical domination is repudiated, and the moral-spiritual aims of governance are affirmed ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Treatise on Leadership*). Citizens are to participate within legitimate channels; institutions of the Faith are to avoid party competition while modeling consultation and service.

Shoghi Effendi renders the discontinuity explicit. The Administrative Order is "not an experiment" but a divinely conceived Order, its legitimacy derived from Revelation rather than contract or revolution (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 147). In its modern partisan sense, "politics" is alien to the Faith; believers avoid entanglements that breed division. This abstention is not quietism: it is orientation. The community is summoned to justice, social action, and institution-building—not by seizing coercive power, but by constructing the foundations of a new order through spiritual means and non-partisan administration (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*).

A further clarification concerns differentiation within unity. Bahá'í sources chart a third path between sacral fusion and secular separation: functional differentiation within a single constitutional commonwealth. The *Aqdas*'s civil provisions presuppose legislative, judicial, and executive capacities; the *Will and Testament*—'This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them'—signals coordination, not dual sovereignty. Assumption made explicit: as civil scale matures, integration must preserve non-coercion, full civil equality for non-adherents, and public reasons for laws of general application. Present stage: Bahá'í institutions legislate chiefly for community life; maturer horizon: differentiated organs operate within one order, avoiding both separation and sacral fusion.

An example not treated above illustrates the revealed grammar of politics. In the *Kitáb-i-Sulṭán* (Tablet to Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh), Bahá'u'lláh exhorts the monarch to "examine all matters with the eye of justice and mercy," to purge oppression, and—strikingly—to institute consultation in legislation by convening the king, learned figures, and ministers to adopt laws conducive to the security and prosperity of the realm (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Sulṭán*). The counsel weds **justice** to representative counsel and locates the legitimacy of law in a deliberative process oriented to the common good. This is neither clerical rule nor technocratic command; it is covenantal authority guiding a public order through consultative means.

The normative epistemology of Bahá'í politics requires *double rendering*: reasons are framed internally—in the idiom of Revelation, fidelity to the Covenant, and the virtues that animate consultation—and externally—in public-reason terms accessible to non-adherents (peace, non-domination, protection of conscience, equity, material welfare, administrative efficiency). This is not capitulation to secularism but the public articulation of revealed aims in assessable terms. *Example*: a schooling reform rooted in the revealed duty of universal education is publicly rendered as advancing equal opportunity, civic capability, and social mobility, supported by transparent justifications, publication of norms, fiscal accountability, and conflict-of-interest safeguards (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*; *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*).

On this account, Bahá'í politics exhibits continuity, break, and fulfillment. It continues classical commitments to justice, the common good, and moral purpose; it breaks with modern secularizations that sever politics from metaphysics, reduce law to procedure, or enthrone party conflict; and it fulfills the wounded aspirations of political philosophy by re-founding governance in divinely authorized legislation, consultative constitutionalism, and covenantal authority. Justice is ontological before it is procedural; diversity is the condition of unity; obedience is fidelity to truth rather than servility; force is subordinated to law, and law to righteousness (Bahá'u'lláh, *Ishráqát*; *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat*). The result is neither nostalgia nor utopia: it is a revealed polity that redeems the political without sacralizing despotism or capitulating to relativism.

Finally, situating the Bahá'í Commonwealth within this arc clarifies the stakes of comparison. Liberal, socialist, monarchical, democratic, and contemporary international paradigms each

capture partial goods—rights, welfare, stability, participation, order—yet none, as paradigms, can generate the integration of truth, justice, unity, and peace toward which Bahá'u'lláh directs history. The Bahá'í model neither rejects the best fruits of political modernity nor baptizes its pathologies; it re-orders them under a divine telos and a non-partisan administration that privileges consultation over contestation. In this sense, politics is not abandoned but redeemed: returned to its sacred origin, not as priestly rule, but as governance by the institutions of the Covenant—Local and National Houses of Justice under the Universal House of Justice—grounded in justice, consultation, and unity, and rendered publicly accessible by reasons that all can assess (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*; Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*). The next section can then proceed on clarified terms to a comparative analysis of dominant paradigms, evaluating their sources of legitimacy, modes of governance, and final ends against the political telos that only Revelation can fully actualize.

8. The Political Subject—The Role of the Individual

In the Bahá'í horizon, the individual is neither a merely private bearer of claims nor an autonomous, self-legislating will. The person is a moral–spiritual subject whose freedom is constituted by obedience to divine authority and whose agency is realized through selfless service and fidelity to truth. Accordingly, political identity is formed not by party alignment or ideological commitment but by covenantal loyalty, spiritual transformation, and the constructive expression of divine virtues in public life (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*).

The primary civic posture is principled loyalty to the government of residence. Conduct toward civil authority is to be marked by 'loyalty, honesty and truthfulness,' receiving public order as a trust while measuring legitimacy by justice (Bahá'u'lláh, *Bishárát*; *Lawḥ-i-Dunyá*). Obedience to law is thus a religious duty, not a preference, even as ultimate allegiance remains with Revelation. Where explicit conflict arises—e.g., a demand to renounce the Faith or to perform acts directly contrary to revealed law—refusal becomes an obligation of conscience: a non-partisan witness to a higher authority when lesser authorities exceed their warrant (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*; Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*).

Because unity is the criterion of political action, partisan mechanisms are eschewed. The abstention is principled rather than quietist: it redirects civic energy from adversarial competition to constructive institution-building and service (cf. §4; §6). In practice, current guidance delineates the boundaries:

• Partisan entanglements (not permitted). Party membership; candidacy under party labels; campaigning, canvassing, fundraising, or public endorsements for parties, platforms, or candidates (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*; *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*; Universal House of Justice, letters).

• Public demonstrations (permissible under conditions). Participation must be lawful, non-violent, consistent with Bahá'í principles, and—crucially—undertaken in light of timely

institutional guidance so that unity is preserved (Universal House of Justice, letters).
• Administrative discipline (safeguard, not sanction). Temporary withholding of administrative rights may be applied to protect unity and public trust; its purpose is remedial and pedagogical, not punitive (§6; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*).”

Edge-case are handled by principle plus guidance. Compulsory party registration is ordinarily avoided; where civil participation is legally contingent upon affiliation, believers seek case-specific institutional guidance to preserve non-partisanship while complying with law (Universal House of Justice, letters). Primary elections follow the same logic: participation in genuinely non-partisan/open primaries may be possible; closed partisan primaries that require affiliation are generally avoided absent institutional guidance. Military **service** is fulfilled in forms consonant with principle (e.g., non-combatant roles) where available and lawful; refusal of lawful service is not prescribed as a general rule (Shoghi Effendi, letters; Universal House of Justice, letters). Taxation is paid as an aspect of obedience to government—even where revenues fund policies one abhors—unless explicit revealed law is implicated (Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*; Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*).

The abstention from partisanship is not a negation of politics but a reorientation of it. At the theoretical level, it coheres with what Danesh terms non-coercive unity and a politics of delay: mechanisms are adopted when social meanings render them integrative rather than divisive (Danesh, “Church and State in the Bahá’í Faith”). At the same time, strong versions of institutional separationism (e.g., readings that confine Bahá’í obligations to purely private religion) do not annul civic duties—loyalty, law-abidingness, and constructive service remain binding (cf. §4; Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*).

The primary Bahá’í mode of political action is constructive. The Bahá’í mode of political action is constructive non-partisanship. Evidence. The Administrative Order patterns collective decision—consultative, elective, non-clerical—without constituting a parallel state (§4); it publicly models consultation, justice, and service. Practice. Character formation (truthfulness, rectitude, justice, compassion) covaries with institutional norms: elections without candidacy or canvassing; consultation in detachment and candor; post-decision loyalty with channels for reconsideration (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*; *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*; cf. §6).

Public engagement is governed by *double rendering*. Internally, reasons are framed in the idiom of Revelation; externally, the same positions are articulated in public-reason terms—peace, non-domination, protection of conscience, equity, and material welfare—so that non-adherents can assess their prudence and justice (cf. §6; Bahá’u’lláh, *Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd*). Exemplar: a universal-education reform is grounded in revealed duty and publicly justified as advancing equal opportunity, civic capability, and social mobility. Digitally, this entails avoiding factional endorsements, inflammatory content, and disinformation; and upholding courtesy, accuracy, and fairness (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*; Universal House of Justice, letters).

This reframing of political subjectivity replaces antagonism as the axis of civic identity. In place of liberal individualism, ideological activism, or passive monarchism, it posits a covenantal agency oriented to unity, justice, and service. Engagement with injustice is principled and active—lawful, non-violent, consultative—yet free of rancor and the will to domination (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*; Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*). The believer thus appears as a spiritual trustee: a citizen of a world-embracing commonwealth in formation, whose public life is ordered by Revelation, whose agency is exercised as service, and whose struggle is directed not against persons but against the veils of ego, prejudice, and disunity. In this way, political life is transfigured: power becomes trust, freedom is obedience to truth, and citizenship is participation in the patient work of building a just and luminous order.

9. The Rights of Man in Bahá'í Political Thought

Within the Bahá'í paradigm, the "rights of man" are neither pre-political entitlements grounded in abstract autonomy nor merely contractual claims; they are divinely ordained, intrinsically relational, and ordered to higher ends—justice, unity, and spiritual development. Accordingly, rights and duties are correlative: the fulfillment of personal potential presupposes responsibilities to God, to legitimate institutions, and to the common good (Bahá'u'lláh 1978; 'Abdu'l-Bahá 2007). Stated compactly and always read through the lenses of justice and unity, the core claims include**:** freedom of conscience and belief with a duty of sincere truth-seeking and non-compulsion; freedom of worship and of non-worship with a duty of courtesy; freedom of expression and association in non-partisan forms with a duty of truthfulness and civility; due process and equitable treatment with a duty of obedience to just law and truthful testimony**;** civil equality without distinction of creed, race, sex, or class with a duty to eliminate prejudice; education and meaningful work with a duty to acquire and apply useful knowledge; and security of person, property, and honor, including relief from destitution, with a duty of moderation, generosity, and just contribution to public needs (Bahá'u'lláh 1978, 1992; Shoghi Effendi 1991; 'Abdu'l-Bahá 2007).

Pluralism and religious freedom are stated without equivocation. Belief cannot be coerced; spiritual aims are realized "by peace and tranquillity," not "by the sword and arms," and teachers are enjoined to persuade by "kindliness, lowliness and humility," not domination ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2007; Bahá'u'lláh, "Tablet to The Hague," 1919/2002). Apostasy carries no civil or penal sanction in Bahá'í law; where "Covenant-breaking" is named, its consequences are spiritual and communal (e.g., shunning to protect unity), not civil punishment ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2007). Non-Bahá'ís enjoy full civil equality: divine policy is "justice and kindness toward all mankind," prejudice is categorically condemned, and rulers are charged to protect the rights and honor of all citizens (Bahá'u'lláh, "Tablet to The Hague," 1919/2002; 'Abdu'l-Bahá 2007). Within this frame, justice—"the best beloved of all things" in the sight of God—functions as the interpretive key to rights: claims are assessed by their contribution to unity and the advancement of civilization rather than by the unhindered assertion of private will (Bahá'u'lláh 1978, 1992).

Procedurally, the ethics of consultation translate into enforceable guarantees. Present community practice (cf. §§4, 6–7) includes notice and opportunity to be heard, minutes that record actions and reasons, hierarchical appeals (Local → National → Universal), and standards of rectitude and impartiality (Shoghi Effendi 1991). A clarifying term of art is **"**temporary withholding of administrative rights," that is, a temporary suspension of administrative privileges such as voting or service on elected bodies; this measure is restorative and pedagogical, not retributive, and has no civil effect (Shoghi Effendi 1991). Looking ahead to a matured civil order (cf. §4), due-process norms would entail public promulgation of laws, reasons-giving intelligible to non-adherents, transparent records, independent audit, conflict-of-interest and recusal provisions, and accessible avenues of review—proportioned to the jurisdiction of a world commonwealth (Bahá'u'lláh 1992; Shoghi Effendi 1991). Because the Commonwealth aims to include all peoples, Bahá'í public action should be intelligible in public-reason terms—peace, non-domination, equity, and material welfare—while remaining faithful to its revealed ground (cf. §§4, 6).

Socio-economic claims further specify this teleology. Freedom from oppression is inseparable from access to education, meaningful work, and basic welfare; the duty to work—framed as worship—and the obligation to pursue useful sciences embed social rights within a theology of human development. The elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty appears not as discretionary charity but as a requirement of justice ordered to the unity and peace of society (Bahá'u'lláh 1978; 'Abdu'l-Bahá 2007). In this economy, governance stands or falls by fidelity to justice as divine trust: rulers are commanded to safeguard "the rights of the downtrodden" and to "judge between men as they would judge between their own kin," while subjects sustain order through law-abiding conduct and service (Bahá'u'lláh 1978).

In sum, Bahá'í political thought reframes the 'rights of man' as the civic grammar of justice within a teleological order: rights are fulfilled in community rather than prior to it, anchored in unity rather than absolutized in abstraction, and realized through duties freely embraced. This is not rights relativism or majoritarian license: rights gain stability by reference to a divine end—unity and justice—rather than to shifting preference. The envisaged Commonwealth harmonizes rights and responsibilities under the shadow of divine justice—each completing the other.

10. Family, Moral Formation, and the Political Order

In the Bahá'í vision, the family is not a privatized enclave of sentiment but the first polity of moral life: the primordial institution in which spiritual, ethical, and civic capacities are formed for the sake of society. Classical theory intuited the arc from *oikos* to *polis*; Revelation reconfigures it as formation for unity-through-law. The household bears a public vocation: it generates the habits without which justice cannot be administered, law cannot be trusted, and unity cannot be sustained. Accordingly, 'training in morals and good conduct' takes priority over mere information; parents carry a non-delegable duty to educate, and failure of this stewardship

violates a divine trust (Bahá'u'lláh 1992; 'Abdu'l-Bahá 2007). The point is teleological, not anti-intellectual: knowledge is ordered to virtue, and virtue to service.

Formation is comprehensive. Children are to be habituated in sincerity, trustworthiness, loving-kindness, and devotion to God; the "chaste and holy life" that Shoghi Effendi names a "controlling principle" is to be reflected in domestic conduct, economic dealings, and public service alike (Shoghi Effendi 1990). Reverence for parents functions first as a theological posture and only then as a social convenience—an apprenticeship in obedience and gratitude that becomes the ground of civic reliability ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2007). Discipline—intellectual as well as moral—is indispensable, not to suppress freedom but to fit desire to truth and to channel capacity toward the common good.

The family's work is political in the strict sense: it fashions subjects capable of inhabiting a just order. Rectitude, straightforwardness, and kindliness are not private refinements but public necessities; without them 'the constitution of the communities' lacks the character to endure (Shoghi Effendi 1990). As 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the household as 'a nation in miniature,' classical theory intuited the same arc from *oikos* to *polis* (Aristotle) and from family to civil society to state (Hegel); Revelation reconfigures that arc as formation for *unity-through-law*. Thus the claim is causal, not rhetorical: the order of the home becomes the order of the city; the virtues learned in intimacy become the protocols of law.

Bahá'í marriage and family law is calibrated to these public effects. The requirement of parental consent to marriage binds households together and teaches intergenerational consultation; the prohibition of backbiting and the cultivation of chastity and fidelity protect the ecology of trust on which cooperation depends (Bahá'u'lláh 1992; Shoghi Effendi 1990). Families become "fortresses" of the Cause to the extent that they model consultative decision-making, mutual respect, and a love disciplined into justice; persistent domestic discord, by contrast, calls into question any wider claim to demonstrate the efficacy of Revelation in public life ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2007). The equality of women and men—normative in Bahá'í law—thus begins as a domestic ethic and matures as a civic condition: authority is shared, consultation is reciprocal, and education is equally incumbent (Bahá'u'lláh 1992; 'Abdu'l-Bahá 2007).

Education stands at the junction of private duty and public right. Where parents lack the means to teach, the community—and ultimately the House of Justice—assumes responsibility; the education and moral upbringing of children are matters of public concern precisely because they are conditions of public order (Bahá'u'lláh 1992). Work is integrated into the same moral economy: the obligation to acquire a trade and to labour usefully—"exalted to the rank of worship"—forms citizens who are economically self-reliant and socially responsible (Bahá'u'lláh 1978). So understood, the household becomes the nursery of economic justice, equipping persons to resist idleness and excess and to contribute to the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2007).

The family is likewise the first school of unity-in-diversity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s musical image—distinct notes blending into a perfect chord—renders difference as harmony rather than threat; within the intimacies of kinship, prejudices are unlearned and capacities for recognition are acquired (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 2007). A “truly Bahá’í home” thus becomes a front line against the disintegration of social bonds, where racial and other hatreds are exposed as failures of love before they harden into ideologies of domination (Shoghi Effendi 1990). Because households are porous to the public sphere—through speech, media, schooling, and work—domestic consultation and disciplined utterance (truthfulness joined to courtesy) function as early training for non-partisan, public-reason engagement later in life (cf. §§6–7).

The horizon of the family is world-embracing. Parents are enjoined to instill “thoughts of universal peace” so that children grow into “armies of peace,” servants of the body politic understood as humankind (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 2007). The same logic binds microcosm to macrocosm historically: the Bahá’í writings describe an integrative process that, “starting with the family,” must culminate in the unification of the whole world (Shoghi Effendi 1991). The household is not a refuge from politics but its seedbed; its success and the success of a world commonwealth are mutually implicative.

In sum, the Bahá’í account rejects both the privatization and the politicization of the home. The family is a sacred trust oriented to public ends: the formation of truthful, just, compassionate, and industrious persons capable of consultation and obedience to law; the modeling of unity that the wider polity must later institutionalize; the apprenticeship in world citizenship. In this way it anchors the arc from principium to telos: from the first education of the heart to the final form of a civilization ordered by justice and the oneness of humankind (Bahá’u’lláh 1992; Shoghi Effendi 1991; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 2007).

11. Non-State Actors and Global Governance

Complementing §6’s constitutional horizon, the Bahá’í account of global governance does not collapse political agency into the sovereign state. While affirming the legitimacy and necessity of just national governments, it envisages an order in which interlocking agents—religious institutions, associations, learned persons, media, and economic actors—share responsibility for establishing justice and unity. These actors are not sovereigns in the Westphalian sense; they are organs of a single moral body whose coordinating principle is Revelation and whose end is the oneness of humankind. In this cosmology, political authority is not exhausted by territorial sovereignty; it is distributed and disciplined by moral purpose (Bahá’u’lláh 1978, 1992).

Civil society is a locus of governance rather than a benevolent afterthought. “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization”: persons and their voluntary associations are summoned as co-architects of world order, not as passive beneficiaries of state will (Bahá’u’lláh 1994). Associations that teach, heal, reconcile, and build—schools, charities, professional bodies, neighborhood councils—become instruments of public justice when animated by trustworthiness, consultation, and service. Economic actors are likewise implicated:

labor is “exalted to the rank of worship,” idleness is condemned, and the advancement of “arts, crafts and sciences” is praised; enterprise thereby acquires civic vocation, and production and exchange become sites where moderation, responsibility, and truthfulness are practiced for the sake of social cohesion (Bahá’u’lláh 1978). Communication, too, is political: truthfulness in speech, the avoidance of calumny and backbiting, and disciplined utterance are cast as public duties, recognizing that discourse can either knit the world together or unmake it (Bahá’u’lláh 1992).

This distributed authority is governed by a distinctive ethic. Consultation displaces adversarialism; non-partisanship guards unity; service, rectitude, and transparency regulate power (see §§4–7). The Administrative Order functions as pattern rather than as a parallel state: elected, consultative, non-clerical bodies cultivate habits of collective decision that civil society can mirror in schools, clinics, cooperatives, research institutes, and other civic platforms. Learned persons—understood not as a clerical estate but as those who wed expertise to moral character—serve the commonwealth by clarifying problems and illumining means proportioned to revealed ends; rulers are enjoined to consult such persons, and institutions are charged to legislate “according to the needs and requirements of the time” (Bahá’u’lláh 1992; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 2007).

Non-involvement in partisanship does not entail civic quietism (cf. §10). Believers may serve in non-partisan governmental roles, collaborate with civil society, participate in international fora, and initiate endeavors that relieve suffering and advance knowledge—provided such engagement preserves unity and is articulated in public-reason terms intelligible to non-adherents (peace, non-domination, equity). In practice this yields a repertoire of constructive action: community schools integrating moral and scientific education; mediation and reconciliation services that translate consultation into conflict resolution; cooperative enterprises aligning profitability with social responsibility; research networks pairing technical competence with rectitude of conduct (Bahá’u’lláh 1994; Shoghi Effendi 1991).

Because transformation is historical, resistance is expected. The writings speak of peoples “fast asleep,” and of opposition arising from both “learned and unlearned” (Bahá’u’lláh 1978). The mode of advance, however, is persuasion, example, and institutional maturation—not domination. Legal and cultural pluralism are met with principled coexistence: Bahá’í law is not imposed upon others; the community demonstrates its coherence by practice while honoring civil law and contributing to public welfare. When tensions arise, the instruments are consultation, truthful speech, and service; power is reconceived as trust, and authority is legitimated by justice rather than by victory.

In sum, the Commonwealth does not monopolize governance; it integrates it. The state retains indispensable functions yet ceases to be the solitary subject of the political. Under the sovereignty of God—which relativizes all other sovereignties—associations, scholars, media, and economic agents assume rightful responsibility within a coherent order. The pattern is

already visible wherever consultative culture, non-partisan service, and truthfulness animate civic life; it marks the gradual entrance of a new political rationality into history (Shoghi Effendi 1991; Bahá'u'lláh 1992).

12. Language, Identity, and the Politics of Meaning

Against epistemologies that reduce language to an instrument of domination or to the play of indeterminate signs, the Bahá'í writings advance a different grammar of the political: language is a divine trust ordered to truth, unity, and transformation. The political subject is not primarily the autonomous will of liberal theory nor the positional effect of discourse; it is a soul addressed by Revelation. "The source of all learning is the knowledge of God… and this cannot be attained save through the knowledge of His Manifestation" (Bahá'u'lláh 1978). With this claim, authority is relocated from human construction to the Logos; identity is reconstituted as responsiveness to a Word that summons, judges, and educates.

This relocation does not evacuate history; it transfigures it. Revelation, transcendent in origin, enters temporal contingency to reorder it. The Word discloses ends that exceed ideological programs—unity and justice as divine purposes—yet realizes these ends through historical media: law, institutions, and disciplined speech. The Bahá'í Commonwealth therefore neither fixes meaning in metaphysical stasis nor abandons it to relativism; it maintains the permanence of essential goods (truth, justice, unity) while their expression unfolds by progressive revelation. The implied anthropology converges with Augustinian insistence that just order descends from a higher source and with Farabian claims about polity perfected by revealed law, yet it is distinct in its consultative constitution, wherein authority and deliberation are internally related rather than opposed.

Poststructuralist critiques clarify the stakes. Foucault exposes the productive operations of discourse in forming subjects and normalizing power; Derrida thematizes deferral and the textual conditions of meaning (Derrida 1976; Foucault 1977, 2007). The Bahá'í response neither denies discourse's productivity nor the historicity of interpretation; it rejects the nihilistic inference that truth is nothing but effect. "Every word is endowed with a spirit," Bahá'u'lláh writes; speech bears ontological charge and moral consequence (Bahá'u'lláh 1978). Its abuse dissolves trust and multiplies enmity; its rectitude binds persons into the possibility of a common life. Language is thus covenantal before it is instrumental: a bond that participates in reality rather than a mere assertion of will.

Consultation is the praxis of this redeemed speech (cf. §§4–7). Neither adversarial contest nor masked will-to-victory, it is disciplined truth-seeking under the sign of unity. Its virtues—humility, detachment, candor, trustworthiness—are epistemic conditions for tracking reality, not optional courtesies. Consultation assumes the partiality of perspectives and seeks convergence without the coercion of party or personality. In conceding to critical theory that discourse shapes the political, the Bahá'í model denies that domination is discourse's highest office: guided by

revealed principle and ordered to a shared telos, language becomes the medium through which plurality fuses into insight rather than mobilizes into faction.

Because language is world-forming, the politics of meaning is also the politics of education and communication. The summons to an auxiliary world language is not ornamental idealism but a practical condition for planetary deliberation; without a shared medium, justice cannot be reasoned globally nor unity juridically enacted (Bahá'u'lláh 1992). Likewise, injunctions against calumny and idle fancies acknowledge that the public sphere can be unmade by lies as surely as by violence (Bahá'u'lláh 1978). Media, schools, pulpits, and parliaments thus become sites of moral accountability in speech: where truthfulness is cultivated, trust accrues; where words are weaponized, the commonwealth decays.

This grammar reframes identity. If the political subject is constituted by responsiveness to Revelation, then race, class, nation, and analogous markers—while historically consequential—are not ontologically ultimate. The self is summoned out of captivity to such determinations without denying their force; it receives a new axis—orientation to truth and service—that relativizes ideological identity and renders it available for unity-in-diversity. The repudiation of partisanship follows: not flight from politics, but refusal to let speech be captured by antagonism as organizing principle. Language must enable cohabitation; conscripted to win, it ceases to disclose.

At the same time, both rigid essentialism and radical relativism are refused. The writings hold to a unity of truth that unfolds across dispensations: "whatsoever hath led the children of men to shun one another… hath, through the revelation of these words, been obliterated and abolished" (Bahá'u'lláh 1978). Historicity and permanence are not enemies. Forms of expression change as human capacity expands; the essence—justice, unity, the acquisition of virtues—remains stable. Classical orientations—Plato's highest good, Aristotle's architectonic politics, Cicero's res publica, and Strauss's retrieval of enduring questions—are acknowledged as partial anticipations; their horizons are exceeded insofar as the highest good is named by Revelation and enacted institutionally through a consultative order that is neither secular proceduralism nor clerical fiat (Aristotle 1998; Cicero 1999; Plato 1997; Strauss 1959).

In this light, language is the workshop of civilization. Through words, laws are promulgated, covenants made, councils convened, wrongs rectified, and hope taught. When the Word of God enters history, it does not merely inform; it performs. It calls a people into being, institutes a discipline of speech, and supplies the semantics by which justice can be conceived and enacted. The Bahá'í Commonwealth is thus not the triumph of a slogan but the maturation of a grammar: a revealed lexicon of unity and a consultative practice that together transmute discourse from a scene of suspicion into an instrument of shared discernment. Language does not only speak the world; under Revelation it helps re-create it.

Conclusion: Revelation and the Vigilance of History

The Across these chapters, a single claim has been unfolded: the Bahá'í Faith does not append a political theology to an inherited canon; it re-founds political reason upon Revelation. Order, justice, obligation, and sovereignty are relocated from speculative construction or partisan will to the manifest will of God disclosed in history through the institution of the Manifestation. Politics, accordingly, is reconceived as a revealed art: not the management of interests or the formalization of contract, but the ordered enactment of divine purpose in collective life (Bahá'u'lláh 1992).

Revelation discloses ends as well as origins. The telos of Bahá'í political life is twofold: unceasing recognition of the Manifestation of God as the axis of knowledge and criterion of truth, and the progressive realization of the oneness of humankind as juridical and civilizational form. That teleology is historically mediated. It advances through the Lesser Peace—political concord among states—and toward the Most Great Peace, in which revealed principles, institutions, and laws order public life at civilizational scale (Shoghi Effendi 1991). The Administrative Order functions in this movement not as a sectarian enclave, but as "nucleus and pattern" of an emergent commonwealth—democratically constituted, consultative, non-clerical, and protected in its legislative remit (Bahá'u'lláh 1992; 'Abdu'l-Bahá 2007).

Form follows from this end. Houses of Justice legislate "according to the needs and requirements of the time" on matters not explicitly revealed; elections proceed without candidacy or campaigning; consultation replaces adversarial contest as the ordinary method of public deliberation; partisanship is renounced to preserve the condition of unity upon which justice depends (Bahá'u'lláh 1992; Shoghi Effendi 1991). Procedural rectitude—reasons-giving, transparency proportionate to function, avenues of reconsideration and appeal within the consultative chain—becomes the ethical armature of authority. These norms are already operative within the community domain and anticipate, without coercion, their civil-juridical articulation in a matured commonwealth.

Rights and duties are recast within this teleology. The "rights of man" are neither pre-political entitlements grounded in abstract autonomy nor merely contractual claims; they are the civic grammar of justice in an order oriented to unity. Freedom of conscience is affirmed; belief cannot be coerced; apostasy carries no civil or penal sanction; and non-Bahá'ís enjoy full civil equality under a just order (Bahá'u'lláh 1992; 'Abdu'l-Bahá 2007). Reciprocity governs the whole: liberties are preserved by obedience to just law; participation is matched by service; authority is bounded by accountability. In this horizon, negative and positive rights are complementary—protection from domination entails education, meaningful work, and conditions in which spiritual capacities can be exercised (Bahá'u'lláh 1978).

Political subjectivity is likewise transformed. The individual is neither the atomized bearer of preferences nor the partisan activist of ideology, but a moral–spiritual trustee whose agency is realized through truthfulness, rectitude, and service (cf. §§7–9). Family life becomes the first

polity of moral formation; civil society becomes a locus of governance; economic activity acquires civic vocation; media and schools are charged with the ethics of truthful speech. Non-state actors—associations, learned persons, communicative institutions—participate in a distributed architecture of governance disciplined by consultation and non-partisanship. The state retains indispensable functions without monopolizing political agency; sovereignty is relativized before the sovereignty of God, and authority is shared across levels within a coherent constitutional horizon (Bahá'u'lláh 1978, 1992; Shoghi Effendi 1991).

Because transformation is historical, prudence governs tempo. Gradualism, a politics of delay where needed, and non-coercive unity mark the path from present plural orders toward a federated commonwealth. Legal and cultural diversity are met not by imposition but by demonstration: institutions earn legitimacy by justice, transparency, and service; Bahá'í public action is rendered intelligible to non-adherents in public-reason terms—peace, non-domination, equity—while remaining faithful to revealed grounds (cf. §§4–6, 11). Where resistance arises—from entrenched interests or inherited meanings—the instruments remain persuasion, example, and the maturation of institutions.

None of this closes the future. Fidelity to Bahá'u'lláh entails vigilance toward further Revelation: a refusal of the religious amnesia by which communities cling to forms while failing to recognize the One who comes. The Covenant safeguards unity and continuity without sacralizing officials; conferred protection in the legislative sphere secures guidance without absolutizing human judgment (Bahá'u'lláh 1992; 'Abdu'l-Bahá 2007). The Administrative Order is thus a pedagogy as much as a polity—training souls and structures to enact justice now while remaining alert to the Voice that shall speak anew.

What results is a sacred realism: neither utopian abstraction nor reductive pragmatism, but the slow transmutation of history through purified intention, institution-building, and the unification of peoples and nations. Authority is guardianship; citizenship is covenantal participation; sovereignty is the capacity to enact justice on behalf of all. The measure of this order will be its fruits: the protection of conscience, the rectification of wrong, the reconciliation of estranged communities, and the visible advance of unity and peace. In that measure, political philosophy returns to its first principle and its last end: the truth revealed becomes order lived.

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