

and dispensation.... [In] the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest [it is] His own Book - the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme. In these cities spiritual sustenance is bountifully provided, and incorruptible delights have been ordained. The food they bestow is the bread of heaven, and the Spirit they impart is God's imperishable blessing. Upon detached souls they bestow the gift of Unity, enrich the destitute, and offer the cup of knowledge unto them who wander in the wilderness of ignorance. All the guidance, the blessings, the learning, the understanding, the faith, and certitude, conferred upon all that is in heaven and on earth, are hidden and treasured within these Cities." {1}

This Word is the Creative Word of God; that Word which has the power to restructure the entire creation. In the following passage Bahá'u'lláh speaks of effecting the change of Order with the First Word which He spoke in His capacity as a Manifestation of God.

"I testify that no sooner had the First Word proceeded,...out of His mouth,...than the whole creation was revolutionized,... Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, entities of a new creation,..." {2}

Bahá'u'lláh affirms that each one of the Words which He has uttered is endowed with a similar power. He says, "Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him...is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet." {3} And that, "Every single letter proceeding from Our mouth is endowed with such regenerative power as to enable it to bring into existence a new creation - a creation the magnitude of which is inscrutable to all save God." {4}

Notwithstanding the fact that many of these Words had been in use by mankind prior to the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, the fact that they were uttered by the Manifestation has endowed them with unique distinction. Bahá'u'lláh affirms, "The word which the one true God uttereth in this day, though that word be the most familiar and commonplace of terms, is invested with supreme, with unique distinction." {5}

Bahá'u'lláh, in His capacity as "the Organizer of the entire planet", {6} has, through His Word, upset the equilibrium of the old order and established the balance of the new World Order. Bahá'u'lláh has invested mankind with a similar capacity by endowing each soul with the power to reflect all the names and attributes of God - including the power of creation. Bahá'u'lláh says, "O My Servant! Obey Me and I shall make thee like unto Myself. I say 'Be', and it is, and thou shalt say 'Be' and it shall be." {7}

In the Lawh-i-Maqsud which is found in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh there is a wonderful and lengthy passage on the importance of words, and their proper use by man.

"No man of wisdom can demonstrate his knowledge save by means of words. This showeth the significance of the Word as is affirmed in all the Scriptures, whether of former times or more recently. For it is through its potency and animating spirit that the people of the world have attained so eminent a position.... "Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world. Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility." {8}

We might reflect for a moment on the significance of words in relation to the work we presently do for the Faith. Our basic task as Bahá'ís is two-fold: (1) the promulgation of the Word of Bahá'u'lláh, and; (2) the establishment of a world-wide culture and civilization which is based on that Word. The administration of the activities designed to achieve these ends is carried out by bodies whose method is consultation and whose product is a decision. Both the process and the content of the administrative agencies of the Faith are represented in words. But these words are not ordinary words; they are words spoken for the sake of God, and following the Order set by Bahá'u'lláh - intending to carry out His Divine Plan. They are specifically designed to create a visible effect in the world and in the hearts of man in accordance with the laws and principles of Bahá'u'lláh.

The beloved Guardian, in one of his first letters to the American Bahá'í Community, spoke of the purpose of the National Spiritual Assembly and specifically connected the accomplishment of that task to the necessity for communication.

"[The National Spiritual Assembly's] immediate purpose is to stimulate, unify and coordinate by frequent personal consultations, the manifold activities of the friends as well as the local Assemblies; and by keeping in close and constant touch with the Holy Land, initiate measures, and direct in general the affairs of the Cause in that country." {9}

During the course of his ministry, besides his one book and his several book-length letters, the Guardian wrote more than 26,000 letters to Assemblies, committees, and individuals, expounding upon the Word of Bahá'u'lláh, guiding the friends, and organizing them in the gradual construction of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. In these letters he indicated time and again to the friends the importance of communication and urged them to focus on the means for communication, as well as the content of what was being said. In a letter he wrote in 1931 which is included in the World Order Letters he quoted 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definite statement that even the possibility for the achievement of World Order is directly linked to the development of means for communication:

"In cycles gone by, though harmony was established, yet, owing to the absence of means, the unity of all mankind could not have been achieved. Continents remained widely divided, nay even among the peoples of one and the same continent association and interchange of thought were well-nigh impossible. Consequently intercourse, understanding and unity amongst all the peoples and kindreds of the earth were unattainable. In this day, however, means of communication have multiplied, and the five continents of the earth have virtually merged into one....Hence the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved." {10}

From the following letter it's clear that, even in 1923, the Guardian was tremendously burdened by the correspondence which was so necessary to the organization of the work of the Cause, and hoped for a "solution" to the problem.

"I am sure you all realise the seemingly unsurmountable difficulties in the way of individual correspondence with the ever-increasing multitude of Bahá'ís throughout the world, and I need hardly tell you how tremendously difficult it is, and how reluctant I feel, to discriminate at all between the many letters of varying importance which I daily receive from almost every corner of the globe. Realising however that direct and intimate individual correspondence, in some form or other, is most urgent and vital to the interests of the Cause, I am, I assure you, giving it these days again my careful and undivided attention, and pray God that to this problem may soon be found a satisfactory and feasible solution. In the meantime, I wish to emphasise the fact that I eagerly await, and would welcome, and would assuredly have time to peruse, most carefully and in person, every individual letter you may wish to send me, and my readiness and wish to attend, in the very best way I can, to every matter raised in those letters. No written message, however unimportant, will first be opened and read by any one save myself." {11}

In another early letter the Guardian indicates the importance of communication between the various institutions around the world for forging a bond of brotherhood and common purpose.

"They [the Assemblies] must make an effort to maintain official, regular, and frequent correspondence with the various Bahá'í centers throughout the world, report to them their activities, and share the glad-tidings they receive with all their fellow-workers in the Cause. "They must encourage and stimulate by every means at their command, through subscription, reports and articles, the development of the various Bahá'í magazines,..." {12}

The Universal House of Justice in its 1974 Naw-Ruz Message to the Bahá'ís of the World reiterated the Guardian's stress on the importance of communication and words in general, encouraging the friends to adopt means which were more efficient and rapid.

"[The] dissemination of news and messages, so vital to the knowledge, encouragement and unity of the Bahá'í community, must be made efficient and rapid, and in anticipation of a vast expansion in the number of believers, of

Local Spiritual Assemblies and of localities where Bahá'ís reside a coordinated program of translating and publishing Bahá'í literature with the eventual aim of providing the Sacred Text and the teachings of the Faith to all mankind is to be developed.... "The proclamation of the Faith, following established plans and aiming to use on an increasing scale the facilities of mass communication must be vigorously pursued." { 13 }

We are not only encouraged as individuals to stimulate each other through our letters, magazines, and personal communications - consultation is a law which is specifically enjoined upon our administrative bodies. This law is of such importance that Shoghi Effendi calls it "the bedrock of this unique order." { 14 }

The supreme importance of these consultative bodies lies in the fact that in them resides the sole authority for the administration of the affairs of the Faith. No individual in the entire Bahá'í world has any more power or administrative authority than any other individual - all administrative authority is vested in elected bodies whose method of operation is consultation.

In the following passage Shoghi Effendi indicates the scope of the authority, and the efficacy of the method, of these consultative bodies:

"The principle of consultation, which constitutes one of the basic laws of the Administration, should be applied to all Bahá'í activities which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through cooperation and continued exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests. Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable, are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task." { 15 }

WHAT ARE THE THINGS WHICH NEED TO BE DONE:

In the promulgation of the Word of Bahá'u'lláh, and in the creation of a new world-wide culture and civilization, the primary tasks which must be accomplished are all concerned with consultation, communication, and motivation. But the achievement of these goals also requires knowledge of the Word and its authoritative interpretations, and administrative skill in doing such work as planning, organization, management, and monitoring. Knowledge of the principles of Bahá'u'lláh, and skill in consultation and the methods of science, are primary requisites for all of these activities.

In one of Shoghi Effendi's early letters to the American Bahá'í community he spoke of the role in organizing and shepherding the community which would be undertaken by the future International House of Justice, saying that, "that Supreme Council...will guide, organize and unify the affairs of the Movement throughout the world." { 16 }

But it is not necessarily the administrative agencies who do all the work, or for that matter, even initiate every impetus for the Faith as a whole to move in any particular direction. The individual believer has a part in this process

which is not inconsiderable.. In the words of Shoghi Effendi:

"[It is the] individual believer on whom, in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire community. He it is who constitutes the warp and woof on which the quality and pattern of the whole fabric must depend.... Without his support, at once whole-hearted, continuous and generous, every measure adopted, and every plan formulated, by the body which acts as the national representative of the community to which he belongs, is foredoomed to failure. "The administrative agencies of a divinely conceived Administrative Order at long last erected and relatively perfected stand in dire need of the individual believer to come forward and utilize them with undeviating purpose, serene confidence and exemplary dedication." {17}

While it is to every individual believer, as "one of the multitude of bricks which support the structure and assure the stability of the administrative edifice,..." {18} that this call is made, it is on the learned, in particular, that a greater responsibility falls. Bahá'u'lláh, in the Lawh-i-Maqsud, says:

"The man of consummate learning and the sage endowed with penetrating wisdom are the two eyes to the body of mankind. God willing, the earth shall never be deprived of these two greatest gifts....Please God, the peoples of the world may be led, as the result of the high endeavours exerted by their rulers and the wise and learned amongst men, to recognize their best interests." {19}

'Abdu'l-Bahá adds His injunction:

"It is essential that scholars and the spiritually learned should undertake in all sincerity and purity of intent and for the sake of God alone, to counsel and exhort the masses and clarify their vision with that collyrium which is knowledge." {20}

In the concluding passages of The Secret of Divine Civilization, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's treatise on social and political development and the responsibilities of the learned within those arenas, the Master indicated the supreme importance of communication of thought and the directing of public opinion. He said:

"It is therefore urgent that beneficial articles and books be written, clearly and definitely establishing what the present day requirements of the people are, and what will conduce to the happiness and advancement of society. The publication of high thoughts is the dynamic power in the arteries of life; it is the very soul of the world. Thoughts are a boundless sea, and the effects and varying conditions of existence are as the separate forms and individual limits of the waves; not until the sea boils up will the waves rise and scatter their pearls of knowledge on the shore of life. "Public opinion must be directed toward whatever is worthy of this day, and this is impossible except through the use of adequate arguments and the adducing of clear, comprehensive and conclusive proofs. For the helpless masses know nothing of the world, and while there is no doubt that they seek and long for their own happiness, yet ignorance like a heavy veil shuts them away from it." {21}

Furthermore, He, in that same book, indicates what the collective responsibility of the scholars and the learned is in connection with the structuring and ordering of the affairs of the world:

"In view of the fact that at the present time...fully developed and comprehensively learned individuals are hard to come by, and the government and people are in dire need of order and direction, it is essential to establish a body of scholars the various groups of whose membership would each be expert in one of the aforementioned branches of knowledge (in preceding passages, these are cited as "knowledge of the sacred Scriptures and the entire field of divine and natural science, of religious jurisprudence and the arts of government and the varied learning of the time and the great events of history..."). This body should with the greatest energy and vigor deliberate as to all present and future requirements, and bring about equilibrium and order."{22}

In 1949 the Guardian admonished the believers to work toward "a more profound and co-ordinated Bahá'í scholarship...,"{23} but it seems that we have had some difficulty in carrying out this instruction. Bahá'í scholars and those who study deeply the Writings of the Faith are often spread so far afield from each other that collaboration and coordination is physically and financially impossible. And while the Faith has always had in its ranks scholars and learned individuals there has not been, until recently, an official administrative channel through which they might efficiently and effectively coordinate their efforts and collaborate in the devising of solutions to the problems facing the Bahá'í community.

The Universal House of Justice established its Research Department shortly after assuming its duties, and in 1968 made provision for the extension into the future of the functions of the institution of the learned through the establishment of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. Five years later the International Teaching Centre was brought into existence. The Association for Bahá'í Studies was begun in the mid-1970's. And within the past year the Continental Boards of Counsellors have received instructions from the House of Justice to assist the community of scholars.

But the communicational medium through which these scholars might be convened has still not yet been effectively established. The beloved Guardian gave voice to a similar plaint as early in his ministry as 1923; we would do well to hear again his wish and reflect to determine how we might fulfill by proxy this long-cherished hope to work closely with others in the establishment of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

"After a long and unbroken silence, it gives me the greatest joy to be enabled to correspond again with my dearly-beloved co-workers of the National Spiritual Assembly. "Your three letters,...have been safely received, and to each I have given my earnest and fullest attention. Their perusal which reflects only a certain amount of your activities together with the study of the enclosed communications and circulars and of the detailed and admirable report of the proceedings of the Annual Convention have all served to heighten my admiration

for the thoroughness, the ability, and the devotion with which you are conducting the affairs of the Cause of God in that land. "How often I have wished and yearned to be nearer to the field of your activities and thus be able to keep in a more constant and closer touch with every detail of the manifold and all-important services you render. I cherish the hope that ere long the facilities in the means of communication and transport will serve to draw us still nearer to one another, and fulfill, though partially, this long-desired wish." {24}

The efficacy of consultation in connection with working on projects together is clearly set forth in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

"The purpose of consultation is to show that the views of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man,... Thus consultation... hath been enjoined upon the believers, so that they may confer upon ordinary and personal matters, as well as on affairs which are general in nature and universal. "For instance, when a man hath a project to accomplish, should he consult with some of his brethren, that which is agreeable will of course be investigated and unveiled to his eyes, and the truth will be disclosed;...the members of each profession, such as in industry, should consult, and those in commerce should similarly consult on business affairs. In short, consultation is desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues." {25}

"Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs. Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another's projects and plans." {26}

The task ahead of the Bahá'í world is the most monumental task which has ever confronted any group of people throughout all of history. It is a task which is not only going to require study, research, and deepening on the part of a great many scholars, it is going to require that all of that work be coordinated and systematized..

This task is none other than the organization and management of the entire range of human and material resources around the world for the benefit of all mankind. Shoghi Effendi has given us a vision of the pattern of this future society in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*:

"A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve center of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate....In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will cooperate, and will harmoniously develop....The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war...will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind,...to the extension of scientific research,...to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the

planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race." {27}

This passage was written in 1939, in the dark beginnings of a World War at a time when few had ever even dreamed of such prospects, yet here is a clear and definite anticipation of the communications system which our modern scientific age has made into reality. And is this not a major miracle? It was only one hundred years ago from this present date when Bahá'u'lláh, seeking to impress upon Nabil-i-Akbar the wonders of past ages, set forth as an example the achievement of Martos who, "invented an apparatus which transmitted sound over a distance of sixty miles." {28}

These inventions and discoveries are not happenstance. The plan of God requires means for its implementation, and the Word of Bahá'u'lláh has unleashed the potentiality for all of the necessary sciences and technologies to come into existence. Adib Taherzadeh, in volumes I & III of his series, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, speaks at length of the connection between the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and the developments in the communications sciences:

"Since the appearance of the Bab, man's advances in both material and spiritual civilization have been prodigious. The unprecedented increase in scientific discoveries has, within a short period of time, established a marvellous system of communication throughout the world, which is of the utmost significance if we are to evaluate correctly the plan of God for mankind. "The diffusion of the light of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the entire planet and the proclamation of its Message on a global scale could be realized only at a time when the peoples of the world are able to communicate easily with one another. Without a world-wide system of communication linking all humanity together, the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh would have been impractical and ineffective. For this is a Faith whose basic teachings revolve around the principle of the oneness of mankind. Its message is universal and its aim is to establish a spiritual world order for all who dwell on earth. "In the early days of the Faith in Persia, many believers could not visualize the manner in which the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh would reach the remote corners of the earth. The only way of travelling known to them was by walking or riding a donkey or a mule. The question which puzzled them most was how they could cover such long distances to teach the Cause. At that time no one could have offered a solution except to say that God would create the means. But the Bab had stated that mankind should establish a system of swift communications so that the news of the coming of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' could reach the whole world. "Now this has happened, and within such a short period a miraculous scientific revolution has taken place. Today the world has become one world. Man can communicate with the speed of light and travel faster than sound. The Bab had indeed ushered in a new era in human knowledge, paving the way for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh..." {29} "Bahá'u'lláh affirms (in the *Suriy-i-Haykal*) that through the outpouring of knowledge from the heart of the Haykal, He will soon raise up scientists of great calibre who will bring about such marvellous

technological achievements that no one can as yet imagine them. This prophecy of Bahá'u'lláh has already been fulfilled - and this is only the beginning.... "The technological developments which have taken place in the field of communications since the advent of the Bab bear ample testimony to this. As the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh grew, the means of communication kept pace with it." "...In surveying the progress of their Faith, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh have seen that whenever the propagation of the Faith or the building of its Administrative Order needed some new material means, they were miraculously provided in time. Some of the new inventions which have played a vital part in the development of the Faith have come about just in time to serve a particular need. To cite one example of many: Bahá'u'lláh revealed many Tablets, Epistles and Books which, if compiled, would produce about one hundred volumes. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings are no less in range. The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá contain, among other things, teachings both spiritual and social, laws, exhortations and explanations about many subjects including man, the purpose of his life and his relationship to God. Added to these are the voluminous writings of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith. In addition to his famous works, he has written no less than twenty-six thousand letters, some of them so lengthy that they warranted being printed in the form of a book. His writings contain invaluable guidance which, as the authorized Interpreter of the Words of Bahá'u'lláh, he has given to the Bahá'í world. It can be seen therefore that the Bahá'í Holy Writings are enormous in range and contain matters of vital interest for all humanity. "When the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í community, came into being in 1963, one of the most essential needs was the collating of all the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith and the making of a comprehensive index of all the subjects they contained. This was a vital necessity for the supreme institution of the Faith which had to have access to each and every subject recorded in these Writings, so that it could guide the Bahá'í community in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and also legislate whenever feasible on matters which are not explicitly mentioned in these Writings. "Up until the formation of the Universal House of Justice, it was impossible even to attempt to make this comprehensive index. Such a colossal undertaking, involving the provision of a detailed list of every subject within such a vast range of writings, would not have been a practical proposition given the small size of the Bahá'í community because of the non-existence of technological aids at that time. The invention of these aids, such as photocopiers and electronic processors, and their commercial use, were almost synchronized with the birth of the Supreme Body of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. And this vital task was undertaken. Had it not been for this timely development, insignificant as it may seem today, it is difficult to imagine how the Universal House of Justice could have discharged its sacred functions in the Bahá'í world effectively, bearing in mind that prior to taking every major decision, the Supreme Body has to refer to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and take into consideration their words which have a bearing on the subject.{30}

Norbert Wiener, the chief founder of the science of cybernetics - the science of control and communication - foresaw many of these possibilities which were inherent in the advent of the communication and information sciences. In his book, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, written in 1950, he says:

"...Communications in society...[is] the cement which binds its fabric together." {31}

"...The integrity of the channels of internal communication is essential to the welfare of society." {32}

"With the airplane and the radio the word of the rulers extends to the ends of the earth, and very many of the factors which previously precluded a World State have been abrogated. It is even possible to maintain that modern communication, which forces us to adjudicate the international claims of different broadcasting systems and different airplane nets, has made the World State inevitable." {33}

While the presently available technology in the communications industry is extremely useful in and of itself, it takes on an even greater significance and facility when it is fused with present technological advances which have been made available to humanity from the information processing sciences. The result of this fusion is the creation of a new information environment which has already had tremendous societal impact, yet society has not even begun to tap the deeper potential of this environment. The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh will, through the medium of the fusion of the communication and information processing technologies, have tremendous "ordering capabilities" at hand by which the management of the world can be accomplished. (A chart illustrating the correlative developments from these two sciences and their latter day fusion is included as an appendix to this paper.)

At this point I feel it's important to say a little about the connection and relationship which the philosophy and theory of the information processing sciences have to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Information is a word which has been around in the English language for some time, and heretofore it has meant little more than "a collection of facts". Bahá'u'lláh, however, as was quoted in reference #5 above, says that the Words He has uttered have been invested with a new spirit, even those words which were the most familiar and commonplace of terms. Information is one such word which has been invested with tremendous significance in the most fundamental manner. The new way in which scientists and philosophers conceive information has implications for the very structure of the philosophy of the way we perceive the nature of reality.*

In *God Passes By* Shoghi Effendi speaks of some of the more important Tablets from the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh. One of those he mentions is the *Lawh-i-Hikmat*, the Tablet of Wisdom, which can be found in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi says that in this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh "sets forth the fundamentals of true philosophy." {34}

Besides a wealth of other implications which can be found in this Tablet which relate to the importance of information, pattern and order, you will see that Bahá'u'lláh invokes God in the name of the "All-Informed" a great many times throughout the Tablet. Of all the names of God used in this Tablet there is only one - the All-Wise - which is used more often.

What is information? And what is its importance to us here? Daniel Bell, Harvard Professor of Sociology and chief protagonist of the new information society, defines information relative to data and knowledge. Data is discrete fact at the most basic level, whereas "information is a pattern or design that rearranges data for instrumental purposes, while knowledge is the set of reasoned judgements that evaluates the adequacy of the pattern for the purposes for which the information is designed. Information is thus pattern recognition, subject to reorganization by the knower, in accordance with specified purposes.."{35}

With the development of electronic data processing technology we now have the capacity to store and retrieve discrete data which is arranged in an informational pattern, whether as an indexed data base, or in a form representing a logical structure, or sequence of logical structures, e.g., a computer program, and manipulate that data in accordance with these patterns at tremendously rapid rates. Because electronic data processors operate on the basis of a difference between one state and another - i.e., 0 (zero) or 1 (one), which have no inherent meaning, they only indicate difference - they can process information using the processes of binary arithmetic. By setting up data in logical structures in terms of Boolean algebra a tremendously rich and varied logic is made available for manipulation at computational speeds approaching the speed of light. Central processing units which are found in the common personal computers in many of our homes are routinely capable of performing in excess of two million arithmetic operations a second.

I feel that it is important to note here the correlation between the processes of electronic data processors and the fundamental nature of the contingent world as defined by Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh has identified the qualities of "distinction, differentiation, temporal limitations, characteristics and standards"{36} as being fundamental to the nature of the contingent world - the world of names and attributes. In translating "that which hath been written into reality and action"{37} scientists have discovered applications for some of the most fundamental processes of the contingent world and brought into being a technology which will be of tremendous benefit to all of mankind.

The fusion of these capabilities with the communications technologies have created the capacity, for the first time in the history of mankind, for the rational organization and management of the affairs of the world from a "nerve center" which has a rich and abundant communicational path to each of the various organs and centers in the body of the world.

In commenting on the potential of this capacity Professor Bell has stated that the "methodological promise of the second half of the twentieth century is the

management of organized complexity;..." {38} Can we imagine a more complex management problem than the mandate which Bahá'u'lláh has given to the Universal House of Justice? I think not - and it is precisely for this reason that Bahá'ís, and especially Bahá'í administrators, scholars, and the learned, must step into this realm, and do so quickly, with full consciousness of the implications of what they are doing.

In a rather abstrusely worded passage in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* Shoghi Effendi indicates that if we would use the "facilities which modern scientific progress has placed at the service of humanity in our time" we would find that the task of achieving "the unification of all mankind" would be "infinitely less complex" than the "problem of welding the American states into a single federation" during the founding of our Republic. {39} As the promulgation of the Word and the ordering of society are our primary tasks are not the communication and information technologies heavily implicated?

He, in another passage, states that, "The Bahá'ís should not always be the last to take up new and obviously excellent methods but rather the first, as this agrees with the dynamic nature of the Faith which is not only progressive, but holds within itself the seeds of an entirely new culture and civilization." {40}

The Guardian also indicates that one of the purposes of Bahá'u'lláh in designing such flexibility into the structure of the Administrative Order of the Faith is that "whatever is deemed necessary to incorporate into [the machinery of the Cause] in order to keep it in the forefront of all progressive movements, [could] be safely embodied therein...." {41}

THE TECHNOLOGY WHICH IS AVAILABLE:

What are these "new and excellent methods" - these gifts of "modern scientific progress" - which I am proposing that we incorporate into the machinery of the Cause in order to reduce the complexity of the task of achieving the unification of all mankind? And how are they so different from what has been available from science in the past?

The prospects for the advancement of the work of the Cause in light of recent and anticipated scientific and technological advances are truly incredible. In the past few years there has been established a world-embracing satellite-based communications network which functions with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity; there has been a continual drop in the ratio between computing power and cost; an increasing volume of information is being stored in ever smaller storage units; there has been a wide-ranging decentralization of information-processing power with the proliferation of personal computers in the homes of the common citizen; and amazing developments in all areas of the computer programming field have occurred which are so wide-ranging and incredible as only those who are at once aware of the future world society predicted by the Central Figures of the Faith, and who are actively staying abreast of the whole range of developments in the fields of computers and telecommunications, can sufficiently appreciate.

The ramifications of the scientific and technical achievements in information-processing and in the means of communication have the potential to influence every aspect of Bahá'í life and work, but most significantly the arena of the administration of the Faith. The Word of Bahá'u'lláh has established a new Order in the world of being; the structural basis of this Order is the Administrative Order of the Faith. The function of the Administrative Order is the propagation of the Word of Bahá'u'lláh, the maintenance of unity among the body of the believers, and the guidance of the corporate body of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh into an efflorescent civilization which is based upon His teachings.

The work of maintaining unity of action and unity of belief in guiding the community gradually into the future is primarily a work which involves communication, organization, and management, and each of these areas have, in particular, felt the impact of the fusion of the communication and information-processing sciences in very great measure.

The most significant development to the author's mind is the possibility of linking the personal computer in the home with any other personal or corporate computer by utilizing the present telephone system. This, together with conferencing software which can facilitate one-to-many communications, bears the possibility of increasing the quality and quantity of the communications capacity of the Faith as a whole in a revolutionary way.

In the early days of the Faith, as Mr. Taherzadeh has explained, the teachers of the Faith walked from place to place or rode donkeys or mules. The Word which had been revealed was laboriously copied by hand by scribes who were in the service of Bahá'u'lláh. Later many of these Tablets were translated into other languages and began to filtrate out into the spreading Bahá'í community. It's widely known that in America copy after copy was typed by hand with as many carbons as the typewriter would carry. Gradually, as money was made available, the Books and Prayers of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá were printed. Magazines, such as The Star of the West, were brought into being to provide a reasonably current channel for the communications of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.. As the technology of the telegraph became more wide-spread throughout the world the beloved Guardian made increasing use of this facility. According to Ruhyyih Khanum in The Priceless Pearl:

"Since the inception of his ministry Shoghi Effendi had increasingly used the medium of telegrams and cablegrams, not only because they saved time but because, as he explained to me, of their psychological effect; a cable conveys a sense of urgency and drama and is often a better way of driving home one's point." {42}

In the thirty years since the passing of Shoghi Effendi science and technology seems to have outdone itself. We now have available for our use a vast array of technological, and even "conceptual", devices by means of which we can "process the Word of Bahá'u'lláh" and communicate very rapidly with one another - and in a tremendously abundant degree.

By way of illustrating how presently available technology might be used by the Faith I will present a possible scenario of a very real problem which we will face in the near future and show how utilization of this technology would decrease the complexity of meeting the challenge. Of course this scenario assumes that these technical aids are already in use by the Administrative agencies of the Faith - something we have yet to accomplish in a wide-spread manner.

In the Citadel of Faith the Guardian maps out certain stages in the growth of the Faith and ends his scenario by saying:

"...the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world...will be the prelude to that long awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature,...will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh." {43}

What will we do when, for every one of us, there will be one thousand souls to educate in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh? How can we meet the challenge of organizing and training the Spiritual Assemblies? Of insuring that each Assembly has all the guidance it needs in order to assist both its internal community and the larger community in all aspects of social development?

THE SCENARIO BEGINS:

As it became increasingly apparent that the fortunes of the Faith in America were about to be revolutionized the National Spiritual Assembly consulted among themselves via the computer conferencing service which had been leased from a major university using the communicating word processors which the Assembly had recently purchased. After availing themselves of the guidance at hand from Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, the National Spiritual Assembly decided to convene a full-time advisory task force which would be charged with the organization of an approach to the problem which was to soon come up.

This task force would have at its disposal the facilities of the recently completed integrated data base of the writings of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and letters and messages from the Universal House of Justice. (The communications which had been sent to the American community from itself over the past seventy years had not been placed into the larger data base as yet as the National Spiritual Assembly had felt the need to have them organized so that a comprehensive review of its past decisions could be performed when time permitted.)

Scholars of the Faith had already begun preliminary organizational work on the data base which had been put into computer-readable format by scanning all of the extant writings of the Faith with the newly purchased optical character reader. Complete concordances of all the writings were being printed as fast as

the laser printer could turn them out. Several research teams composed of scholars from across the country who consulted with each other via the same computer conferencing network which the National Spiritual Assembly used were each experimenting with different conceptual methods of organizing, outlining, and indexing the writings. As the personal computers which these scholars had in their homes didn't have enough memory capacity to hold all of the writings in a single, easily manipulable data base, the research teams had been organized by the Association for Bahá'í Studies to experiment with different ways of conceiving the "knowledge base" of the writings with the view toward eventually having an "expert system" which could be consulted on-line by any individual, Assembly, or committee who had a question which they needed to resolve in light of all of the authorized texts of the Faith. Time with the new large computer at the National Center had been allocated to each of these groups - after working together among themselves on the conferencing net from their separate homes they would submit their organizational schemes directly to the data base after office hours when the computer would have ample time available to process the writings according to their scheme. They could each see the results when they logged-onto the system the next evening.

These scholars were very fortunate to have the contributions of the beloved Guardian to guide their works, which, above all, consisted of:

"a masterly orientation of thought towards the concepts enshrined in the teachings of the Faith and the orderly classification of those teachings into what might well be described as a vast panoramic view of the meaning, implications, destiny and purpose of the religion of Bahá'u'lláh, indeed of religious truth itself in its portrayal of man as the apogee of God's creation, evolving towards the consummation of his development - the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth." {44}

Meanwhile, the advisory task force, which was composed of a multi-disciplinary team of Bahá'ís, had outlined the task ahead by using an "idea organizer" or "outlining program" on the PC in their conference room. They knew that they were organizing for a time in the future when the material resources of the Faith would be increased also, but the organization and preparation to meet that time had to take place within the present budgetary limits. As an appropriate approach to the challenge began to be conceived the project was planned out with clear-cut goals and all of the necessary milestones, objectives, and timelines fixed in order to meet those goals. This task was made much more clear to all present by using the project management software which they had running on the office PC. The critical path had been determined, and by using the electronic spreadsheet, the presently available budget had been juggled around such that the National community would only have to increase its annual contributions by 17% during the coming year. (The Treasurer would be pleased that they would only have to increase the budget by 17%.) Within three weeks the plan was presented to the National Spiritual Assembly at a special meeting which had been called especially for that purpose.

Obviously, there was a lot of work to do yet - organization is one thing, and a

very important thing, but there were tutorials to be designed for the on-line computerized data bases which would be set up. And much of this work depended on the rational organization of the integrated data base which the scholars were working on right now - and as much of the technology was relatively new there was a lot to learn and a lot of testing which had to be done. Nevertheless, several aspects of the work stood out clearly and work could begin on them right away. The Teaching Committee had to make plans to expand the membership data base in such a way as to monitor the educational progress of the newly enrolled believers.

The Business and Professional Affairs Committee had to target certain notable people and issue a call to the general community for assistance in organizing a portfolio of interests, susceptibilities, and inhibiting factors for each of the people targeted. They also needed to identify individual Bahá'ís who could call upon those people in order to proclaim the Faith to them.

The data processing office had already been at work preparing the system for the input and update of membership information from the field by the local District Teaching Committees.

The Bahá'í Schools which had permanent staff on-board had been consulting for some time over the computer conferencing network on the coordination of Bahá'í scholarship - there were certain priorities which had been identified in relation to the challenge at hand, and the schools had organized research teams of the scholars they knew and had solicited other Bahá'ís in general through the American Bahá'í to begin doing the needed research.

Since the National Convention had begun meeting on the conferencing net all year round the National Spiritual Assembly had a tremendous resource pool of deepened believers available for consultation at a moment's notice - and the Convention never adjourned!

The Counsellors and the Auxiliary Board members too were busy too. Consulting with the National Spiritual Assembly, advising Local Spiritual Assemblies, conferring with individual believers, and in general, monitoring the rapid development of the National community which they protect and serve.

The Social and Economic Development Committee had established contacts both within and without the Bahá'í community in preparation for establishing an "Electronic Peace Corps" which would consist of technical experts from all fields of science, business, and social services who would be on-call over the conferencing net in the event their particular expertise was needed;

The Publishing Trust had begun duplicating volumes of the various Bahá'í works on computer diskettes which would be then sold to the friends so they could work on making compilations, doing research, and, in general, deepening their knowledge of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. The word processing programs the friends had in the personal computers they had in their homes provided them the capability they needed in order to "process the Word" so as to make it more accessible to their contacts, study groups they had organized, etc.

And all of this was being accomplished by the rank and file Bahá'í. For years the National Spiritual Assembly had dreamed of the system which would allow them to make rapid and efficient use of all of the energy and competence that exists in the rank and file of the believers, as Shoghi Effendi had said that this was "the first quality for leadership both among individuals and Assemblies." {45} And this potentiality now existed because of the establishment of an effective communications infra-structure on this continent which provided the possibility for Bahá'ís - no matter where they lived in the country, no matter how little they could travel for the Faith, no matter how tied-down they were in their professional lives - to consult together in doing research and development on projects which were needed by the Faith whose priority had been clearly identified by the National Spiritual Assembly.

. . . THUS ENDS THIS SCENARIO.

The challenges ahead of us are of such tremendous magnitude the only way we are going to be able to meet them is to work together - to coordinate the work with common goals and clear objectives in our minds. It's now possible to do this with the present technology if we would but heed our Guardian's advice to use those things which modern scientific progress has given to humanity.

"....The world, [is] contracted and transformed into a single highly complex organism by the marvellous progress achieved in the realm of physical science, [and] by the world-wide expansion of commerce and industry...." {46}

The Guardian has given us the task of establishing the nucleus of, "A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources,..." {47} This is the task of the Universal House of Justice and its sustaining pillars the National Spiritual Assemblies - we have long known the promise, but we have only been able to wonder how this might be accomplished. Now, with the construction of the "mechanism of world inter-communication" and the development of information-processing tools which allow for the automation of the necessary conceptual processes of the organization and management of such a complexity, aspects of the methodology for the accomplishment of this task are being unveiled to the eyes of the Bahá'í world.

America as a whole has been blessed by Bahá'u'lláh. Much of the technology which we are taking for granted here is not even a dream in the minds of millions of people around the world. Yet these are the mechanisms which will provide the means for the unification of the whole of humankind. Shoghi Effendi referred to the challenge America faces when he wrote:

"The world is moving on. Its events are unfolding ominously and with bewildering rapidity....The New World [America] is being insensibly drawn into its vortex....The Atlantic and Pacific Oceans are, with every acceleration in the march of science, steadily shrinking into mere channels. The Great Republic of the West finds itself particularly and increasingly involved....The world is contracting into a neighborhood. America, willingly or unwillingly, must face and grapple with this new situation. For purposes of national security, let

alone any humanitarian motive, she must assume the obligations imposed by this newly created neighborhood. Paradoxical as it may seem, her only hope of extricating herself from the perils gathering around her is to become entangled in that very web of international association which the Hand of an inscrutable Providence is weaving." {48}

* (For further information from the realm of science and philosophy I would refer the reader to: *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* by Gregory Bateson; *The Turning Point* by Fritoj Capra; and *The Human Use of Human Beings* by Norbert Wiener.)

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SIDEBAR:

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