

# Processes of the Lesser Peace

edited by Babak Bahador and Nazila Ghanea. Oxford: George Ronald, 2002. xii + 276 pages. George Ronald Bahá'í Studies series. Available at [George Ronald](#). reviewed by William P. Collins in *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1-2 (2004)

Bahá'u'lláh envisioned a two-stage emergence from the era of state sovereignty to the golden age of peace. He offered the rulers of His time the opportunity to embrace His message and establish a spiritualized world. When they rejected this Most Great Peace, he set before them the Lesser Peace, a stage of world development to be engineered by the rulers and peoples themselves, based on certain spiritual and operational principles articulated by the successive leaders of the Bahá'í Faith. After more than a century the world is now coming close to the Lesser Peace, and many are hopeful that new international systems will resolve problems by recourse to global institutions.

While some expected this peace to appear suddenly during the twentieth century, as that century ended, the Universal House of Justice emphasized that the Lesser Peace is a process beset by struggle, triumphs, and occasional setbacks. The present volume is an attempt to review and reflect upon the processes that are moving the planet inexorably toward global law and governance.

The eight essays in this volume, presented from 1995 to 2000 at gatherings of the Bahá'í Politics and International Law Special Interest Group of the Association for Bahá'í Studies—English-Speaking Europe, cover Bahá'í proposals for reforming international institutions and legal structures, the environment, the spiritual destiny of America, collective security, international legal systems, and thinking about global governance. They amply demonstrate the involvement of Bahá'ís in issues of UN reform, global governance, and international law, and their willingness to address thorny issues.

Jeffrey Huffines offers a historical overview of evolving Bahá'í proposals for global governance, juxtaposing these proposals with actions taken by governments. He outlines Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's collective security and disarmament proposals, historic events outside the Bahá'í community, and the Bahá'í external affairs strategy, and summarizes specific Bahá'í proposals for UN reform. Although the presentation of proposals is not itself adequate to effect changes, the Bahá'í International Community has been sufficiently respected to be offered a lead role in articulating the applicable principles for international organizations to build something like the Lesser Peace. Babak Bahador, in "The Establishment of the Lesser Peace," considers how the Bahá'í writings infuse global processes with prophetic significance, ensuring a Bahá'í fascination with how and when the Lesser Peace will emerge. Bahador considers it possible to relieve confused speculation by differentiating between the underlying conditions necessary for the Lesser Peace and the outward manifestation of that peace. Monumental historical changes are initiated by a change in condition, imperceptible at first, but ultimately complete and visible before our eyes.

Bahador reviews the thinking of three international relations experts who demonstrated that the world has entered a new state of affairs. He outlines the major outward conditions Bahá'ís foresee as signs of the establishment of the Lesser Peace—a universal conference, collective security, and disarmament. He demonstrates that the transition from underlying condition to outward manifestation involves addressing the obstacles to peace and reinforcing the realization of our deep interdependence.

Arthur Lyon Dahl, in “The Environment and the Lesser Peace,” proposes that science has demonstrated an increasing planet-wide threat to the environment, capable of adversely affecting human life, which demands a multilateral global response. Such a response inevitably requires a level of cooperation that contributes to strengthening underlying conditions for the Lesser Peace—including political cooperation to address environmental problems, adoption of environmentally friendly development principles, and reconciliation of conflicting global legislation. The resolution to this problem is the establishment of global institutions empowered to reconcile disparate national laws and to enforce environmental agreements internationally.

America's role in establishing the Lesser Peace is the subject of John Huddleston's essay. America has a well-developed sense of mission, deriving from its history and its current position as the only truly global superpower. But people around the world are responding to the United States' leadership role with increasing skepticism, focusing on the negative aspects of America's worldwide influence. This skepticism grows in part from the American over-reliance on material power.

America possesses tremendous moral power because of its diversity, federal democracy, and religious experience. But these features arose from both idealistic and selfish historical circumstances. For example, federal democracy was based on idealism about equality before the law, but the United States Constitution also enshrined moral contradictions which were not removed until the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. The positive aspects of America's achievements include advocacy of democratic ideals in world affairs and global leadership in building international institutions. Huddleston considers America to have established a kind of Pax Americana, in which it has taken the lead to counter aggression. The United States is prepared for its next steps—advocating world federal democracy, decreasing materialism, and fostering a new religious awakening.

Danesh Sarooshi, in his article, examines collective security in international law. The power of collective security lies with nations who become party to and invoke international treaties. When the League of Nations came into being, it was a partial and largely ineffective organization, yet Shoghi Effendi praised the League's censure of Italy's attack on Ethiopia in 1936 as the first exercise of Bahá'u'lláh's system of collective security. The United Nations Charter created an international organization explicitly to maintain global peace. Collective security is enshrined in the UN Charter under Chapter 7, which gives the Security Council broad powers to deal with threats to peace.

The Bahá'í International Community has proposed several innovations to the UN system. Collective security is understood to be only one part of maintaining peace. Peace also requires the implementation of other spiritual principles such as gender equality, racial unity, and economic justice. The nations are called upon to make a binding covenant fixing national frontiers, limiting armaments, and removing governments that violate its provisions. The veto power should be eliminated from the Security Council in favor of majority decision.

An international judiciary and a single code of international law form a significant part of the Bahá'í vision of world order. In "An International Legal Order," Rod Rastan considers the historic development of international judicial institutions. The development of these institutions has always reflected nations' relative level of willingness to relinquish absolute sovereignty. Initially, nation-states limited the judicial authority of such institutions to eviscerate their power. Rastan reviews developments since the Hague International Peace Conference of 1899 through the International Court of Justice established after World War II. The International Court remains a forum for voluntary adjudication of disputes that have, in practice, been relatively minor ones. The Charter does not expressly empower the court to rule on the legality of actions taken by UN organs, and it has generally avoided doing so.

In contrast, the binding and enforceable nature of the rulings of the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights more closely meets the requirements set forth in Bahá'í scripture. The judicial and executive remain blunted however, so long as the international system remains one founded on sovereign discretion of nation-states.

The implementation of international legal norms and the mechanisms for their enforcement are more a matter of leadership and will than of law. In Rastan's view, the hesitancy to commit to upholding international order with force is to conceive a static global order rather than one responding to the demands of justice.

Daniel Wheatley, in his article, investigates world government theory since the Second World War and asks whether the new focus on "global governance" is a shift in understanding. He discusses various proposals for world government and considers the writings of critics of world government initiatives who thought that world government might emerge from coercion by a powerful state or as a result of a catastrophe. Some thought that sovereign nations would not choose to subordinate themselves to a world government founded on consent. European states, however, have done exactly that. Large numbers of nations subscribe to treaties that obligate them to higher authority.

Since 1995 there has been a new formulation of the concept of world government called "global governance." Despite disavowals that this equates to world government, it becomes clear that many proposals do resemble those promoting world government. The newly emerging mechanisms of international organization signal the early days of the Lesser Peace. There nevertheless remains a question of why many agencies have been at such pains to deny their proposals' relationship to world government. Wheatley

primarily sees this denial as representing a willingness to work incrementally over a longer period of time. Governance as an umbrella term for the growth of new international cooperative efforts may be less threatening to those who fear world government. But the continued existence of such fear should remain a source of concern to those who advocate global governance.

Charles Lerche, in the book's final essay, catalogues the movement toward global governance. The essay effectively summarizes the major critiques of globalization, especially its blindness to issues of social and economic justice. Lerche reviews the writings of thinkers who see global governance as the most likely scenario for the future even as they express concern about the elitist, interventionist, and coercive nature of a global order inordinately influenced by powerful nations. He considers the shift in thinking about global interdependence to be a parameter shift, not a paradigm shift—the same players are playing the same game, but in a wider field. Economic, political, and national self-interests are exercised planetwide in an interactive environment to pursue wealth and power.

People do not believe global decisions are made with their best interests in mind. They will support proposals and initiatives for global governance that are perceived as not threatening people's need for security, identity, or community. The greatest threat to globalism is the lack of a unifying vision. Lerche suggests that perennial questions of "justice, community, and obligation" have to be reopened and reformulated for a single planet. Global governance is as much about values as it is about interests and institutions. The highest value, according to the Bahá'í community, is the unification of the world's peoples. We can therefore judge aspects of global governance on how well they further this value.

These essays distill many complex issues that contribute to the processes of the Lesser Peace, but with the pace of international developments since publication, they are already out of date and require updating to deal with several issues. Notably, noninterference in the internal or domestic affairs of another state has been found to be bankrupt in practice. In international law, moral obligations exist, but there are few effective methods for intervening within a country when an ethnic group or regime is abusing a population. The recognition of the colossal failure of this sovereignty principle should be an argument for global governance.

The book blurs the distinction between globalism and globalization. This oversight has profound implications for communication of Bahá'í ideas. Globalism means thinking in global terms and solving problems globally. It carries a connotation of justice. Globalization, on the other hand, is the worldwide spread and coordination of economic, social, political, or other enterprises. Globalization, particularly in the economic sphere, where multinational corporations and Western-dominated institutions act in their own interest on a global scale, carries a connotation of moral blindness and self-interest.

These essays were written before September 11, 2001, cast its shadow across the world. The problem of terrorism and its influence on world governance has rapidly

emerged as a critical issue, but references to terrorism in the text are cursory. Under the cloud of terrorism, security becomes impossible, undermining one of the nation-state's rationales. Terrorism may be one of the forces that will impel the nations of the world to create supranational methods for combating its causes and effects.

Since 2000, when these essays were presented, we have learned that being global does not make something necessarily positive. Organized crime, terrorism, arms trafficking, and slavery are global. This global reach of the dark side of human endeavor cries out for world governance and the Lesser Peace. Without planetwide structures to regulate human affairs, the world is helpless to defend against destructive actions beyond the reach of national law and becomes a playground for disintegrative forces. Terrorism is forcing an examination of the constitution of the nation-state, the application of national power, the connections between religion and violence, the international legal framework, and the UN's structural focus on the nation-state.

One can see, in the past century, steady movement toward greater global order and interaction. In the end, however, the structures are a response to a wider *Zeitgeist* which is the fact of human oneness at the biological and psychological level. It awaits humanity's choice to accept and act on it.

The processes that will lead to the Lesser Peace are not simply incremental processes of structure and law in international affairs. Such processes also embody a fundamental change in the spiritual "order" within individuals and religious communities. The outward movement toward broader planetary governance mechanisms surely must mirror the inner epiphanies that individuals and religious communities experience as they realize that limited conceptions of God's justice and good-pleasure must widen to embrace His boundless love for all humanity, and that the evils we see in the world are not outside of ourselves.