

**Transcript of Dr. Robert Henderson  
Presentation of the Five Year Plan  
Kingdom Conference 6/30/01**

**Dr. Robert Henderson:** Are you feeling like I'm feeling? [cheers] Are you just as happy as you can be. Does it feel right deep inside? It just feels like it's supposed to feel. You bring all of these people together. And you have these sacred beings, these children, who embody the spirit and the vision and who have defined the terms by which we have engaged the world in such a noble and dignified way. I'm just as happy as I know how to be. [applause]

I've got to tell you that all of the members of the Continental Counselors are here and the National Spiritual Assembly. We're so happy, that some of our members have just gotten carried away. Poor Bill Davis is going all around the conference and he's saying 'Hi I'm Bill, I'm six years old. So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.' [applause] He got so carried away that we told him later it was naptime.

But friends, you know that the entire purpose of our Faith is to build the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth with joy, hope and confidence. So that everybody, everywhere can have the hope, and have the confidence and gain the happiness that God intended them to have. And we wanted to say to you this morning that it is with humble hearts and heads bowed in gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God, that we offer this Five Year Plan as our testament to advance God's Cause of Universal Love and Salvation. [applause] We wanted to say to you this morning that this plan is borne of God's Plan because as we reach into the Bahá'í Writings we see that creation itself was borne of God's love. The Bahá'í Writings tell us O Son of Man! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, dost thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.

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We see as the children told us this morning that God so loved every single soul that he sent messengers to every people. He sent Abraham and Moses, and Buddha and Zoroaster. He sent the Christ, he sent Muhammad. He sent the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh so that all souls would know His love and know His law and would be exalted in obedience to both.

And he gave us a vision to hold on to while we grew up through test and trial. He said there would come a time when he would gather all of the children together in one house. And He said that in that time “I will give them one heart and I will write My Law on their inward parts.” He said that “I will stamp my name on their foreheads.” He said that he would put a new spirit within us in that time. So that we would become to recognize that we are all the children of the same Father. [applause]

And friends He made promises. He said that in that time of unity and reconciliation He said that He would wipe away all of our tears and He said that there would be no more pain or sorrow or suffering. No more death in that day because we would have attained to everlasting life. And He said that there would be no need of candle. Because this would inaugurate the day that would not be followed by night. And He gave us a prayer to say. ‘Our Father, Who art in Heaven hallowed by Thy Name. Thy Kingdom Come. Thy Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.’

And now friends is the time of fulfillment because Bahá'u'lláh has come to instill that spirit into the hearts of all human beings and to reconcile the differences of religions and let us understand anew that we are all the children of the same loving Father. That all of those traditions are spiritual and legitimate and that they all lead to one Kingdom, in which all of the flocks will be gathered together in one fold. And that day is today. And

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that is the purpose of this chapter of the Divine Plan which we call the Five Year Plan.

[applause]

Now in the Five Year Plan, we'll talk a lot about building systems and inaugurating processes and doing training. But at the bottom foundation of that plan, the purpose is to foster love and understanding and cooperation and service to one another, to be a comfort and to be a joy to every single soul on the planet. The Bahá'í Writings tell us that the purpose of these plans is to be a treasury to the poor, and a cure for the ailing, and an uplifter of every victim of oppression, a comforter of every heart. Because they say that by engaging in these practices we will spread the light of the love of God and vanish the darkness forever and ever. [applause]

In the Bahá'í Writings, Bahá'u'lláh has given a mission, a spiritual destiny to this nation. He said that the United States would evolve through test and trial, through purifying tests and trials to become a land of spiritual distinction and leadership, a champion of justice and a powerful servant of the Cause of everlasting peace. In His Most Holy Book he said that these nations of the West must bind the hands of the broken with the rod of justice. And so all of the things we want our nation to be will become manifest in the time of Bahá'u'lláh when the Kingdom is built. It will have a powerful role in urging reconciliation and peace.

And He said to the American Bahá'ís that we have a parallel mission. The Bahá'í Writings call on us to advance what we call the Divine Plan, which is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grand design for the spiritual conquest of the hearts of human beings all over the planet. And our mission is to transform our souls and our ways of life. And to spread the divine fragrance of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings among all people. We are asked to build a new

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kind of community and a new kind of institution which will nurture the emergence of a kind of community that is organized around unity, love and service to one another. That is the mission of the Divine Plan.

And so as we look at the Five Year Plan and we ask ourselves how we will enshrine these purposes in an orderly pursuit, we have crafted certain overall features and I'd like to share them with you this morning. The first is this, we wanted to start a learning mode, we wanted everybody to engage in a process of learning from one another. And that is how this conference was structured, so that we could learn from one another. Because everything that we want to have happen everywhere in the Bahá'í community is happening somewhere in the Bahá'í community. And we felt that if we gathered the family together and we had a chance to have a family chat about the different ways that we are prosecuting this mission of building the Kingdom we would learn from one another and we would understand how to lay the foundation and erect the superstructure of a house that would accommodate all of the members of our community.

So the learning mode is the first and most important understanding. And this plan has a major aim and the major aim is advancing the process of entry by troops. Because we want everybody to know what the mission of the Bahá'í Faith is and Bahá'u'lláh's teachings of love, the practical solutions that the Faith provides. And to do this we must build a system because we are few and we have a lot to do. The Five Year Plan calls for us to integrate and nurture children, junior youth and youth into the mainstream life of the community. To make them center stage, if you will. [applause] And it calls for us to cultivate individual initiative among individuals and support families and encourage communities to rise up and be all that they can be. To assist one another and comfort one another through the difficult trials in life and to advance this mission of service.

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It calls for us to promote the spiritual transformation of our communities, of our individual lives, of our family lives, the spiritual transformation of our marriages and of our institutions. So that we can be the embodiment, more and more of the ideals we teach. And by arising to struggle to carry out these ideals in our day-to-day lives we will advance the missions of both our nation and our community.

And last it calls for us to influence the affairs of our larger community through the projects that you've been learning about the last few days and that we've highlighted in these main stage presentations. These projects of social and economic development that have only the motive to share the love of Bahá'u'lláh in the service of each other. Now in the prosecution of this plan, each of us has a mission, a spiritual mission. And our Writings tell us that if we earnestly follow the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, we will indeed become the light of the world and the soul of the body of the world, the comfort and help for humanity and the sources of salvation for the whole universe. These great powers are in your hearts and it is time to bring them out. And so we'd like to inaugurate the Five Year Plan by conveying just the gist of these spiritual missions to all of you.

Let me ask all of the children in the audience to rise. All of the children stand up.

[applause] We want to say to the children, we want to say to the children that you are the most precious treasures in our community. [applause] We want to say to you that we will do everything to keep you safe and to help you grow happy and strong, because you will become very soon the leaders of the Bahá'í community and the leaders among human beings. [applause] And we want to say to all of the children that we're going to organize our communities just the way that we organized this conference, so that the children can be in the center of the circle. [applause] We not only want their voices to be

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heard, we have learned we need their voices to be heard. And so for all of the children we have a five year plan for you that calls you to prayer and calls you to study the teachings and invites you to a role of service to your families and your communities so that you can become leaders and models and take Bahá'u'lláh's healing message and love to all people.

Now will all the junior youth from 11 to 14 stand up. [applause] You are so precious to us and you have one of the most important roles in the Five Year Plan, your role is to prepare for the age of spiritual maturity, 15 years of age according to Bahá'u'lláh. So that you can assume a role of leadership in the Bahá'í community and in the larger community. Because we know you have powerful energy and intelligence and ideas that will help the Bahá'í community develop itself, will help us all grow and understand better the mission of Bahá'u'lláh and will carry that mission of service and love into the community and we need you to do that. So your role in the Five Year Plan will be to practice and learn the obligatory prayers and learn about fasting and learn about the Bahá'í history. And begin to carry out teaching plans.

We met a young man who was eleven years old and in the sixth grade during our Kingdom Project visits. He was in Dallas and he had an old T-shirt on and it said, 'Bahá'í Faith.' And this T-shirt, he had worn it so often that it was a little gray, you know it was beyond bleach. But he said "I put on this T-shirt because I decided I was going to have a teaching plan in my school. And so I wore my T-shirt every day and in the beginning people said 'Bahá'í-what?, B-who?'" He said, "But now they know that the Bahá'í Faith stands for the equality of women and men, the Bahá'í Faith stands for the eradication of prejudice, and racial unity. And the Bahá'í Faith stands for the elimination of poverty. And the Bahá'í Faith stands for universal education. And the Bahá'í Faith

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stands for the nobility and the dignity and the upliftment of every single soul because every soul is precious to God. Now the children in his school know that and the T-shirt is a testament because it too has become holy. [laughter, applause]

Now all of the youth, 15 years of age and older, please stand. [applause] You know that the Bahá'í Writings, the Bahá'í Writings tell us that youth can move the world. And we know that youth are not only the future, they are the now. And in the Bahá'í Faith youth are also the champions of our history. The sacrifice and the martyrdom of youth and their allegiance to the Faith in its most early days are part of the reason we're all here today. And as we look around the world, we see that American Bahá'í youth and Bahá'í youth from all over the world are scattering to the four winds, carrying the message of Bahá'u'lláh in every place.

I was in Cape Town, South Africa at the World Parliament of Religions, where 10,000 people of every religious background were gathered. And I was there as a representative of our National Spiritual Assembly. I went to one of the youth sessions at the World Parliament and before the Bahá'í youth got up and did a workshop dance, one of the organizers of the Parliament stopped and he said, 'You know we have to thank the Bahá'í youth. Because the Bahá'í youth programmed all of the computers and wrote all of the software that coordinates the buses and the shuttle system and the registration and all of that.' [applause] And he said without the contribution of the Bahá'í youth, the logistical foundation of the Parliament would not have been organized.

And I tell you that one of the leaders of that process, of programming and computer organization, was a young Iranian Bahá'í, 17, who had pioneered with his parents to Rwanda and who had witnessed the massacres in Rwanda, and whose parents had stayed

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in Rwanda during that bloody and disastrous civil war. And who was now at the University of Cape Town perfecting his education so that he could go back to Rwanda and continue his mission of service. Youth are moving the world! [applause]

Your goals are outlined in your booklets and I hoped that you all picked them up. But I tell you that we need you to pay earnest attention to this, because everything depends on what you do, on the love in your heart and on your insistence to carry forward. For our part, we will help you in every way; love you and comfort you. Comfort you in your difficult times and applaud you as you demonstrate yourselves to be champions of the advancement of our Faith.

All of the adults please rise. [applause] You are our most able and experienced members. The development of the Faith and its progress is largely in your hands. You are the comforters and the parents of all of the children and youth, and their protectors. And you are the ones who provide the resources and the means for the Faith to develop in every way. What we know about love, we learn from you. What we know about service, we learn from you. What we know about kindness and how we learned to banish the darkness of ignorant prejudice, we learn from you.

And now as we go to a turning point in our Faith, where hundreds of thousands of people are calling the Bahá'í numbers and saying I want to know the Bahá'í community, I want my children to be in children's classes and I want to come and meet the Bahá'ís. They are coming to see you and they are coming to see your children and they're coming to see your teenaged youth. And now we will all witness what the Universal House of Justice told us, that entry by troops will act on us, even as we act on it. And we must prepare ourselves by helping each other in every way.

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Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith told us that the paramount need in the Bahá'í community is that we love one another. Because he said that if we set aside all of our differences, and gnawing anxieties and petty preoccupations for the sake of a greater love of Bahá'u'lláh we would be seized by a power from God that would cause our communities to develop and our Faith to grow. That power is in your hearts. Shoghi Effendi told us. [applause]

Shoghi Effendi told us that people crave love, not an imitation, but the embodiment of a bright and shining ideal. And 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that as we advance the divine plan, if we just love one another, He said that God would turn the world into the Abhá Paradise for the sake of our love for one another. So we know what our job is.

[applause] We will build teaching systems, and we will start training processes, and we'll have institutes and study circles and systematization all of that. But, what is going to start that process and sustain that process is love.

And I want to tell you [applause] I want to tell you especially, because you're not only our most able members and our strength, but you also carry the greatest burdens. We know how difficult life is and how many burdens trouble your heart and we want you to know that God has not forgotten a single soul. And we know this. We have evidences everyday.

Just a few days ago we were all privileged to hear a story that occurred in Haifa on the occasion of the inauguration of the grand opening of the Terraces leading to the Shrine of the Báb. And the story was of an African woman from the Congo, who was one of her countries representatives to that great and spiritual occasion. Who met an Eastern

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European woman from Romania, whose name was Congolese. And she could not understand how a Romanian woman would have this name. Now it happens that the African American woman, excuse me the African woman from the Congo, had many decades before had a child under distressing conditions and had to give that child to an orphanage to be reared. That orphanage was taken over by the military and she lost track of her child. Later she became a Bahá'í and she prayed for that child's well-being every day. But, she had no idea where he was. It happens that that child grew up in that orphanage and was sent to Romania to become a doctor, became a Bahá'í and married the Romanian woman, whose name was Jacque Congolese. And in one instant, these two souls, one from Africa, one from Eastern Europe had discovered a grand reconciliation and a salvation of a lifetime of anxiety.

And friends, I want you to think about this, God does not forget the troubles or the burdens or the hopes and desires of any single soul. You can call upon Bahá'u'lláh with confidence that He will hear your call and answer your prayer and then you must turn those answers into action. [applause]

And now last, I want to ask the members of Spiritual Assemblies to rise. [applause] The Local Spiritual Assemblies, friends, you are the focal centers of Bahá'í life. You are the institution who must make real the promises of our Faith. You are the ones who order our communities, and who minister to the needs of the friends. The Bahá'í Writings say that you must function to be loving shepherds to the multitudes. They say that a spiritual power flows through you. That you are the instruments of the power of God's love. And they say that your purpose and your mission as institutions is to give rise to a community of love that expresses that love through assistance to one another and service to the entire community. That expresses that love by building systems, and schools, and projects to

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comfort those who need comforting, to solve the problems that need solving and to infuse a sense of trust, and confidence and hope among all people. This power flows through you and we make you a pledge at this moment of the inauguration of the Five Year Plan. And that pledge is that the Continental Counselors, and the National Spiritual Assembly and all of our agencies, the Auxiliary Board Members and their Assistants all of the agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly and the Regional Bahá'í Councils, every resource we have will be at your disposal. As you advance this process of human love and salvation, as you spread the divine teachings and as you assist your community to advance through test and trial, and to spiritualize and transform their lives. We know that this is a mighty challenge, but we also know that you are doing that all over the country every day. And that in the Five Year Plan, that process of growth and development of your powers will accelerate. [applause]

We'd like to say one more thing to the Local Spiritual Assemblies and that is this: You will see in your missions for the Five Year Plan, that we hope that you will engage all of the members in your community in consultations that will occur at least once every six months. We want you to talk to all the children and the junior youth and the youth and the adults. We want to talk to the families. And we want you to talk to them about the progress of their plans, and about their hopes and their cares. And we want you to reach out to them and ask them about what they recommend for the development of the Bahá'í community.

You know one child in North Carolina during a recent meeting said, said to us, "You know the Local Spiritual Assembly is missing a chance to improve the community by not putting kids on committees. They think we're little kids and we don't know anything. But you know what? I got an idea to improve the Feast, and I've got an idea to make our

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community even stronger and better.” And this was an eight year old. [applause]

So friends we want you to engage the community in a regular pattern of action and goal setting and learning and evaluation. We want you to talk to them so that we can create a community that is strong. And as more and more people come into the Bahá'í Faith and as we expand our mission of service to all people, they will see in us proof that Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings do transform hearts and do eliminate boundaries and do foster a hope and an encouragement that life can become better and that we can take control of it and direct it in a positive and spiritual way. [applause]

And now we want to say this to you in closing. We know that the mission of the Bahá'í Faith is a grand mission. We stand to assist in the unity of all religions. We want to break down all barriers and bring all people together. We cannot abide poverty and we want to wipe it out. And we want to make sure that every human being is illuminated by the light of spiritual and social and scientific teachings so that everyone becomes a fountain of knowledge. And friends we know that this is a mighty task. But we wanted to say to you this morning that you are not alone. That Bahá'u'lláh has promised the assistance of divine forces and if you just call on Him, He will assist you at every turn. The Bahá'í Writings promise that if we will understand the essential purpose of the Bahá'í Faith, which is an all unifying love, those writings say: I swear by Him who causeth the seed to split and the breeze to waft, that so great a light will shine from your faces that it will reach up to the highest heavens. Those writings say that your aims and purposes will exert their influence on great and mighty nations. And you will discover yourselves to be marshals of the Army of Peace and princes of the Forces of Light and stars shining from the Horizon of Perfection and brilliant lamps shedding their radiance upon all human beings. This is the promise of our faith and this is your destiny in the

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Five Year Plan. Thank you. [applause]