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Original essay first published in  
*The Bahá'í World*, vol. IX  
This 4th edition, revised with Epilogue, 1982  
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# PREFACE TO THE 1982 (REVISED) EDITION

WHEN, in November 1957, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith suddenly and untimely passed away without leaving an heir, the Bahá'í world was faced with the unexpected situation of finding one of the main provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá inoperable. Some comment was therefore necessary in the new edition of this essay on the Bahá'í Administrative Order, published for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Guardian's ascension.

It seemed undesirable to alter the original essay, which is a fair record of the general understanding of the Bahá'ís in 1950 about the future unfoldment of their Faith. Instead it was decided to add an epilogue, a device by which some historical account could be given of those portentous years between the passing of the Guardian and the election of the Universal House of Justice, and the supreme role which the Hands of the Cause played in that interregnum. Those exciting times are past, while the hopes and fears and speculations they engendered are unknown to the ever-increasing majority of new Bahá'ís. The Universal House of Justice has issued its authoritative statements about the new situation and its resolution, but the brief account in this epilogue will record something of the subjective aspect of those days and how the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh

preserved the unity and very life of His Cause. In spite of so disastrous a blow as that which struck the infant Faith when it was bereft, suddenly, of that centre of Divine guidance and authority on which it had come to rely so heavily, the fundamental principles of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order were unchanged, His Covenant inviolate. The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá remained the Charter of the New World Order.

Riḍván 1982.

DAVID HOFMAN

CIVILIZATION is the social expression of the human spirit. In every age this spirit first becomes articulate in a Gospel or "Book," and every age requires its own voice to cry its latent ideals in the wilderness of confusion—that period of transition from one social era to another.

The Bahá'í Faith has been called the spirit of this age, and Bahá'u'lláh, its Author, is acclaimed by His followers as the Messenger of God for to-day. His revelation deals directly with the problems of the age, spiritually and practically.

The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His son, constitutes the "indissoluble link" between the Revelation itself and the world order which that Revelation is destined to promote.

"The creative energies released by the Law of Bahá'u'lláh, permeating and evolving within the mind of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, have, by their very impact and close interaction, given birth to an Instrument which may be viewed as the Charter of the New World Order, which is at once the glory and the promise of this most great Dispensation."<sup>1</sup>

No human being would claim to-day to understand fully the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. To us, "the generation of the half-light," is given only a dim perception of its major features—the main institutions, the most brilliant light and the darkest shade, a clouded vision of the whole and only an intimation of the subtle and hidden relationships between the component bodies.

<sup>1</sup> Shoghi Effendi: *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*.

But because of this we are also given the opportunity to probe that mystery, to seek, in the ever-increasing light of this wondrous dawn, to discover more and more of the picture, to attain, by experience of the society which Bahá'u'lláh's almighty Spirit has already raised, and by striving to pierce the mystery of His Revelation, a clearer vision of that Divine Order of which the Will and Testament is the Charter.

In order to obtain this fuller understanding, it is necessary to approach the Will as one would approach a great work of art; free of all objective conceptions, shapes, colours, institutions, methods, free particularly of any expectation and of the "tales of the past." It is essential to appear, not looking for confirmation of anything of one's own, but waiting only to see what the Author has to say.

With this attitude ever in mind, we may consider the social and political theory of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, which is to operate through the provisions and institutions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It is summed up in the word Theocracy, or, as an earlier dispensation had it, "God Himself shall rule His people." Such a system can neither be entirely democratic, nor aristocratic, nor autocratic. It must, and does, rest on different sanctions and operate through different channels, without, however, discarding what has been found good in human experience.

No modern people will ever think of God as an incarnate Being, administering world affairs from some earthly capital. The conception of Theocracy therefore, in its true sense of rule by the Will of God, is not new to human imagination and hope, but it is definitely new (and as yet remains unknown) to conscious experience. The greatest efforts of peoples, whether exemplified in

the once mighty system of Christendom, based on the undoubted primacy of Peter and reinforced by whatever the Roman genius had to offer, or in the slow and empirical growth of the British Constitution, or in the painstaking efforts of the framers of the American Constitution, cannot be said to bear that stamp of perfection which must characterize Theocracy. Nor indeed can it be expected that they should, since such a system is only practicable to a generally mature society. And humanity even now stands only at the gate of that condition, unable to put away its youth and advance joyfully to its destiny.

The attributes of God exist in perfection only in His Manifestation. “*Whoso hath seen me hath seen the Father*”; “... *when I contemplate, O my God, the relationship that bindeth me to Thee, I am moved to proclaim to all created things ‘verily I am God!’; and when I consider my own self, lo, I find it coarser than clay!*” Therefore, as long as the Manifestation dwells with men, the Will of God may be known without fear of pollution from the channel through which it is revealed. Only seldom, however, is the Manifestation called upon to administer the social order which His Revelation creates.<sup>1</sup> The problem, therefore, is to protect the word and to find adequate and safe channels for the continuous flow of Divine guidance, after the ascension of the Prophet. This is an essential condition of Theocracy, the *sine qua non* without which any order, no matter how good, lacks the ultimate sanction of the authentic interpretation of the “Book”. Little wonder that Muhammad should characterize His Book and His Family (among whom was ‘Alí, the appointed successor) as the greatest gifts which He left to His followers. It is upon the

<sup>1</sup> Notably in the case of Muhammad.

Book, the written Word, and its interpretation as authorized by its Author, that a theocratic state must rest.

The unique and peerless feature of the Bahá'í Revelation is that for the first time in history, full and undeniable provision has been made for the protection of the Word and for the continuity of Divine guidance, without in the least constricting that creative force latent in every human soul, and which, when evoked by the Word of God, is the motivating power of civilization. Far from hampering the operation of this mighty force, the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh provides for its fullest expression, and by eliminating "economic" fear, offers it greater scope and a longer period of effective strength. In addition it provides adequate channels for its direction and the overshadowing guidance of the Covenant, so that the excesses and wastefulness and confusion common to the early days of a new vitality, are avoided. Reference is made to such times as the Renaissance, or, on a lesser scale, the settlement of the West in America.

The institutions provided by the Bahá'í Revelation to guard the Book from interpolation and to keep open the channel of Guidance, are the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, the "twin pillars" of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian as interpreter of what is in the Book, and the Universal House of Justice as legislator on matters not provided for in the Book, are "*both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One.*" The close spiritual relationship between these two institutions is commented on later, although it is clearly apparent that this is one of the features of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order at present



shrouded in mystery, a mystery which experience and the passage of time will do more to clarify than present meditation.

The Guardianship is another mystery whose full significance will only be discovered by later generations. To us it means, from our own experience, unity, preservation, and an ultimate authority, but to future generations it may mean both more and less. Less because the Universal House of Justice will be fully established and active, and able to exercise those functions which now devolve upon the Guardian; more, by virtue of the reinforcement of the institution through the full development of all the other component parts of the Bahá'í World Order, and because of the extension of its activity from the inspirer, champion and beloved guide of a small and struggling world community, to the full exercise of its duties and prerogatives as one of the twin pillars sustaining the single social order of the planet.

But we may say something of the significance of this mighty institution in the light of historical experience. In any highly developed, and therefore complex, modern state, guarantee has had to be created or developed for the protection of the constitution. In England the constitution (elusive and indefinable) is guaranteed by the monarchy. The king is the guarantor of the rights and freedom of the individual and the upholder of constitutional authority. In America the Supreme Court fulfils this function.<sup>1</sup>

It is apparent that the most politically mature peoples have realized and tried to meet the need for safeguarding the basis of their society. Warned by historical experience, where every covenant has eventually been

<sup>1</sup> This is the only similarity of the institutions.

broken, every order eventually corrupted, man still seeks the assured foundation and the house builded upon a rock.

This basic need is filled in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh through the unique institution of the Guardianship. Not only is the Guardian the channel of Divine guidance, but he is the protector, the "Guardian of the Cause of God." The Book, the "Mother Book" from which this mighty order springs, claims him as its guardian and interpreter, and no other may serve. The Guardian is under the protection of the Manifestation of God, and therefore through him "*the mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe.*"

Beyond this the author does not wish to go at present, other commentary on the Guardianship being too nebulous for assured expression.

Here then, based on the inviolable sanction of the Word of God, Divine guidance is given to man in respect of interpretation of what has already been revealed, and in respect of whatever additions to the Book are necessary for the transaction of affairs. It is from these complementary functions of the two main institutions that the flexibility of the Administrative Order is derived. For the interpretation of the Guardian may vary in application (never in principle) while the House of Justice is specifically empowered to repeal and modify its own laws, which form no part of the Book.

The various agencies for bringing this guidance to bear on the energy generated by the action of the creative Word on the souls of men, are dealt with in the text. It is desired to stress here that the guidance and the energy meet in the same institutions and operate through the same channels. This is the spiritual process implied when it is said that Bahá'í institutions are not

solely political, social, judicial or religious. They are all these things at the same time, organic, complex, highly developed, mature institutions, and therefore exceedingly difficult to establish and their mysterious operation exceedingly difficult to understand, as the present world community of Bahá'ís knows to its pain and its joy.

Energy is generated from the mass, guidance is diffused from the top; the two, mingling in the arteries of this organic order and spreading throughout its nervous system, constitute its life force.

It should be borne in mind that the Will and Testament is an integral part of Scripture and can no more be divorced from the rest of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's utterances than can any part of the creative Word from the whole Revelation. It should be remembered too that the Master's other statements on the functions of Houses of Justice, on consultation, on the general conduct of affairs, on the rights and obligations of individuals, are of equal importance to the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. But the Will and Testament is the clear and authentic charter of this Order; it establishes its institutions and defines its relationships.

Through this document the rights of all are protected, authority is upheld and power delegated. It is no less than the charter of world civilization, the Bill of Rights of all mankind.

In the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, power and initiative are vested in the people. The power is expressed through the control of all local affairs by the local House of Justice—a body elected from the residents in each locality, which must present its records periodically (every 19 days) and seek the advice, opinions and comment of the community which it serves. Initiative

is evoked by the direct injunction of Bahá'u'lláh on each individual to engage in *“some one occupation, such as arts, crafts, trades, professions and the like.”* *“We have made this, your occupation, identical with the worship of God, the True One.”*

It is also a basic teaching of Bahá'u'lláh that whatever is given by God—His Revelation, Guidance, Knowledge—is in direct proportion to the receptive capacity of mankind. Therefore to some extent—certainly within the space of one dispensation—man is the arbiter of his own destiny. For the gifts and bounties available are conferred according to his efforts. *“Whoso maketh efforts for us, him will we cause the faithful spirit . . .”* So that the only limit set to the outward expression of the sovereignty of the Manifestation, is the state of development of man's power to respond to the Word of God. This power is his highest faculty, and in this dispensation it reaches maturity. This motivating power of society, arising from the people, remains vested in the people by the institutions and ordinances of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Manifestation of God is the Source of all. Through Him power and initiative are evoked in the mass of mankind. Through His Covenant, specifically centred in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, interpretation and protection are given. Through the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Covenant is preserved and extended for the whole length of the dispensation. Authority and Divine guidance are vested in the House of Justice, and guarantee and Divine guidance are vested in the Guardian. A close relationship is revealed between the component and integral parts of the World Commonwealth.

This then is Theocracy. Power and initiative evoked by the Word of God; authority conferred by the Word

of God; guarantee and guidance given and maintained by the Word of God. Everything rests on the creative Word and God Himself rules His people.

Such a comprehensive and unquestionably authorized system is new to human experience. Neither the Christian Faith, nor Islám, can claim the written, undisputable authority of the Manifestation of God for any system within their folds. Consequently their socially-creative power is paralysed by the spirit of modern criticism, and they are unable to make any significant contribution to the reorganization of world society. Sincere and altruistic as is the desire of many within these Faiths, and of many in the other great religious systems of the planet, those very systems arrest the vision of their members at their own borders, so that there is small hope of their aspirations being realized, save through the Most Great Covenant whose promise is enshrined within their Holy Books.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament is divided into three parts, each apparently written at different times, the last two some time later than the first part. It is a matter of inference that parts two and three were added by the Master after two particularly flagrant violations by the traitorous members of His own Family. Part 1 has the following note at the end: “*This written paper hath for a long time been preserved underground, damp having affected it. When brought forth to the light, it was observed that certain parts of it were injured by the damp, and the Holy Land being sorely agitated it was left untouched.*”

Parts 2 and 3 each recount fresh violations of the Covenant and dwell upon the importance of preserving the Faith. The continuation of divine guidance after Him is mentioned in each part.

Some conception of the trials which 'Abdu'l-Bahá faced may be gathered by a single perusal of the Will; from such sentences as this: "*O dearly beloved friends! I am now in very great danger and the hope of even an hour's life is lost to me.*" Under such conditions the Master's only thought was for the friends and the preservation of the Faith. He prays for both, sends His love and confers His blessing, and ends with mention of the Guardian.

We now come to the text.

The opening paragraph serves as introduction to the high theme which is to follow, and reveals its main outline. That outline is the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

"*All praise to Him . . .*," this refers to Bahá'u'lláh, "*. . . Who by the shield of His Covenant hath guarded the Temple of His Cause from the darts of doubtfulness . . .*" The Covenant, which shields the Faith from schism and protects it from the violators, is inseparable from the name of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, whose Will and Testament is as essential a part of it as is the Will and Testament of Bahá'u'lláh.

The main theme of the Covenant is protection of the Word and the continuity of Divine guidance. In the Testament of Bahá'u'lláh this theme has a single expression, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Greatest Branch, the Centre of the Covenant. In the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá it has two expressions, the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.

This second paragraph bears much meditation. In itself it is a complete statement, perfectly constructed and fitting into the whole Will and Testament as an integral unit. It begins with the Guardian and ends with the Guardian, but not before every member of the great world order, destined to rise on this Charter, has

been included. “*Salutation and praise, blessing and glory rest upon that primal branch of the Divine and Sacred Lote-Tree, grown out, blest, tender, verdant, and flourishing from the Twin Holy Trees . . .*” The “*primal branch*” is Shoghi Effendi; the Divine and Sacred Lote-Tree is the Manifestation of God (specifically Bahá’u’lláh in this instance) and the Twin Holy Trees are Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb, Shoghi Effendi being descended from both houses, that of the Báb through his father, that of Bahá’u’lláh through his mother.

This is the first mention of the Guardian, and follows immediately upon the praise to Bahá’u’lláh and His Covenant. Note the tender and loving language which the Master uses, and then consider the next part of this long sentence: “*The most wondrous, unique and priceless pearl that doth gleam from out the twin surging seas. . . .*” This is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s testimony to the first Guardian. The Twin surging Seas again designate Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb. We may note here that throughout Bahá’í Scripture, the Divine Lote-Tree, the Ocean, the Nightingale, are symbols of the Manifestation of God, and that whenever the twin symbols are used, reference is made to the two Manifestations of this Dispensation, Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb.

The statement now continues with mention of others in the Faith upon whom “*salutation and praise*” are invoked. “. . . *the offshoots of the Tree of Holiness,*” that is Bahá’u’lláh’s children; “. . . *the twigs of the Celestial Tree,*” members of the Family of the Báb; “. . . *they that in the day of the Great Dividing have stood fast and firm in the Covenant.*” This refers to the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh when many sought leadership and violated the explicit written Covenant. The great dividing was between those who were steadfast

and the violator, and bears no reference whatever to a schism. As time has shown, the Covenant flourished and the violators came to nothing. Next are the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God, those who have spread the Message and “*stood for righteousness in this world, and kindled the Fire of the love of God in the very hearts and souls of His servants.*” Finally “*them that have believed, rested assured, stood steadfast in His Covenant and followed the Light that after my passing shineth from the Dayspring of Divine guidance—for behold! he is the blest and sacred bough that hath branched out from the Twin Holy Trees.*” Here is a definite assurance that after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Divine guidance will be given through the Guardian, a written statement made even more explicitly later, unique in the religious history of the world.

The paragraph closes; “*Well is it with him that seeketh the shelter of his shade that shadoweth all mankind.*” How great is this passage, how perfect in composition, how beautiful in design. Opening with the theme of the Guardianship, continuing throughout the whole body of believers, it returns easily and smoothly to its theme, carries it to a great crescendo, stops, and then concludes with that thunderous chord, “*Well is it with him that seeketh the shelter of his shade that shadoweth all mankind.*”

Some comment is necessary on the term “*all mankind.*” Not only the believers, but every human being is under the shadow of the Guardian. This is not difficult to realize when we understand that the Manifestation of God is the Tree upon which all human beings are the leaves. We all belong to that Tree, consciously, unconsciously, or even unwillingly. The Manifestation is the Lord of the Age and “*all else are servants unto Him and do His bidding.*” Direct from the



Manifestation by His explicit will, through the Centre of the Covenant, the light of Divine guidance continues to shine through the Guardian, and will do so until God is again manifested "*in the noble form of the human temple.*"

All development is of the spirit. The milestones of progress . . . what we call events . . . are reached first in the spiritual world and later objectified in human affairs. Thus the sovereignty of Christ was a spiritual fact at the time of His Manifestation, but there was a lag of some hundreds of years before human consciousness caught up with it. It is so to-day with the sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, and therefore with the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi.

'Abdu'l-Bahá continues by urging the friends to protect the Faith of God, a duty which can be accomplished, as He states later, by "*obedience to him who is the Guardian of the Cause of God.*" He recounts the martyrdoms of the early believers and some of the afflictions heaped upon Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. "*Ten thousand souls . . .*"; a constant perusal of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings leads one to feel that the term is not intended exactly, but means a great number.

The Will continues with an account of the base treason of Mírzá Yahyá, Bahá'u'lláh's half-brother, a tale known only too well by those who have wept for the afflictions of the Blessed Beauty. The dark story is not complete however; by no means. Muḥammad 'Alí, the "*centre of sedition,*" the "*prime mover of mischief*"; Badi'u'lláh, too weak for constancy in faith or treason; Shuá'u'lláh, "*in concert with others,*" plot and scheme and work mischief with all their might, motivated by black hatred deep in their miserable natures which impels them to oppose the Light of God and to attempt

to destroy the Centre of the Covenant. The story of their countless machinations is surely without equal. Little wonder the Master sought refuge with the Almighty Father Whose Light found so perfect an expression in Him. “. . . Graciously assist me, through my love for Thee, that I may drink deep of the chalice that brimmeth over with faithfulness to Thee and is filled with Thy bountiful Grace . . . Lord! Shield Thou from these Covenant-breakers the mighty stronghold of Thy Faith and protect Thy secret sanctuary from the onslaught of the ungodly. Thou in truth art the Mighty, the Powerful, the Gracious, the Strong.”

He next proclaims that Muḥammad ‘Alí is “cut off from the Holy Tree”; expelled from the community of the believers, for whom He reveals a prayer. “O God, my God! Shield Thy trusted servants from the evils of self and passion, protect them with the watchful eye of Thy loving kindness from all rancour, hate and envy, shelter them in the impregnable stronghold of Thy Cause and, safe from the darts of doubtfulness, make them the manifestations of Thy glorious signs, illumine their faces with the effulgent rays shed from the Dayspring of Thy Divine Unity, gladden their hearts with the verses revealed from Thy Holy Kingdom, strengthen their loins by Thine all-swaying power that cometh from Thy realm of glory. Thou art the All-Bountiful, the Protector, the Almighty, the Gracious.”

Now, having established the Guardianship, and exposed the violators (whose crimes He concealed when they affected only Himself), He exhorts the friends in the strongest language to engage in teaching the Cause far and wide, “that throughout the East and the West a vast concourse may gather together under the shadow of the Word of God, that the sweet savours of holiness may be diffused, that faces may shine radiantly, hearts be filled with the

*Divine spirit and souls be made heavenly.” “It behoveth them not to rest for a moment, neither to seek repose. They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime and travel throughout all regions.” And in the midst of such activity He wishes the friends “to achieve renown in the world wherever they go.” On another occasion He said, “I desire for you distinction.”*

*“The disciples of Christ forgot themselves and all earthly things, forsook all their cares and belongings, purged themselves of self and passion and with absolute detachment scattered far and wide and engaged in calling the peoples of the world to the Divine Guidance, till at last they made the world another world, illumined the surface of the earth and even to their last hour proved self-sacrificing in the pathway of that Beloved One of God. Finally in various lands they suffered glorious martyrdom. Let them that are men of action follow in their footsteps!”*

The remainder of Part I delineates the main features of the Administrative Order. The Guardian is named and appointed. All the “branches,” “twigs,” “hands,” and believers must “turn unto Shoghi Effendi . . . as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God.” “He is the expounder of the Words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants.” Thus the authority of the interpreter, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is conferred upon the Guardian. (The succession is amplified later.)

Immediately following this the Guardian is declared to be “under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty (Bahá’u’lláh), under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One” (the Báb). The command of obedience to the Guardian and to the Universal House of Justice, which is under the same protection and guidance, is as strong and emphatic as anything found

in the Master's Writings, and the passages require constant reading to allow their forcefulness to sink in.

The succession is established, calling into the picture another institution, that of the Hands of the Cause of God. The Guardian must, in his own lifetime, nominate his successor previously designated as his first-born son, but "*should the first-born of the Guardian of the Cause of God not manifest in himself the truth of the words:—'The child is the secret essence of his sire', that is should he not inherit of the spiritual within him . . . and his glorious lineage not be matched with a goodly character, then must he (the Guardian of the Cause of God) choose another branch to succeed him.*" "Another branch" means a descendant of Bahá'u'lláh. The Hands of the Cause of God are to elect nine from their own number, and this body of nine, by secret vote "*must give their assent to the choice of the one whom the Guardian of the Cause of God has chosen as his successor.*"

The Hands of the Cause are all appointed by the Guardian, men and women of exalted spiritual character. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes them thus: their duties are "*to diffuse the Divine fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men, and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things. They must manifest the fear of God by their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words.*"

The whole body of the Hands of the Cause is under "*the direction of the Guardian of the Cause of God,*" but the small body of nine which they elect from among themselves "*shall at all times be occupied in the important services in the work of the Guardian of the Cause of God.*" Thus the Guardianship has an attendant body of helpers, elected from the spiritual aristocracy of mankind, and

the Guardian also has at his direction spiritually-exalted characters throughout the planet, wherever he may be guided to appoint them.

There is nothing in the Will and Testament from which to infer that the Hands of the Cause have any political, social, or economic privilege. They are spiritual advisers and teachers and must obey the Houses of Justice like any other believer. The non-ecclesiastical character of the Faith is unaffected, since the direction of affairs, administration of the House of Worship, meetings and celebration of festivals and anniversaries, remain the inviolable right of the Houses of Justice in each locality.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose for which all these forces are to be mobilised is *“that the existent world may become even as the Abhá Paradise, that the surface of the earth may become heavenly, that contention and conflict amidst peoples, kindreds, nations and governments may disappear, that all the dwellers on earth may become one people and one race, that the world may become even as one home. Should differences arise they shall be amicably and conclusively settled by the Supreme Tribunal, that shall include members from all the governments and peoples of the world.”*

Here is the first, and only mention of this important institution in the Will and Testament. A World Court of arbitration, Supreme Tribunal, drawing its members from all nations will, as the Guardian has already written “adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise

<sup>1</sup> The appointment of a number of Hands in 1951, followed later by others, was a matter of supreme interest to the Bahá'í world. The Hands in each continent were assisted by an auxiliary Board, the members of which they themselves appointed. Four Hands, resident in Haifa, assisted the Guardian, and were members of the International Bahá'í Council.

between the various elements constituting this universal system.”<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the Will and Testament, as indeed throughout all ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writings, there breathes that ideal of boundless love, of reconciliation, amity and universality, of which He was the perfect Exemplar. This is nowhere more apparent than in this mighty Charter, where the intrigues and hatred of the Covenant-breakers have to be exposed, and the organism kept healthy by their expulsion. However strong and vehement the Master’s denunciation of the violators of the Covenant, there is only prayer and forgiveness for the oppressors of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The breakers of the Covenant are consigned to the wrath of God, but for these same people, the contemptible enemies of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, there is only this: “*O my Lord! Have mercy upon them, shield them from all afflictions in these troubled times and grant that all trials and hardship may be the lot of this Thy servant that hath fallen into this darksome pit. . . . O God! my God! lowly, suppliant and fallen upon my face, I beseech Thee with all the ardour of my invocation to pardon whomsoever hath hurt me, forgive him that hath conspired against me and offended me, and wash away the misdeeds of them that have wrought injustice upon me. . . .*”

His prayers for the believers and the Cause are fervent and simple. For protection from self and passion, for safety from the violators. He now exhorts them: “*O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God’s grace. It is incumbent upon everyone to show the utmost love, rectitude of conduct, straightforwardness and sincere kindness unto all the peoples and kindreds of the world, be they friends or strangers. So intense must be the*

<sup>1</sup> *The Unfoldment of World Civilization.*

*spirit of love and loving-kindness, that the stranger may find himself a friend, the enemy a true brother, no difference whatsoever existing between them. For universality is of God and all limitations earthly. Thus man must strive that his reality may manifest virtues and perfections, the light whereof may shine upon everyone. The light of the sun shineth upon all the world and the merciful showers of Divine Providence fall upon all peoples. The vivifying breeze reviveth every living creature and all beings endued with life obtain their share and portion at His heavenly board. In like manner, the affections and loving-kindness of the servants of the One True God must be bountifully and universally extended to all mankind. Regarding this, restrictions and limitations are in no wise permitted.*

*“Wherefore, O my loving friends! Consort with all the peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, good-will and friendliness; that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Bahá, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancour may vanish from the world and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the Light of Unity. Should other peoples and nations be unfaithful to you show your fidelity unto them, should they be unjust towards you show justice towards them, should they keep aloof from you attract them to yourself, should they show their enmity be friendly towards them, should they poison your lives sweeten their souls, should they inflict a wound upon you, be a salve to their sores. Such are the attributes of the sincere. Such are the attributes of the truthful.”*

This quotation will serve to remind us that the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is no mere system to be laid over a dead society. Its motivating force, its life, its breath, is the love and service of God; the Administrative

Order is the Divinely-appointed scheme by which the mature expression of such spiritual force may find its fullest expression.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá deals next with the House of Justice, explaining that He means the Universal House of Justice “*which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error.*” This refers to its establishment by Bahá’u’lláh Himself and to its being under the same protection and guidance as overshadow the Guardian. “*It must be elected by universal suffrage*”; a direction later specified to mean that the members of the National Houses of Justice must constitute the electorate of the supreme Universal House. The Master states the qualities which the voters must consider when electing this world government. “*Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and daysprings of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God’s Faith and the well-wishers of all mankind.*”

The close and indissoluble relationship between the two “Pillars” of Bahá’u’lláh’s World Order, the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, is now more clearly revealed than formerly, when they were linked together “*under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One.*” The Guardian, whose duty of interpretation has already been laid down, is appointed permanent head of the Universal House of Justice. He must attend its deliberations or send someone to represent him. He has “*at his own discretion, the right to expel*” any member who commits a sin “*injurious to the common weal.*” The obvious comment is that the guidance which is given to the institution does not descend to individuals by right of membership. Only the Guardian has this



individual protection. The House of Justice, however, has its own defined functions, upon which the Guardian may not encroach. *“It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text. By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved. . . . This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them.”* The House of Justice deliberates on all matters not in the Book, and legislates, majority vote prevailing. The Guardian has one vote and no power of veto. Should he believe a contemplated measure to be contrary to the spirit of the Faith, he will most certainly ask for a reconsideration, and it is impossible to imagine the House of Justice not seeking the true spiritual foundation of the matter in consultation with the Guardian.

It is noteworthy too that just as both institutions receive the same Divine care and protection, so the Guardian, by virtue of his membership, partakes of the authority vested in the House of Justice, although he has no individual legislative power.

These twin pillars of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, acting in close harmony, yet within clearly defined spheres, ensure the continuity of Divine guidance not only with respect to interpretation of the revealed Word, but also with respect to the practical application of the spiritual principles of the Faith to world affairs, as well as to legislation on those matters which Bahá'u'lláh has “deliberately left” out of “the body of His legislative and administrative ordinances.” Authority therefore is vested in the House of Justice, according to the Will of Bahá'u'lláh and the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá. Guarantee, or guardianship, comes from the Guardian by virtue of his interpretation of the Word of God, the bedrock on which the whole structure is raised. We have already

shown that power and initiative reside in the mass of believers—in the people—who constitute the seedbed of human development.

This paragraph about the House of Justice concludes with a statement which penetrates deep into the muddle and confusion of modern administration, and yet bears that stamp of deep wisdom, simplicity. *“The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive must aid and assist the legislative body, so that through the close union and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong, that all the regions of the world may become even as Paradise itself.”*<sup>1</sup>

The legislative body is composed in part of the National and Local Houses of Justice, but there will undoubtedly be a permanent executive service, such as some countries already have, and such as the League of Nations had already foreshadowed in its committees on nutrition, drug and white slave traffic, wage standards, education, and in the secretariat of its own council.

The mandate of the Universal House of Justice is clear and definite. It must deliberate upon *“all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatever they decide has the same effect as the text itself.”* But in spite of such compelling authority bestowed upon it, its enactments are not in the same station as the Word of God, a distinction which the Master clearly upholds and of which he shows the implication. The decisions and laws formulated by the House of Justice may be abrogated by the House of Justice, whereas the text of the Book remains supreme and inviolate throughout the Dispensation.

<sup>1</sup>For ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s further discussion of the relationship between these two functions see His essay on politics, published in English as *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.

The membership of the House of Justice will change, but the institution is created by Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian, by virtue of his permanent membership, gives to it that continuity of vision and disinterestedness which is so strong a feature of monarchy.

The National House of Justice, or "secondary" House as it is termed in the Will, is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own contribution to the institutions of the world order. The Universal and Local Houses were designed by Bahá'u'lláh, but it is the Master who institutes the intermediary or secondary body. "*. . . in all countries, a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one.*"

"Huqúq," or the fixed money offering ordained by Bahá'u'lláh is to be offered "*through the Guardian of the Cause of God, that it may be expended for the diffusion of the Fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Word, for benevolent pursuits and for the common weal.*" The amount is not mentioned here (actually it is nineteen percent of income after expenses have been deducted) but the Master tells the friends that God is independent of all created things, and that this offering is a favour from Him which "*causeth the people to become firm and steadfast and draweth Divine increase upon them.*"

The machinations of Muhammad 'Alí and his fellow conspirators were a constant source of danger to the Master, and at one time He was constrained to write the following: "*This wronged one hath in no wise borne, nor doth he bear a grudge against anyone; towards none doth he entertain any ill-feeling and uttereth no word save for the good of the world. My supreme obligation, however, of necessity, prompteth me to guard and preserve the Cause of God. Thus with the greatest regret I counsel you saying:*

*Guard ye the Cause of God, protect His Law and have the utmost fear of discord. This is the foundation of the belief of the people of Bahá (may my life be offered up for them). 'His Holiness, the Exalted One (the Báb) is the Manifestation of the unity and Oneness of God and the forerunner of the Ancient Beauty. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty (may my life be a sacrifice for His steadfast friends) is the supreme Manifestation of God and the Dayspring of His Most Divine Essence. All others are servants unto Him and do His bidding.' "*

The final sentence is a direct repudiation of the charge which the violators made, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, by claiming to be in the same station as the Manifestation, proved Himself an impostor according to the terms of Bahá'u'lláh's Will, which stated clearly that after Him no Manifestation should appear for a full thousand years. (It is interesting to note their time-honoured method of using certain sentences for perverted ends whilst utterly ignoring the main substance.) It was a few of the Master's own followers, who in their immaturity and overwhelming love, unwittingly lent assistance to this charge, by insisting on the same station for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Whom they had seen and to Whom they had delivered their hearts, as for Christ and Bahá'u'lláh Who were remote, and could not even in imagination surpass their perfect Master. It is an understandable view. The child models its unknown Father in heaven upon its known father, and many have mistaken the perfect expression for the reality. It is understandable even in view of the Master's repeated statements to the contrary, although here understanding falls short of charity, for there is surely something of egotism in maintaining one's own opinion at the cost of regarding the statements of the Centre of the Covenant as veils to

shield the Truth from unworthy ones. Be that as it may, it lent some countenance to the violators, who were not slow to wrest whatever support they could from the fact of a few devoted believers regarding 'Abdu'l-Bahá as Christ. Thus the Cause of God suffers as much, or more, "from the unwisdom of its friends" as the Guardian puts it, than from the hatred of its enemies.

The Will concludes with a re-statement of its major theme—the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi. "*O ye the faithful loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It is incumbent upon you to take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi, the twig that hath branched from, and the fruit given forth by the two hallowed and Divine Lote-Trees, that no dust of despondency may stain his radiant nature, that day by day he may wax greater in happiness, in joy and spirituality, and may grow to become even as a fruitful tree.*

"*For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the guardian of the Cause of God; the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause and the beloved of the Lord must obey him and turn unto him. He that obeyeth him not, hath not obeyed God; he that turneth away from him, hath turned away from God and he that denieth him hath denied the True One. Beware lest anyone falsely interpret these words, and like unto them that have broken the Covenant after the Day of Ascension (of Bahá'u'lláh) advance a pretext, raise the standard of revolt, wax stubborn and open wide the door of false interpretation. To none is given the right to put forth his own opinion or express his particular convictions. All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.*

"*The Glory of Glories rest upon you.*"

The sentence "To none is given the right to put forth his own opinion or express his particular convictions," cannot

be lifted from its context and applied to anything else. It applies only to the successorship under the Covenant and the authority vested in it. Indeed such a statement in any other setting would be a direct contradiction of the Bahá'í principle of consultation, which requires everyone to set forth his views with moderation and recognizes that "*out of the clash of differing opinions the spark of truth cometh forth*". The pitiful experiences of 'Abdu'l-Bahá had proved only too clearly how the darkness in human nature is ever on the watch to take advantage of a sudden hiatus, caused by the removal from mortal sight of such a Figure as the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh, and His sole aim was "*to guard and preserve the Cause of God*". History proves that He did so, and the Covenant, which revolved around Him, was not broken. Violated by many as traitors are counted, by few as the faithful are numbered, the mighty stronghold remained "*impregnable and safe,*" unbroken and unimpaired in its efficacy as a shelter for all mankind. Rather did it gain in strength through the casting off of inorganic elements, but at the cost of such tribulation to the Founders of the Faith as only the Holy Ones can bear.

The abominable reception accorded God's Manifestation whenever He appears is one of history's most astonishing facts. What of the mob that cries "crucify Him"; that assembles on the roof tops of Tabríz to watch His execution; that howls for blood and is hardly calmed by His bastinado; the mob that picks up stones to hurl at Majesty in chains. These qualities are manifested during each revelation, and must be, in order that the victory over death may be won again by that transcendant "*pure and stainless soul,*" the Manifestation of God. The vessels of darkness doubtless are broken;

so that the Light may enter. “*Father forgive them for they know not what they do.*”

But we may wonder what happens to “Judas” in each dispensation. His crime is different from that of the blind, fearful, ignorant mob. For those who sin against the Holy Ghost, that is recognize the Truth and receive its light, and then set themselves against it with the power which it has given them, we are told in the Gospel there is no forgiveness. To the Bahá’í, eternity means the duration of a dispensation, at the end of which time there is a “new heaven and a new earth” and “all things are made new.” Maybe this tortured being, conscious of God but excluded from “heaven” is given another chance at the day of judgment, when the Lord of the Age purifies all things.

. . . . .

The more frequently one reads the Will and Testament the more is one intrigued and delighted by its artistic and æsthetic qualities. Its construction, form, design and unity all proclaim it the work of a creative, superbly-balanced mind—as between the subjective values and objective forms. Written under stress and difficulty it never loses that mysterious quality which can elevate a painting or musical work to the realm of art.

Briefly the main design is the kingdom of God on earth; the theme, stated immediately after the introduction is Divine protection and guidance, a theme which has two phrases, the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, a theme which is repeated in each part of the work, which is perceptible in the many variations (principles of action and subsidiary institutions), and is itself expanded and developed in

the main body of the work. It provides the closing sentence of the document. Dramatic value and contrast are provided by the opposition of the violators, a shade so black and strong as to “*threaten to subvert the Divine edifice itself.*” Over all is the glory of Bahá’u’lláh, and throughout, in the repetition of the major and minor themes, in the trials and persecutions of the Great Ones, in the all-conquering love showered on friend and foe alike, breathes that spirit of harmony and high drama, the Day and Night of the cosmos, which, by the creation of form in wood or stone, paint or music, language or social order, we humans strive perpetually to enshrine.



# EPILOGUE

THE SUDDEN and unexpected death of the Guardian of the Faith in November 1957 was a shattering blow to the world community of Bahá'ís. Shock was tinged with apprehension, which penetrated to the very foundations of faith, since Shoghi Effendi had left no issue and none knew how the supreme, unique feature of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order—the continuity of divine guidance, which the Faith had enjoyed uninterruptedly for ninety-four years—was to be maintained.

The theme of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, "divine protection and guidance, a theme which has two phrases, the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice . . .", had become a bastion of assurance in the heart and soul of every Bahá'í. But the Guardian had gone and there was no successor; the Universal House of Justice was not yet formed. The validity of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant was on trial.

Now, if ever, was the time for division, doubts and disintegration. But the exact opposite took place; there was consolidation, renewal of vigour, more resolute pursuit of the tasks set by the Guardian and a heightened awareness of the privilege of being Bahá'í. Love for the Guardian became the source of greater dedication and sacrificial service, and believers the world over became conscious of their unity as never before. The mysterious working of the Covenant, exerting its protective,

benign and vitalizing influence, became apparent in the course of the decade following the Guardian's passing, and its operation is our present theme.

We need not dwell upon the heartache and overwhelming sense of tragedy of that time. Some mention, however, must be made of the relationship between the Bahá'ís and their Guardian, or the elements of the crisis and the developments which stemmed from it cannot be understood.

Shoghi Effendi came to the Guardianship in 1921, a young man of twenty-four, in his second year at Balliol College, Oxford. He rapidly established himself in the position defined for him by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and, over the years, by his unflagging devotion to the interests of the Cause, by his disclosure of its bright horizons to the Bahá'ís, by his careful and loving nursing of their inadequate and immature understanding of the supreme grandeur of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, by his mighty works, by his constant challenge to the believers by his mobilization and successful direction of their unknown capacities to serve the Faith, by these and by every action of his life he became the "beloved Guardian", the recognized "sign of God" on earth and like his illustrious Forebear described by E. G. Browne, the "object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain."

Love for the Guardian, faith in Bahá'u'lláh and the conduct of the Chief Stewards of the Faith, were prime factors in carrying the Bahá'í community over the hiatus between the closing of one source of Divine guidance and the opening of another. The powerful constructive forces generated by these three factors acted, under the overshadowing protection of the Covenant, to strengthen the infant Faith, to absorb its shock

and eventually to restore to it the promised, incontrovertibly authentic channel of Divine guidance which is its supreme distinguishing feature.

Reference has already been made to the appointment, in 1951, of the “first contingent” of the Hands of the Cause of God. (See p. 19n.) During the next few years the Guardian increased the number of Hands to nineteen, maintained it at that level until less than two months before his passing, when, in a general letter addressed to the Bahá’í world, the number of these high-ranking officers of the Faith was raised to twenty-seven. In that same letter the Hands of the Cause of God were designated “Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth . . .”

In 1953 the Guardian of the Faith had launched the first global Teaching Plan in Bahá’í history. Known as the Ten Year Plan, or Ten Year Crusade, it was designed to implant the banner of the Faith in all parts of the world and to increase the number of National Spiritual Assemblies—the pillars which would sustain the Universal House of Justice—from twelve to more than fifty. Every community in the Bahá’í world had been assigned its share of the task and was actively engaged in it when the blow fell.

The announcement of the Guardian’s passing was made to the Bahá’í world by his widow, the Hand of the Cause Amatu’l Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum. Immediately after the funeral, which took place in London and involved a cavalcade of more than sixty cars from Kensington to the North London Cemetery, Southgate, where a large number of believers had already gathered, Rúhíyyih Khánum called upon the friends in all parts of the world to rally round the Hands of the Cause, to pray for them, to turn to them and to await their guidance.

Within a few days of the funeral the “Chief Stewards” held their first conclave, in the Mansion of Bahá’u’lláh at Bahjí, within the precincts of His Shrine—to Bahá’ís the most sacred spot in the entire planet.

The eagerly awaited proclamation issued from that meeting ranks with the historical documents of the Faith. Recognizing the nature of the crisis, their own responsibilities and the supreme obligation to protect and preserve the unity of the Cause, the Hands of the Cause called attention to the mighty achievements of the Guardian in firmly establishing the Faith throughout the world, thereby laying the foundation for the erection of the Universal House of Justice, in creating the institution<sup>1</sup> which was to evolve into that Supreme Body and, by planning the objectives of the Ten Year Crusade, guiding the progress of the Cause until 1963. They certified that the Guardian had left no Will, and had appointed no heir.

Assuming their stewardship, the Hands of the Cause took charge of the infant Faith until that Institution through which the promised guidance could again flow would be elected. They announced that the Guardian’s plan would be followed without deviation or compromise and that they (the Hands) would decide and announce the date for the election, in the manner defined by the Master in His Will and Testament, of the Universal House of Justice: “When that divinely ordained body comes into existence, all the conditions of the Faith can be examined anew and the measures necessary for its future operation determined in consultation with the Hands of the Cause.”<sup>2</sup>

1. The International Bahá’í Council; see p. 19n.

2. Proclamation by the Hands of the Cause to the Bahá’ís of East and West, 25 November 1957. (See *The Bahá’í World*, Vol. XIII, pp. 341–345)

The Hands' objective was clear, noble and immediately satisfying to the believers. All the National Spiritual Assemblies then in existence cabled and wrote messages to the Hands of the Cause, recognizing them as the true authority and Head of the Faith at that time, and pledging on behalf of themselves and the communities they represented, complete loyalty and obedience. The unity of the Faith was apparent.

Following as closely as possible the intention of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as set out in His Will and Testament, the Hands of the Cause selected from their own number (twenty-seven) a body of nine to serve as "The Hands of the Cause Residing in the Holy Land" and to act as the central directive of the Faith. These nine, who became known as the Custodians, derived their authority from the entire body of the Hands of the Cause of God, whose authority had been conferred by Bahá'u'lláh Himself in many passages of His Writings, confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament and every one of whom had been appointed by the Guardian of the Faith, and designated by him "Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth".

In all ages of history the Covenant of God as revealed by the Prophet has been the object of attacks by those who wished to destroy it. In this Dispensation the Manifestation of God Himself and subsequently 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian had had to contend with attempts at violation of the Covenant and subversion of the unity of the Faith. In the interregnum between the passing of the Guardian and the emergence of the Universal House of Justice the Hands of the Cause were compelled to deal with a further attempt. Mason Remey, a Hand of the Cause, appointed President of the International Bahá'í Council by the Guardian, a signa-

tory of the first and later proclamations of the Hands of the Cause after the Guardian's passing, announced himself as second *hereditary* Guardian of the Faith. He made this extraordinary claim on the grounds that he had been appointed President of the International Bahá'í Council and *ergo* was head of the Universal House of Justice. To the Bahá'ís, Remey's claim was less than serious, even ridiculous or laughable, the aberration of an elderly man. However, a small handful followed him, to peter out in dismal obscurity.<sup>1</sup> The violation was not as serious as previous attempts, although it caused great grief to the Hands of the Cause who were forced to expel from the Faith one of their own members.

The Hands in the Holy Land, basing their authority on written texts, and supported by the elected representatives of all Bahá'í communities throughout the world, were recognized by the Government of Israel as the Head of the Faith in succession to His Eminence Shoghi Effendi Rabbani and were able to take possession of all Bahá'í properties and assets in Israel which had been held in the name of Shoghi Effendi. The legal and constitutional integrity of the Faith at its World Centre was preserved, and the Hands in the Holy Land were able to operate from that Centre as the Head of a recognized independent religion.

Within the Bahá'í community the spiritual leadership of the Hands in the Holy Land was hailed with grateful recognition, and was the first balm to its grievous wound. And now occurred a phenomenon, wonderful and unique in the entire history of mankind, which demonstrated more clearly than ever before, the majestic power of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant to preserve His

1 They failed abysmally in the courts of Illinois to claim the Mother Temple of the West and other Bahá'í property.

Faith and to raise up to its service men and women incorruptible even by the exercise of absolute power. The Hands of the Cause of God, Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth, acceded with the expressed acclamation of the entire Bahá'í world community to supreme authority in the conduct of the affairs of the Faith. Beyond this they received the veneration and love of the Bahá'ís, who recognized in them their beloved Guardian's appointees. Let it be recorded that the elders of a Faith, invested with such power and supported by such love, took no thought for themselves, their reputations or fame, their own ideas, their comfort or importance. All was subjugated to the care of the Cause of God and to following faithfully the Guardian's plan. It was a triumph of love. The Guardian had set a course for the Faith, to bring it to a stated destination by Ridván 1963. Half-way through that voyage he, the captain, was struck down and momentarily the ship was leaderless. The Hands of the Cause took the helm, resolute in their sole purpose of following the course set by the Guardian and reaching safe harbour with the election of the Universal House of Justice.

The position was clear: the Guardian's Plan was to be completed under the central direction of his own appointees and when that task was done, or victory in sight, consideration would be given to the election of the Universal House of Justice.

The Bahá'ís went to work with a will. Single-mindedly and united as never before, they set out to win for their departed beloved the harvest whose gathering he had so longed to witness. To cities, towns and villages of their homelands, to foreign lands, to remote and inhospitable places, to islands, jungles and deserts

they betook themselves, often alone, sometimes with relatives and families, to implant the banner of Bahá'u'lláh and redeem some unfulfilled pledge of the Guardian's Plan, transforming for ever some corner of a foreign field into a Bahá'í homeland. In most of these pioneer posts communities of native believers gradually emerged, who would later elect their Local Spiritual Assemblies and later still combine with other local communities in the election of a National Spiritual Assembly, a sustaining pillar of the Universal House of Justice. Thus, for example, at the beginning of the Ten Year Crusade in 1953, there were two National Spiritual Assemblies in Latin America. At the end of the Crusade, in April 1963, twenty-two were recognized in that area, whose members were electors of the Universal House of Justice.

There is no lack of evidence to show that the Guardian constantly had in mind the election of the Universal House of Justice. He referred to it throughout his ministry; he wrote of his own participation in its deliberations; and in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles dated 25 February 1951 he indicated the conclusion of the Ten Year Crusade as a likely time for its formation.<sup>1</sup> In January 1951 he announced the first step towards its establishment. This was the appointment of the International Bahá'í Council which, he wrote, was to evolve from an appointed body through the stages of a Bahá'í Court (to deal with matters of personal status in the Holy Land), an elected body, and finally to effloresce into the Universal House of Justice, that Supreme Institution which he had said "Posterity will regard as the last refuge of a tottering

<sup>1</sup> See *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, p. 261. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981.



civilization.” He appointed eight—later nine—members of the Council. Five Hands of the Cause were among them, one as liaison between the Guardian and the Council, one as President, one as Vice-President, one as Secretary-General, one as Member-at-Large. The Hands of the Cause called for an election, in 1961, of this body, limiting its membership to nine from all the adult Bahá’ís in the world except the Hands themselves. (Later they would state to the Bahá’ís their preference not to be elected to the Universal House of Justice.) Thus the International Bahá’í Council entered its “final stage preceding the election of the Universal House of Justice”; it served a two-year term under the direction of the Hands in the Holy Land and ceased to exist with the election, in 1963, of the Universal House of Justice. In the message from their conclave in 1959 the Hands of the Cause had assured the believers “that every effort will be made to establish a Bahá’í Court in the Holy Land prior to the date set for this election. We should however bear in mind that the Guardian himself clearly indicated this goal, due to the strong trend towards the secularization of religious courts in this part of the world, might not be achieved.” It was in fact found inadvisable, if not impossible, as the Guardian had foreseen, to establish such a court.

It was therefore in accordance with the clearly expressed intention of the Guardian, and well within the authority of the Chief Stewards, to arrange for the election of the supreme legislative institution of Bahá’u’lláh’s World Order, the “source of all good and freed from all error.”<sup>1</sup>

1 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself, at a dark moment in His chequered life, had instructed in writing Ḥájí Mírzá Táqí Afnán, cousin of the Báb and chief builder of the Temple at Ishqábád, to arrange for the election of the Universal House of Justice had the threats against Him materialized.

The brilliant success of the Hands of the Cause of God is a matter of history. The celebration of the Ridván Festival in 1963 was marked by such jubilation, such portentous happenings, such a sense of divine bounty as to recall that first Ridván when the King of Kings Himself, on the eve of His second banishment, had made the first announcement of His Revelation. At the World Centre of the Faith members of fifty-six National Spiritual Assemblies, gathered in the House of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, with prayerful solemnity cast their votes for the membership of the Universal House of Justice. In London's Albert Hall seven thousand Bahá'ís from all parts of the world, some in colourful local costume, assembled to observe the hundredth anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration and to celebrate the victory of the Ten Year Crusade. The nine members of the Universal House of Justice were presented to the Congress.

The Universal House of Justice, once elected, immediately established its seat in Haifa, in a building opposite the House of the Master and the Guardian. It gradually assembled its staff and through frequent meetings with the Hands of the Cause resident in the Holy Land, transfer of administrative direction, of the International Bahá'í Fund and the properties of the Faith was effected. The Hands of the Cause had already prepared an outline of a new teaching plan and this, after much detailed work and many considerations, became the Nine Year Plan which was launched at Ridván 1964. Its aim was a vast expansion of the Faith in all parts of the world with the specific goal, among many others, of increasing the number of fifty-six National Spiritual Assemblies whose members had first elected the Universal House of Justice in 1963, to one hundred and

eight by 1973,<sup>1</sup> the centenary year of the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. In addition to this growth in size, the Nine Year Plan was designed to develop cohesion of the scattered world-wide Bahá'í community so that it would rapidly become and ever after develop as a single organic unified society. "Universal participation" in Bahá'í life, aimed at engaging every Bahá'í in such important activities as the daily prayer, attendance at Nineteen Day Feasts, teaching the Faith, contributing to the Bahá'í Fund, obeying the Bahá'í laws of marriage, observing the annual Fast and the nine holy days on which work is abandoned, was one of the goals of the Plan. In addition 219 projects requiring the cooperation of two or more National Spiritual Assemblies were included in the Plan.<sup>2</sup> This was followed by a Five Year Plan to run from 1974 to 1979, while currently the vigour of the Bahá'í world community is channelled to the attainment of the objectives of a Seven Year Plan, to terminate in 1983.

But in 1963, the vital, the burning question to Bahá'ís was the Guardianship. Inevitably there was private speculation, wishful thinking and a very few unauthentic and unauthorised statements. In general, however, the believers everywhere had possessed themselves in patience against the time when the divinely guided Universal House of Justice would settle the matter.

During the October following its election the Universal House of Justice discussed in several sessions with

1 114 were elected at Riḍván 1972.

2 For example, the National Spiritual Assembly of West Africa, which would divide into three independent National Spiritual Assemblies, was required to obtain three Temple sites and three National Ḥaziratu'l-Quds with the assistance of the National Spiritual Assemblies of Alaska, Burma, Germany, India, Persia and the United States.

the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the vital affairs of the Faith. Following these consultations the Universal House of Justice met for seven consecutive days in the central hall of Bahjí. From this meeting it issued the following statement:

“After prayerful and careful study of the holy Texts bearing upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged consultation which included consideration of the views of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.”

This carefully worded and definite statement, although not unexpected, acted as a catalyst to all the amorphous half-thoughts and speculations which the Bahá'ís had purposely not formed or expressed. The position, though hard to bear, was now clear. As far as human mind could conceive the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would have to develop, for an indefinite period, without a Guardian.

The Bahá'í community, recognising its inability to plumb the wisdom of the decree of Providence, accepted the situation with whatever spiritual resources each member was able to summon. The twin pillars of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order had become a single pillar and the Universal House of Justice was now the sole centre of the Cause and the authority unto which all must turn. With the wisdom of hindsight it was discovered that there was no text stating clearly that the Guardianship would continue; on the other hand provi-

sion had been made by Bahá'u'lláh Himself in case the line of Aghsán (and with it the line of Guardianship) should come to an end.<sup>1</sup> It was also recognised that Bahá'u'lláh, in His Most Holy Book, had specifically created the Universal House of Justice and confirmed its Divine guidance. This and the text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will make it clear that the guidance conferred on each of the "twin pillars" is independent of the guidance conferred on the other, and it had been proven by the Guardian's ministry that one pillar could exist and function by itself.

In spite of such considerations the Bahá'í world community knew that it had suffered a grievous blow; its sole recourse was to turn to the light of Divine guidance shining anew from the Universal House of Justice and dedicate itself to the service of its Lord. This the friends did, and gradually as new victories were achieved, as the Faith expanded in numbers and in distribution over the surface of the earth, as new bands of pioneers went out and the Cause of God was seen to be still under Divine blessing, and as large numbers of youth, finding reality for their idealism which a declining world could only frustrate or condemn, entered the Faith, the spirit of joy and dedicated enthusiasm which had characterized the Great Jubilee Congress in 1963 continued to inspire the followers of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Hands of the Cause of God suffered, perhaps, more profoundly than others from the shock of the

1 For instance, in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* Bahá'u'lláh established the right of Himself, "the Revealer of Signs", to "the endowments dedicated to charity", and continues: "After Him the decision rests with the Aghsán (Branches), and after them with the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then—so that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Sites exalted in this Cause, and for that which they have been commanded by God, the Almighty, the All-Powerful."

Guardian's passing. They were his appointees, his personal representatives and often associates; nine of them would have been privy to his nomination of the successor, giving their assent to it. What was their position? As "Chief Stewards" they had brilliantly and devotedly discharged their duties during the interregnum. Now the second channel of divine guidance, established in the sacred Text, had come into being under their aegis. Could the Guardian's authority or any part of it devolve upon them? Could they appoint more Hands in order to perpetuate the Institution?

These and relevant questions were gradually considered by the Universal House of Justice and frank statements of a general nature were issued. It was quickly accepted, and gratefully recognised, that the Universal House of Justice, although debarred from interpretation of the Revealed Word, was now the sole head of the Faith with full authority to promote and establish Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. It was the channel of divine guidance, the centre to which all must turn. In a letter to the Hands of the Cause, dated 27 March 1964, clarifying the relationship between the Institution of the Hands of the Cause and the Universal House of Justice, the Universal House of Justice wrote: "The unchallengeable authority and assurance of divine guidance conferred upon the Universal House of Justice in the sacred Scriptures make it, at this time, the supreme and central institution of the Faith to which all must turn, and also the one body invested with the authority and inspiration required to enable it to guide the Cause of God and maintain unbroken the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh."

The Hands of the Cause, from the moment of the election of the Universal House of Justice, had resolved

to do all in their power to uphold and assist the crowning institution of the Administrative Order. They now lovingly, even gratefully, accepted this decision in the matter of authority. It has gradually come to be recognised by Bahá'ís that one of the new features of Bahá'u'lláh's Order is that, unlike the past, rank is not necessarily accompanied by authority. The members of the holy family, relatives of the Báb, certain appointees had enjoyed in various degrees rank superior to the mass of believers. But authority is vested only in the institutions of the World Order.

The Hands of the Cause of God were recognised as the highest-ranking officers of the Faith, taking precedence over all others, but the Universal House of Justice—not its members—was the “supreme organ” of the Bahá'í World Commonwealth.

In November 1964 a conclave of the Hands of the Cause was held in the Holy Land during a period of fourteen days. The Universal House of Justice took advantage of this opportunity to consult them, after which a general letter was sent to the Bahá'í world which included the following:

“Accordingly, the Universal House of Justice gave its full attention to this matter and, after study of the sacred Texts and hearing the views of the Hands of the Cause themselves, has arrived at the following decisions:

“There is no way to appoint, or to legislate to make it possible to appoint, Hands of the Cause of God.

“Responsibility for decisions of matters of general policy affecting the institution of the Hands of the Cause, which was formerly exercised by the beloved Guardian, now devolves upon the Universal House

of Justice as the supreme and central institution of the Faith to which all must turn.”

Bahá'u'lláh Himself had appointed a few Hands of the Cause; ‘Abdu'l-Bahá clarified their functions and specific duties and had referred to some others as Hands of the Cause; the Guardian nominated some posthumously and appointed others, twenty-seven of whom were in office at his passing; he instituted the Auxiliary Boards, whose members were to be appointed by the Hands of the Cause and to act as their “deputies, advisers and assistants”. He also instituted the Continental Funds for the financing, in each continent, of their work. Although, in accordance with the sacred Text and the fell decree of Providence no more Hands of the Cause could be appointed, the Universal House of Justice had early signified its appreciation of the vital importance of this institution by the announcement as a goal of the Nine Year Plan of “development of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, in consultation with the body of the Hands of the Cause, with a view to the extension into the future of its appointed functions of protection and propagation.”

As the Nine Year Plan unrolled and the Administrative Order spread, it became apparent that the ever-dwindling number of Hands of the Cause would be less and less able to provide their vital services to the whole Bahá'í community, and implementation of this goal of the Nine Year Plan became urgent. Some institution, whose members would be appointed, not elected, and who would be primarily concerned with the spiritual welfare of the Faith including that of its administrative institutions was felt to be imperative, and is indeed an integral part of the fabric of Bahá'u'lláh's



World Order. The Universal House of Justice, after long deliberation, established, in 1968, eleven Continental Boards of Counsellors and assigned to them the direction of the Auxiliary Boards and control of the Continental Funds. It appointed the members—Counsellors—and requested the Hands of the Cause to assist these new officers in assuming their duties, and announced that henceforth the Hands of the Cause, freed from the daily routine of administering the Auxiliary Boards, “will be able to concentrate their energies on the more primary responsibilities of general protection and propagation, ‘preservation of the spiritual health of the Bahá’í communities’ and ‘the vitality of the faith’ of the Bahá’ís throughout the world.”

The Hands of the Cause, as ever, responded with all their energies to this new decision. An assessment of their present role inevitably recalls the apostles of old, who, in the words of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “. . . forsook all their cares and belongings, purged themselves of self and passion and with absolute detachment scattered far and wide and engaged in calling the peoples of the world to the divine guidance . . . and even to their last hour proved self-sacrificing in the pathway of that Beloved One of God.” Some in works of scholarship, others in care of the pilgrims coming to the World Centre of their Faith, others “blazing teaching trails across the surface of the planet”, others in constant encouragement of the Spiritual Assemblies, both National and Local, in the continents where they reside, loved, revered, greatly sought after by the believers, frequently representing the Universal House of Justice on important occasions such as the formation of new National Spiritual Assemblies or the holding of Intercontinental Conferences, sometimes in

contacts with Heads of State or on other occasions when high-ranking officers of the Faith are needed, have rendered and, even as their numbers diminish, continue to render distinguished and inestimable service to the life of the growing Cause.

The Hands of the Cause played a very great part in the successful establishment, consolidation and development of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, and thus one major loss to the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, resulting from the Guardian's passing, was repaired. The functions of the Hands of the Cause, vital to the Bahá'í World Commonwealth, have been preserved to that Order through an institution capable of development with the expansion and evolution of the Order itself. In fact the rapid development of this new institution since its inception in 1968 has been one of the major features of Bahá'í history during those fourteen years.

In spite of large increases in the numbers of Auxiliary Board members, it soon became apparent that the pastoral needs of the ever-expanding Bahá'í community could only be met by a very large corps of helpers to the Counsellors and their Board members. The Boards of Counsellors could support, advise and encourage National Spiritual Assemblies and the Auxiliary Board members could do likewise for Local Spiritual Assemblies, but the growing body of the believers was in great need of spiritual deepening and encouragement by well-founded and knowledgeable friends. To meet this vital need the House of Justice added a new component to the institution. Auxiliary Board members were authorized to appoint assistants, who would act on their behalf and as their deputies in the local communities. This action opened a new door through which the benign influence

of this great appointed arm could permeate the entire structure of Bahá'í society. Its work of encouragement, support of the plans and policies of the legislative institutions, constant stress on the spiritual essence of Bahá'í life, is a potent factor in maintaining the unity, missionary vigour and universal vision of the Bahá'í community—in other words, protection and propagation of the Faith.

Two important developments have further consolidated and facilitated the work of this pillar of the Faith. In 1973 the Universal House of Justice established the International Teaching Centre as the head and directing body of the Boards of Counsellors. Its seat is at the World Centre of the Faith and it is one of those “world-shaking, world-embracing, world-directing institutions” foreseen by the Guardian, operating from the great arc on Mt. Carmel round which are rising, in close proximity to the Shrine of the Báb, the world administrative institutions of the growing World Faith. The Hands of the Cause are its foundation members, while its executive nucleus in Haifa is composed of those Hands present in the Holy Land and Counsellors nominated by the Universal House of Justice. The establishment of this august institution has immensely reinforced the prestige, capacity and effectiveness of this appointive arm of the Administrative Order of the Faith.

In 1981 the House of Justice reduced the number of the Continental Boards of Counsellors to five, conforming to the geographical designation of continents. The number of Counsellors was not decreased, but each Board was strengthened and given the authority to organize its work throughout its continent. The International Teaching Centre remained the liaison

between the Boards and the Universal House of Justice.

These have been the main developments in the Administrative Order of the Faith since the Guardian's passing, and have been paralleled by an expansion in the Faith itself, which now<sup>1</sup> numbers 132 National and more than 23,600 Local Spiritual Assemblies. The vigour, enthusiasm and unity of the Bahá'í community seems to increase with each passing day and demonstrate to an ever more rapidly failing world the spiritually creative, socially constructive and healing power of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

A word may now be said about the relationship between the "twin pillars" of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. In the original essay it was commented that ". . . this is one of the features of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order at present shrouded in mystery, a mystery which experience and the passage of time will do more to clarify than present meditation." Such clarification can, alas, no longer be made with regard to the person of the Guardian, but the arm of which he was the head, with all its components of Hands of the Cause, and later Counsellors, Auxiliary Board members and assistants—and possibly others as yet undisclosed—has been in actual existence and operation for some years, while the Universal House of Justice has likewise been in active supremacy of the Faith for nearly two decades.

One of the interesting features of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is that every member of the Bahá'í community may be called upon, at some time or other, to serve on an administrative institution whose members are elected. In fact, it is safe to say that in the days when the Administrative Order was first being

1 At Ridván 1982.

established, the majority of believers would have served on a Local Spiritual Assembly. The appointed officers of the Faith are inevitably fewer in number. It is the task of the present generations of Bahá'ís to resolve the working relationship of these two sides of the Administrative Order—elective and appointive—while at the same time seeking to understand the principles underlying that relationship.

In the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh all are seeking the same ends, namely the establishment of that World Order and the promotion of “an ever-advancing civilization.” There are no competing interests, no struggles for power; no appointed officer wants to assume the burden of authority carried by the administrative institutions (the ‘rulers’ as Bahá'u'lláh called them) and no elected institution has anything to lose or fear from the discharge, by the appointed officers (the ‘learned’) of their duties. Both support and complement each others’ work and the more close and loving the cooperation between appointed officers and elected institutions the greater the benefit to the society which both serve.

In this feature of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is seen yet another example of that percipience which complements pragmatism with idealism, avoiding the dangers to which either alone is prone while ensuring for society the undoubted benefits which can flow from the happy combination of both. The appointment of the ‘learned’ enlists for society the high qualities of the appointees without detracting in the slightest degree from the undoubted right of the elected bodies—the ‘rulers’—conferred and upheld in the sacred Text, to make all administrative decisions. In the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh there are no crossed wires. Administrative authority is vested in elected institu-

tions; these institutions and the believers in general are shepherded and encouraged by the appointed officers in the direction of the supreme purposes of the Faith, whether they be of an immediate and temporary nature, as in achieving the goals of a teaching plan, or eternal, as in improving character and deepening in knowledge and understanding of the Word of God.

The specific charge to the appointed officers of protection and propagation of the Faith is a responsibility also laid on the Spiritual Assemblies, although the latter have sole authority to make administrative decisions, to manage the Bahá'í Fund and conduct all the affairs of their communities. The close relationship between these two aspects of the Administrative Order, in the service of identical ends, involves constant exchange of information so that the Hands of the Cause and the Boards of Counsellors will call to the attention of the Spiritual Assemblies any and all matters affecting the welfare of the Faith, which they consider need attention, whether arising in the Bahá'í community or in the work of the Spiritual Assemblies themselves, and the Spiritual Assemblies will constantly be given the full cooperation of the Hands and Counsellors and their Auxiliary Board members in enlisting the energies of the believers to carry out their policies.

At this early stage in the growth of the Faith, new Spiritual Assemblies are constantly being formed and the value of the loving advice and assistance of the appointed officers of the Faith is inestimable. Few only of the present National Spiritual Assemblies, and far fewer Local Spiritual Assemblies may as yet be called veteran.

But even in the mature stages of Bahá'í civilization, when all the Administrative institutions are established,

fully developed and experienced, the functions of the 'learned' will be essential and prime factors in the general well-being.

Bahá'í Administration is a divine experiment in the application of spiritual laws and principles to human affairs, or, as was written on behalf of the Guardian, in 1933, to a new and young believer: "Bahá'í Administration is . . . indeed, an indispensable laboratory where you can put into practice the knowledge you gain from the Teachings." The spiritual laws and principles are constantly held before Bahá'í society by the appointed officers; the application of these laws and principles is made by the elective institutions, whose members are freely elected by all the people. Divine guidance, flowing through the supreme Universal House of Justice to these and all institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's Order, ensures the ultimate accomplishment of God's purpose for mankind.

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, ceaselessly active in the promotion of human unity, has demonstrated its power to protect His Faith through tempests of trials, to purge and strengthen it and bring it forth renewed in vigour and dedication. And as the organic life of this divinely conceived Order proceeds, the beneficent powers and influences enshrined in the embryo by the Will of its Author will inevitably exert their creative role until the stage of maturity is reached and this world has become the long-promised Kingdom of God, displaying in all its beauty the vision of the Prophets of old and the reality of Bahá'u'lláh's sublime utterance.

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