

The Rise of Justice in the Spiritual and Secular Life of Man

An Exposition on excerpts from *The Advent of Divine Justice* by Shoghi Effendi

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Introduction

Shoghi Effendi, the Beloved Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and great grandson of its founder Bahá'u'lláh, began the follow-up to the ground work laid out in his previous letter *The Unfoldment of World Civilization in 1936* with his treatise, *The Advent of Divine Justice* in late December of 1938. The purpose here is to examine four vital issues in this pivotal work. First is the manner in which he raised the consciousness of the young Bahá'í community in the West to a deeper level of Bahá'í theology as the dark clouds of WWII were beginning to sweep over Europe. Second is the systematic manner by which the Guardian introduced methods for expansion of the Faith while in the midst of a disintegrating society including how barriers were to be overcome in the face of enormous challenges. Third is the introduction of a form of justice not seen before in human history. Fourth is the special role that the American Bahá'í community would play in the future progress of the Faith with special emphasis on the unique station of its community and of its members.

He addressed the young American Bahá'í community just when it was endeavoring to achieve one of the many plans, which would ultimately be assigned to them in the fullness of time. He found it difficult to adequately express his joy and exultation when contemplating "the ceaseless evidences of the dynamic energy which animates the stalwart pioneers of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh in the execution of the Plan committed to their charge." He applauded the close cohesive interaction and harmony between the various agencies that constituted the basic framework of every properly functioning

Bahá'í community. And he referred to this as a "striking contrast to the disruptive tendencies" which the discordant elements of society so tragically manifested. (ADJ-2)

Recurrent Crises

These disruptive tendencies caused recurrent crises that were described as "afflicting an ever-increasing portion of the human race" which must continue to exercise, at least temporarily, a morbidly negative influence on the young Bahá'í community that had by then reached the far corners of the world, albeit in small numbers. He asked:

How can the beginnings of a world upheaval, unleashing forces that are so gravely deranging the social, the religious, the political, and the economic equilibrium of organized society, throwing into chaos and confusion political systems, racial doctrines, social conceptions, cultural standards, religious associations, and trade relationships -- how can such agitations, on a scale so vast, so unprecedented, fail to produce any repercussions on the institutions of a Faith of such tender age whose teachings have a direct and vital bearing on each of these spheres of human life and conduct? (ADJ 2-3)

This did indeed affect the lives of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh as they found themselves in a maelstrom of "contending Passions" wherein their institutions were endangered while the very core of their belief system was under attack. In mid-Europe the Bahá'í community with its potential to "radiate the splendor of the light of the Faith on the countries that surround it" was stifled by the Nazi regime and its voice silenced.

The large Bahá'í community of 'Ishqábád, Turkistan in central Asia where the first Bahá'í Center and Mashriqu'l-Adhkár (House of Worship) had been built, was at the mercy of forces that, for decades were bent on reducing it to utter impotence. This culminated with the expropriation of its Temple by the Soviet Union concurrently with disbandment of its Spiritual Assemblies and the imprisonment of a number of the followers of the Faith.

In Iran where the vast majority of Bahá'ís lived and whose Capital, Tīhrán had been hailed by Bahá'u'lláh as "the mother of the world" and "the dayspring of the joy of mankind" there was a civil authority "as yet undivorced officially from the

paralyzing influences of an antiquated, a fanatical, and outrageously corrupt clergy.” The fact was that the political collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1908 left the smoldering remains of a spiritually bankrupt priesthood as the only meaningful influence on the people of the Middle East, civil authority notwithstanding. And with the pathetic demise of the despicable, corrupt Qájár Dynasty of Iran in 1925, the vestigial remains of a once glorious civilization offered its final death rattle. The Guardian described the actions by this unholy symbiotic relationship of clergy and state as it relentlessly repressed the adherents of the Bahá’í Faith in the land of its birth.

Indifferent to the truth that the members of this innocent and proscribed community can justly claim to rank as among the most disinterested, the most competent, and the most ardent lovers of their native land...such an authority refuses to grant to a Faith which numerically outnumbers the adherents of either the Christian, the Jewish, or the Zoroastrian Faiths in that land, the necessary legal right to enforce its laws, to administer its affairs, to conduct its schools, to celebrate its festivals, to circulate its literature, to solemnize its rites, to erect its edifices, and to safeguard its endowments. (ADJ-4)

Concurrently, in the Holy Land, incidents of racial strife, terrorism and fratricide enflamed the animosities between Jew, Christian and Muslim alike. The rising tide of lawlessness endangered the neutral status of the Bahá’í community and interfered with its normal functions. Its very members were imperiled, as was the flow of Bahá’í pilgrims and yet the Bahá’í Holy places were miraculously preserved.

Shoghi Effendi then defined the world as being “torn with conflicting passions, and perilously disintegrating from within,” but a world also confronted by an infant Faith that... “seems to be drawn into its controversies, entangled by its conflicts, eclipsed by its gathering shadows, and overpowered by the mounting tide of its passions.” He further explained that within the heart of the cradle of “the as-yet unemancipated Faith of Bahá'u'lláh,..” the forces of violence were impelling its retreat. (ADJ-5)

The strongholds of such a Faith, one by one and day after day, are to outward seeming being successively isolated, assaulted and captured. As the lights of liberty flicker and

go out, as the din of discord grows louder and louder every day, as the fires of fanaticism flame with increasing fierceness in the breasts of men, as the chill of irreligion creeps relentlessly over the soul of mankind, the limbs and organs that constitute the body of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh appear, in varying measure, to have become afflicted with the crippling influences that now hold in their grip the whole of the civilized world. (ADJ-5)

He then quoted 'Abdu'l-Bahá's timely comment on the seriousness of the hour. "The darkness of error that has enveloped the East and the West is, in this most great cycle, battling with the light of Divine Guidance. Its swords and its spears are very sharp and pointed; its army keenly bloodthirsty." (ADJ-6)

And again:

This day, the powers of all the leaders of religion are directed towards the dispersion of the congregation of the All-Merciful, and the shattering of the Divine Edifice. The hosts of the world, whether material, cultural or political are from every side launching their assault, for the Cause is great, very great. Its greatness is, in this day, clear and manifest to men's eyes. (ADJ-6)

Chief Remaining Citadel

In spite of these crises there was still an enduring hope for the embryonic Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi declared the Bahá'í community of North America to be the chief remaining citadel of the Faith and he further identified it as the cradle of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. He reminded the doubters of the special spiritual destiny of America with a quote from 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The continent of America is, in the eyes of the one true God, the land wherein the splendors of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, where the righteous will abide, and the free assemble." (ADJ-6)

The Guardian observed that the North American believers had "shown its capacity to be recognized as the torchbearer of that light, the repository of those mysteries, the exponent of that righteousness and the sanctuary of that freedom." He then, with great honor, referred to the American believers as "the

spiritual descendants of the Dawn-Breakers of an heroic Age” who would usher in the New World Order, “the shell ordained to enshrine that priceless jewel, the world civilization, of which the Faith itself is the sole begetter.” (ADJ-7)

He asked: What community other than the North American Bahá'ís had established the administrative institutions that would become so critical to the new Order? It had also, with consistency, resourcefulness, perseverance and fidelity extended the framework within which those nascent institutions could alone multiply and mature. The community was fired by noble vision to raise an edifice that could be regarded “as the greatest contribution ever made by the West to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh?” Furthermore, the community had secured the allegiance of Royalty with marvelous testimony. It had shown foresight, organizing ability in establishing schools “for the enrichment and consolidation of its teaching force.” (ADJ-8)

The community had produced pioneers with qualities of audacity, consecration, tenacity, and devotion that would forsake their all to “scatter over the surface of the globe, and hoist in its uttermost corners the triumphant banner of the Faith. They undertook the labor to exercise the patience, and to provide the funds required for the translation and publication of their sacred literature. It was the first Bahá'í community

to frame its national and local constitutions, thereby laying down the fundamental lines of the twin charters designed to regulate the activities, define the functions, and safeguard the rights, of its institutions.”(ADJ 9-10) It secured the basis of its national endowments, and obtained the necessary documents assuring the recognition of its Spiritual Assemblies.

And finally what other community has had the privilege, and been granted the means, to succor the needy, to plead the cause of the downtrodden, and to intervene so energetically for the safeguarding of Bahá'í edifices and institutions in countries such as Persia, Egypt, Iraq, Russia, and Germany, where, at various times, its fellow-believers have had to suffer the rigors of both religious and racial persecution? (ADJ-10)

Shoghi Effendi acknowledged the achievements of the American Bahá'í community during the previous two decades as deserving to rank “as a memorable chapter in the history of the Formative Period of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.” He commented

further that, great as had been the friends achievements, the tasks before them were far greater in magnitude than anything they had achieved in the past. History would bear out the truth of those words.

The Guardian described a "Crusade of still greater magnitude" with the explanation that the virtual establishment of the Administrative Order of their Faith was the first task for the American Bahá'ís called into being by the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They addressed themselves, with equal zest and consecration, to the next more arduous task of erecting the magnificent House of worship at the holiest spot in North America and then resolved to undertake yet another task--the Seven Year Plan, the first practical step towards the fulfillment of the Tablets of the Divine Plan.

The opening of the second century of the Bahá'í era was to include the formation of at least one center in each of the Republics of the Western Hemisphere. And most interesting was his declaration that the Plan espoused by 'Abdu'l-Bahá would, after perusal "instantly reveal a scope for their activities that stretches far beyond the confines of the Western Hemisphere."

The moment this Divine Message is carried forward by the American believers from the shores of America and is propagated through the continents of Europe, of Asia, of Africa, and of Australasia, and as far as the islands of the Pacific, this community will find itself securely established upon the throne of an everlasting dominion. (ADJ-13)

In effect then, The Tablets of the Divine Plan, addressed to the Bahá'ís of the U.S. and Canada, were ultimately intended to inspire the expansion of the Faith throughout the world. The believers in the west thus initiated the Seven Year Plan as decreed by Shoghi Effendi.

The Guardian then laid out a startling array of possibilities for the future of the American Bahá'ís, possibilities that far exceeded anything that they might have imagined. They were to erect the various dependencies of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the West, and to deal with the intricate issues involving the establishment and the extension of the structural basis of Bahá'í community life. They were to play a significant part in the election of the International House of Justice and its establishment in the Holy Land, and to help establish the spiritual and administrative center of the Bahá'í world, together

with the formation of its auxiliary branches and subsidiary institutions. They were to be vitally involved in the worldwide Bahá'í community efforts regarding the multitude of challenges facing that community. Listed was the codification and promulgation of the ordinances of the Most Holy Book, and the third Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Bahá'í world in the outskirts of the city of Tíhrán. Also included were the precautionary and defensive measures to be devised, coordinated, and carried out to counteract the full force of the inescapable attacks that the organized efforts of ecclesiastical organizations of various denominations would progressively launch and relentlessly pursue. And they were to "enable a sore-tried Faith to pass through the successive stages of unmitigated obscurity, of active repression, and of complete emancipation." He further commented:

The challenge offered by these opportunities the American believers, I feel confident, will, in addition to their answer to the teaching call voiced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Tablets, unhesitatingly take up, and will, with their traditional fearlessness, tenacity, and efficiency, so respond to it as to confirm, before all the world, their title and rank as the champion-builders of the mightiest institutions of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. (ADJ-15)

The believers were kindly encouraged to acknowledge the bounty spread before them and they were lovingly nourished in preparation for the arduous trials that would confront them in the dark days before WWII. He reminded them that His unfailing light was shining upon them with incomparable splendor.

Though small in numbers, and circumscribed as yet in your experiences, powers, and resources, yet the Force which energizes your mission is limitless in its range and incalculable in its potency. Though the enemies which every acceleration in the progress of your mission must raise up be fierce, numerous, and unrelenting, yet the invisible Hosts which, if you persevere, must, as promised, rush forth to your aid, will, in the end, enable you to vanquish their hopes and annihilate their forces. (ADJ 16)

The Guardian paused to emphasize the distinction between the North American believers and the people from which God had raised them up. It was important that they recognize the

impact of the transmuting power of Bahá'u'lláh on their lives. "Otherwise, the supreme and distinguishing function of His Revelation, which is none other than the calling into being of a new race of men, will remain wholly unrecognized and completely obscured." (ADJ-16)

The Supreme Function Of His Revelation

The historical consistency of the appearance of the Great Prophets of God in times and places where man had sunk to the lowest levels of spiritual and moral degradation were noted. Examples were the Hebrews under the Pharaohs before Moses came to lead them to the Holy Land, the decline of the Jews when Christ appeared, the barbarity of Arabia when Muhammad arose and the decadence of Persia in the hour of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. It was never the high moral standards nor the social attainments of any people that would initiate the appearance of a Divine Messenger.

For it is precisely under such circumstances, and by such means that the Prophets have, from time immemorial, chosen and were able to demonstrate their redemptive power to raise from the depths of abasement and of misery, the people of their own race and nation, empowering them to transmit in turn to other races and nations the saving grace and the energizing influence of their Revelation. (ADJ-18)

Persia had sunk to the lowest depths of perversity and thereby became the receptacle of the transforming power of the Revelations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Their regenerating spirit transformed "the most cowardly, and perverse of peoples into a race of heroes,.." It was untenable to maintain the belief that the excellence of Persia and the nobility of its people were the basic reasons for the appearance of the new Revelation. In a similar manner, but lesser extent, this principle would also apply to the country that would be designated as the cradle of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The United States, the country that would bear such an honor was not chosen because of its excellence or special merit.

It is precisely by reason of the patent evils which, notwithstanding its other admittedly great characteristics and achievements, an excessive and binding materialism has unfortunately engendered within it that the Author of their Faith and the Center of His Covenant have singled it out to become the

standard-bearer of the New World Order envisaged in their writings. (ADJ-19)

Shoghi Effendi declared that this was the best way that Bahá'u'lláh could demonstrate His power to raise up men and women who were "immersed in a sea of materialism, and notorious for its political corruption, lawlessness and laxity in moral standards," to become the champions of moral rectitude and indiscriminating fellowship. This would be prerequisite to their call to bring into being the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and a new world civilization.

He pondered the staggering responsibility that would be born by the young, inexperienced American believers in their efforts to weed out the faults and habits derived from their own nation while cultivating the characteristics so necessary to their participation in the work of their Faith. He further stressed what he felt were the essential requirements for the work that would demand the undivided attention of the North American believers.

Spiritual Prerequisites

The first of these spiritual prerequisites was defined as a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities. This would particularly apply to their elected representatives at all levels of administration. The second would primarily concern Bahá'í youth who must all observe chastity in their individual lives. The third would require that all members of the Bahá'í community be free of prejudice of any kind. The Guardian strongly reaffirmed these points.

A rectitude of conduct, an abiding sense of undeviating justice, unobscured by the demoralizing influences which a corruption-ridden political life so strikingly manifests; a chaste, pure, and holy life, unsullied and unclouded by the indecencies, the vices, the false standards, which an inherently deficient moral code tolerates, perpetuates, and fosters; a fraternity freed from that cancerous growth of racial prejudice, which is eating into the vitals of an already debilitated society -- these are the ideals which the American believers must, from now on, individually and through concerted action, strive to promote,... (ADJ-23)

Shoghi Effendi called upon the words of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá extensively in the effort to unequivocally

emphasize the importance of the rectitude of conduct that all Bahá'ís must observe. Following are a few admonitions:

The companions of God are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example. I swear by Him Who is the Most Great Ocean! 'Within the very breath of such souls as are pure and sanctified far-reaching potentialities are hidden. So great are these potentialities that they exercise their influence upon all created things. (ADJ 23)

Again from Bahá'u'lláh an explanation of purpose:

The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds. (GWB 299)

Also He warns:

Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds. Strive that ye may be enabled to manifest to the peoples of the earth the signs of God, and to mirror forth His commandments. Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth. Happy is the man that heedeth My counsel, and keepeth the precepts prescribed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. (GWB 305)

And 'Abdu'l-Bahá counseled the believers:

Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a center of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: 'This man is unquestionably a Bahá'í, for his

manners, his behavior, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá'ís. Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God...The most vital duty, in this day is to purify your characters, to correct your manners, and improve your conduct. (BWF-401)

He further asserted: "Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues." Bahá'ís embrace this for without it, progress for the soul is impossible in any of the worlds of God! Shoghi Effendi elaborated on the potency of such conduct in the actions of elected representatives, and of participants in business dealings. The same should be true in domestic matters and in service. In fact, all human conduct should be in compliance with the Most Holy, the Book of Laws. Such rectitude of conduct at all levels of Bahá'í life constitutes the transcendental principle of Divine Justice "that must be regarded as the crowning distinction of all Local and National Assemblies, in their capacity as forerunners of the Universal House of Justice..." (ADJ-27) This concept is then supported by numerous quotes from the writings of the Faith followed by this statement from 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

God be praised! The sun of justice hath risen above the horizon of Bahá'u'lláh. For in His Tablets the foundations of such a justice have been laid as no mind hath, from the beginning of creation, conceived. The canopy of existence resteth upon the pole of justice, and not of forgiveness, and the life of mankind dependeth on justice and not on forgiveness. (ADJ-28)

The implications of modesty, temperance and decency require moderation in all the things that we do, according to the Guardian. Spiritual prerequisites are restated:

It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the

perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses. (ADJ-30)

The Most Challenging Issue

The Guardian identified racial prejudice as the most challenging issue facing the American Bahá'í community. He referred to it as a corrosion that had bitten into the fiber of American society. He declared that it would take ceaseless efforts in sacrifice, vigilance, moral courage and fortitude to resolve this issue of paramount importance. And he appealed to both white and Negro alike who identify with the Bahá'í Faith, to participate and lend assistance to the task of fulfilling the instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He admonished them to follow the examples set by Him, "Let them remember His courage, His genuine love, His informal and indiscriminating fellowship, His contempt for and impatience of criticism, tempered by His tact and wisdom." He further stated:

To discriminate against any race, on the ground of its being socially backward, politically immature, and numerically in a minority, is a flagrant violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh...Freedom from racial prejudice, in any of its forms, should, at such a time as this when an increasingly large section of the human race is falling a victim to its devastating ferocity, be adopted as the watchword of the entire body of the American believers, in whichever state they reside, in whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes, and habits. (ADJ-35)

He appealed to white friends to resolve to contribute their share to the solution of racism and to abandon any sense of superiority and to avoid a patronizing attitude. Most importantly a genuine friendship and sincerity of intentions is required in dealing with a people who have suffered "such grievous and slow-healing wounds." He then admonished the Negroes to make a corresponding effort to forget the past, to show their power of warmth and to wipe out any trace of suspicion. Neither should assume that the solution to such problems is exclusively the responsibility of the other.

Their Double Crusade

Shoghi Effendi again emphasized the rectitude of conduct and declared it to be the primary weapon that the American believers must wield in their double crusade of regenerating the

inner life of the Bahá'í community and of assailing the evils that remained entrenched in the life of their nation. The perfecting of such weapons was far more important than the development of any particular plan. More than anything else, this would prepare them to bring into operation that "World Order which was incubating within the worldwide administrative institutions of their Faith."

In the conduct of this twofold crusade the valiant warriors struggling in the name and for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh must, of necessity, encounter stiff resistance, and suffer many a setback. Their own instincts, no less than the fury of conservative forces, the opposition of vested interests, and the objections of a corrupt and pleasure-seeking generation, must be reckoned with, resolutely resisted, and completely overcome. (ADJ-41)

He pleaded that the Bahá'ís in the west be not afraid of criticism for it is a voice that indirectly reinforces the proclamation of the Cause. But to effect a spiritual transformation in the multitudes of the hungry, restless and un-shepherded requires that the agency by which the message of Bahá'u'lláh is imparted be free of the defilements that it seeks to remove!

It was the Seven Year Plan that would occupy the believers time and thought in the ornamentation of the Temple in Wilmette, Illinois and the expansion of teaching efforts in North and South America. The Temple stood on the holiest spot in the western hemisphere and its completion would, in time, have a profound effect as a "silent teacher" in the Cradle of the Administrative Order of the Bahá'í Faith. The teaching goal was to have at least one local spiritual assembly in every state of the United States and every province in Canada. Also, one Bahá'í center was to be created in each Latin American Republic.

The Teaching Requirements

At this juncture, Shoghi Effendi felt compelled to clarify the purpose of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the West "as no more than an instrument for a more effective propagation of the Cause..." over and above its beauty and the ideals that it symbolized. In addition, the teaching requirements of the Seven Year Plan would include the sustained attention of the entire Bahá'í community in spite of any limited experience. Teaching was not to be the sole domain of the administrative institutions.

The field is indeed so immense, the period so critical, the Cause so great, the workers so few, the time so short, the privilege so priceless, that no follower of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, worthy to bear His name, can afford a moment's hesitation... That God-born Force, irresistible in its sweeping power, incalculable in its potency, unpredictable in its course, mysterious in its workings, and awe-inspiring in its manifestations...is, under our very eyes, sundering, on the one hand, the age-old ties which for centuries have held together the fabric of civilized society, and is unloosing, on the other, the bonds that still fetter the infant and as yet unemancipated Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. (ADJ-46)

The Guardian intimated that such extraordinary circumstances to spread the knowledge of their Faith might not recur again. Moreover, the importance of the teaching campaign in Canada and throughout the United States could not be overestimated. And he felt that it must follow certain principles to attain its objective.

First, the believers were to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the history and teachings of the Faith, the station of its Forerunner, the Báb and the laws revealed by its Author, Bahá'u'lláh. To do so would require conscientious study of its literature and assimilation of its laws and principles. It would also require memorization of prayers and exhortations. It would be necessary to master the essentials of its administration and to keep abreast of current affairs and latest developments.

Following this, they were to familiarize themselves with the languages of Latin America as well as the three great Island groups in the Pacific Ocean. He advised the teaching pioneers, with an admonition from Bahá'u'lláh: "Be unrestrained as the wind," The Guardian further added:

No participator in this inter-American campaign of teaching must feel that the initiative for any particular activity connected with this work must rest solely with those agencies, whether Assemblies or committees, whose special concern is to promote and facilitate the attainment of this vital objective of the Seven Year Plan. It is the bounden duty of every American believer, as the faithful trustee of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, to initiate, promote, and consolidate, within the limits fixed by the administrative principles of the Faith, any activity he or she deems fit to undertake for the furtherance of the Plan.

(ADJ 50)

Shoghi Effendi then suggests a wide variety of approaches to teaching depending upon the characteristics of a given culture yet all the while safeguarding the integrity of the Faith. Then he emphasized how important the spirit of teaching should be:

Let him remember the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and His constant admonition to shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instill into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings. (ADJ 52)

Yet, Shoghi Effendi tempered the afore mentioned flexibility with the following guidelines.

Let every participator in the continent-wide campaign initiated by the American believers, and particularly those engaged in pioneer work in virgin territories, bear in mind the necessity of keeping in close and constant touch with those responsible agencies designed to direct, coordinate, and facilitate the teaching activities of the entire community. (ADJ 52)

The Guardian unequivocally placed the mandate of teaching upon every participant in the Seven Year Plan with the caveat that it be “the all-pervading concern of his life.” This would apply to “all the republics, classes and denominations of the entire Western Hemisphere.”

The Awakening Of Latin America

The next step for the North American Bahá'ís in their initiation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan was to set in motion a tremendous exertion to assist a few isolated believers in their efforts to awaken the nations of South America to the call of Bahá'u'lláh. This second phase of the Seven Year Plan would have to be entered before it could be considered as fully launched. And they were assured of the effusions of Divine Grace that would be poured upon them with overwhelming evidences of their regenerative power.

Central and South America embraced twenty independent nations equaling one third of the sovereign states at the time and would play “an increasingly important part in the shaping of the world's future destiny.” Shoghi Effendi then exuded one his inspiring appeals to the Bahá'í community of North

America:

Let some, at this very moment, gird up the loins of their endeavor, flee their native towns, cities, and states, forsake their country, and, "putting their whole trust in God as the best provision for their journey," set their faces, and direct their steps towards those distant climes, those virgin fields, those unsundered cities, and bend their energies to capture the citadels of men's hearts -- hearts, which, as Bahá'u'lláh has written, "the hosts of Revelation and of utterance can subdue." Let them not tarry until such time as their fellow-laborers will have passed the first stage in their campaign of teaching, but let them rather, from this very hour, arise to usher in the opening phase of what will come to be regarded as one of the most glorious chapters in the international history of their Faith.(ADJ 59)

His appeal then relied upon the call of Bahá'u'lláh:

O wayfarer in the path of God! Take thou thy portion of the ocean of His grace, and deprive not thyself of the things that lie hidden in its depths.... A dewdrop out of this ocean would, if shed upon all that are in the heavens and on earth, suffice to enrich them with the bounty of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. With the hands of renunciation draw forth from its life-giving waters, and sprinkle therewith all created things, that they may be cleansed from all man-made limitations, and may approach the mighty seat of God, this hallowed and resplendent Spot. Be not grieved if thou performest it thyself alone. Let God be all-sufficient for thee... (GWB 279)

Following this were the inspiring words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

O ye apostles of Bahá'u'lláh! May my life be sacrificed for you!... Behold the portals which Bahá'u'lláh hath opened before you! Consider how exalted and lofty is the station you are destined to attain; how unique the favors with which you have been endowed...My thoughts are turned towards you, and my heart leaps within me at your mention. Could ye know how my soul gloweth with your love, so great a happiness would flood your hearts as to cause you to become enamored with each other...The full measure of your success is as yet unrevealed, its significance still un-apprehended. (BWF 423)

The goal was to establish in each Latin American country at least one Bahá'í center by the hundredth anniversary (22 May,

1944) of the birth of the Faith. This would provide the foundation upon which the North American believers could build, in Central and South America, the Administrative Order during the opening years of the second century of the Bahá'í era.

The object was to establish a necessary foundation, to pave the way in a systematic manner of the laying of the basis for the permanent national and local Bahá'í institutions in Latin America. Further, the campaign would initiate the revealing of essential stages the American believers were to play in the worldwide propagation of their Cause. Ultimately, it would be the believers in Latin countries that would distinguish themselves but first it would require the sending of settlers and itinerant teachers "to raise the call of the New Day in a new continent."

All manner of support and resources were to be provided the pioneers including properly translated literature and appropriate publicity for its distribution. The teachers were to mix in a friendly manner, with all sections of the population regardless of creed or color. They were to patiently endeavor to implant such love and devotion in their hearts of the few who were receptive to enable them to become self-sufficient promoters of the Faith in their localities. But they were also advised to exercise care so that their efforts would not be misconstrued to be proselytizing.

In his appeal for pioneers, the Guardian particularly addressed the American believers who were able to establish permanent residence in Latin countries by establishing their own means of livelihood. This would greatly relieve the pressure on the Teaching Fund while allowing them to partake of the sacred privilege of carrying out so noble an enterprise. For those who were unable to go should appoint and support one who could.

Shoghi Effendi was especially grateful to the "Handmaidens of God" who had, since the inception of the Faith, opened up so many diversified countries around the globe. They, more than the men, had boldly moved forward in the selfless act of teaching at all levels.

A special appeal was made to the Bahá'í youth to exercise their adventurous spirit and vigor in arousing the interest of their fellow youth in the Faith. Though inexperienced, it would be their optimism and alertness that would animate them to fulfill their potential in service to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

He then made special note of Panama, observing that the unique geographical position of Panama endowed it with great importance in connecting the North American Bahá'í communities to the Central American States as well as to the South American Continent. In like manner it was noted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that it connected the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific through the Canal and would thus provide significant traffic that would allow the Faith to unite the East and West. Teaching in Panama would therefore have great importance because a strong Bahá'í community in Panama would provide a key matrix from which the Faith could spread North to South and East to West.

The Guardian recalled the vision set by the Seven Year Plan as a vast functional priority facing the American believers and called upon them to not let strife and confusion befog their own vision. Upheavals should never deflect their course nor should denunciations sap their loyalty. Reliance on God's all compelling Will would always be their pillar and guide.

Far from yielding in their resolve, far from growing oblivious of their task, they should, at no time, however much buffeted by circumstances, forget that the synchronization of such world-shaking crises with the progressive unfoldment and fruition of their divinely appointed task is itself the work of Providence, the design of an inscrutable Wisdom, and the purpose of an all-compelling Will, a Will that directs and controls, in its own mysterious way, both the fortunes of the Faith and the destinies of men. (ADJ 72)

The Seven Year Plan was but an initial stage in a far greater Plan as delineated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and authored by Bahá'u'lláh. Reflections on these aspects would steel the resolve of the American Bahá'í community and would dissipate their forebodings regarding the ultimate objective of unity for the entire planet.

The Advent of The Kingdom

The Guardian noted a valuable insight offered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

The full measure of your success is as yet unrevealed, its significance still unapprehended. Erelong, ye will, with your own eyes, witness how brilliantly every one of you, even as a shining star, will radiate, in the firmament of

your country, the light of Divine Guidance, and will bestow upon its people the glory of an everlasting life.... The range of your future achievements still remains undisclosed. (TDP 39)

It was His hope that the success attending their efforts in the Americas would carry over to the rest of the world. Following this, the advent of the Kingdom of the Lord would be proclaimed in all inhabited continents of the globe. The positive consequences of this would be very great for the American Bahá'ís because they would then be recognized as spiritually illumined and divinely guided. But to rest on such laurels would be tantamount to betrayal of the trust placed upon them by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a trust that Shoghi Effendi reassured us would never be broken. The Guardian then reinforced this with copious utterances gleaned from the untranslated reservoir of Bahá'u'lláh's billowing words, a few of which follow:

Cling ye to the Cord of steadfastness, in such wise that all vain imaginings may utterly vanish. Speed ye forth from the horizon of power, in the name of your Lord, the Unconstrained, and announce unto His servants, with wisdom and eloquence, the tidings of this Cause, whose splendor hath been shed upon the world of being. Beware lest anything withhold you from observing the things prescribed unto you by the Pen of Glory, as it moved over His Tablet with sovereign majesty and might. Great is the blessedness of him that hath hearkened to its shrill voice, as it was raised, through the power of truth, before all who are in heaven and all who are on earth.... O people of Bahá! The river that is Life indeed hath flowed for your sakes. Quaff ye in My name, despite them that have disbelieved in God, the Lord of Revelation. (ADJ 76)

He continues describing deeper aspects of His Cause:

Verily I say! No one hath apprehended the root of this Cause. It is incumbent upon everyone, in this day, to perceive with the eye of God, and to hearken with His ear. Whoso beholdeth Me with an eye besides Mine own will never be able to know Me. None among the Manifestations of old, except to a prescribed degree, hath ever completely apprehended the nature of this Revelation. I testify before God to the greatness, the inconceivable greatness of this Revelation. Again and again have We, in most of Our Tablets, borne witness to this truth, that mankind may be roused from its

heedlessness. (ADJ 77)

These quotes of Bahá'u'lláh as used by the Guardian not only inspired the pioneers but also further educated the embryonic community of American Bahá'is in the verities of the Faith.

This is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things.... This is the Day whereon the Ocean of God's mercy hath been manifested unto men, the Day in which the Daystar of His loving-kindness hath shed its radiance upon them, the Day in which the clouds of His bountiful favor have overshadowed the whole of mankind. (GWB 6)

The window of opportunity to teach in virgin lands had never been greater and every effort was precious to the Cause as characterized by Bahá'u'lláh:

This Day a door is open wider than both heaven and earth. The eye of the mercy of Him Who is the Desire of the worlds is turned towards all men. An act, however infinitesimal, is, when viewed in the mirror of the knowledge of God, mightier than a mountain. Every drop proffered in His path is as the sea in that mirror. For this is the Day which the one true God, glorified be He, hath announced in all His Books, unto His Prophets and His Messengers. (ADJ 78)

A regenerating energy was showered upon the believers by Bahá'u'lláh's words, which would serve as a balm to them when faced with enormous challenges in fulfilling the Seven Year Plan.

Through the movement of Our Pen of Glory We have, at the bidding of the Omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this worldwide regeneration. O people! I swear by the one true God! This is the Ocean out of which all Seas have proceeded, and with which every one of them will ultimately be united. (GWB 92)

These were but a few of the extraordinary utterances by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá that were previously unavailable to the Bahá'is. Shoghi Effendi finally referred to what he called "some of the most momentous and thought-provoking pronouncements ever made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in the course of

His epoch-making travels in the North American continent....”

May this American Democracy be the first nation to establish the foundation of international agreement. May it be the first nation to proclaim the unity of mankind. May it be the first to unfurl the Standard of the Most Great Peace... The American people are indeed worthy of being the first to build the Tabernacle of the Great Peace, and proclaim the oneness of mankind.... For America hath developed powers and capacities greater and more wonderful than other nations.... The American nation is equipped and empowered to accomplish that which will adorn the pages of history, to become the envy of the world, and be blest in both the East and the West for the triumph of its people....The American continent gives signs and evidences of very great advancement. Its future is even more promising, for its influence and illumination are far-reaching. It will lead all nations spiritually. (PUP 36)

The Destiny Of America

As a literary convenience, the Guardian would often interchange the terms ‘nation’ and ‘American’ when addressing the Cradle of the Administrative order of Bahá’u’lláh, specifically the United States of America and when doing so there were three things that he brought to bear regarding the future of that embryonic order. First, the nation was endowed with the worthiness to play the part envisioned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It was the recipient of spiritual capacities of which a God-given mission had fused into its people and which were even then being manifested through the teaching efforts of the Bahá’ís. Second, the orientation of that nation was inexplicably gravitating toward policies and associations that would put it on the course of its true destiny as a result of the creative energies generated by the first stirrings of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. Third, the world was rapidly moving toward a conflict of ominous proportions and “the Great Republic of the West” was being reluctantly drawn into its vortex. Shoghi Effendi recognized the significance of these events within the prophetic utterances of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

The world is contracting into a neighborhood. America, willingly or unwillingly, must face and grapple with this new situation. For purposes of national security, let alone any humanitarian motive, she must assume the obligations imposed by this newly created neighborhood. Paradoxical

as it may seem, her only hope of extricating herself from the perils gathering around her is to become entangled in that very web of international association which the Hand of an inscrutable Providence is weaving. (ADJ-59)

The populace, except for the small community of believers did not recognize the Hand that directed their destiny. Yet the activities of both groups were contributing to the fulfillment of the promises voiced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Concurrently the world had become an armed camp as religion's light was diminishing and moral authority was disintegrating. The words of Bahá'u'lláh in the 1870s echoed a still fresh concern: "The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned...." (GWB-216) And, soon after the termination of the first World War, 'Abdu'l-Bahá prophesied:

The ills from which the world now suffers will multiply; the gloom, which envelops it, will deepen. The Balkans will remain discontented. Its restlessness will increase. The vanquished Powers will continue to agitate. They will resort to every measure that may rekindle the flame of war. Movements, newly born and worldwide in their range, will exert their utmost for the advancement of their designs. The Movement of the Left will acquire great importance. Its influence will spread. (ADJ-88)

The clear, emphatic voice of President Franklin Roosevelt warned that attack was very possible due to the advanced development of military aircraft and by other factors. The Secretary of State said "These resurgent forces loom threateningly throughout the world -- their ominous shadow falls athwart our own Hemisphere..." And in the American press: "We must mount vigilant guard over the Western Hemisphere." (ADJ-89)

Meanwhile, Shoghi Effendi noted the significant distance that the nation had traveled since its formal repudiation of the Wilsonian ideal (League of Nations) and found it to be highly encouraging. He pondered the future possible relationships between the Western republics and the affairs of the world under the impact of international crises with respect to the ultimate destiny of America. However, he emphasized that nothing could alter the eventual course ordained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *The Tablets of The Divine Plan*.

The Guardian further surmised that the impending perplexities afflicting humanity would bode darkly for America but that she would emerge determined to bring the full weight of its influence “to exorcise forever, in conjunction with its sister nations of both the East and the West, the greatest curse which, from time immemorial, has afflicted and degraded the human race.” It was felt that America would become purified from the crucible of a common war and would be disciplined, even molded by its lessons. Only then would it be positioned to “lay the cornerstone of a universal and enduring peace, proclaim the solidarity, the unity, and maturity of mankind, and assist in the establishment of the promised reign of righteousness on earth.” (ADJ 90-91)

Then, and only then, will the American nation, while the community of the American believers within its heart is consummating its divinely appointed mission, be able to fulfill the unspeakably glorious destiny ordained for it by the Almighty, and immortally enshrined in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Then, and only then, will the American nation accomplish “that which will adorn the pages of history, become the envy of the world and be blest in both the East and the West.” (ADJ-91)

This last quotation concluded his communication and was signed “SHOGHI” on Christmas Day, 1938. Now, with the benefit of seven decades of hindsight it is astonishing to observe the accuracy and insight expressed in the writings of the Guardian when comparing his views to the historical events that ensued after his remarkable utterances regarding the human condition in the late 1930s.

In Summary

The first vital issue under question in *The Advent of Divine Justice* mentioned earlier involved the Guardian educating the Western Bahá'ís in the verities of their Faith by immersing them in certain of its writings regarding the overriding principles, virtues and administrative requirements that would armor them in dealing with the travails of a disintegrating age. In the second issue, he identified the most challenging spiritual barriers they would face and the methods they would need to employ in achieving success of the ambitious Seven Year Plan for teaching the Faith in the Americas. Moreover, this would open the door for worldwide expansion. Indeed, the future of the Faith was in their hands as America was declared to be its Chief Remaining

Citadel. Regarding the third vital issue, that is Justice, the Guardian explained in his inimitable way that the infusion of laws and principles annunciated by Bahá'u'lláh within the rectitude of conduct at all levels of Bahá'í community life literally defined the transcendental principle of Divine Justice. Thus a concept of justice that had never been acknowledged before was born in those initial stages of the Divine Plan. He declared this to be the "crowning distinction of all Local and National Assemblies." (ADJ-27) Of the fourth issue, Shoghi Effendi surmised that America would be purified and molded by the impending conflicts of world conflagration in a way that would prepare her to lay the cornerstone of universal peace. Its Bahá'í members were honored with the designation as the Spiritual Descendants of the Dawn Breakers and the country was given the high honor of being the Cradle of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most subtle and enduring of these issues under discussion is the notion of Divine Justice. With it, Justice has reached an unprecedented plateau for it will henceforth embody the spiritual characteristics that are so necessary for the advancement of civilization. With it, the scourge of war will be obliterated from the planet as will the most challenging issue of racism. Such a perspective was previously augmented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as noted by Shoghi Effendi: "The continuance of mankind depends upon justice and not upon forgiveness." (SAQ-270) This infers that justice is earned whereas forgiveness is acquired by grace but grace alone will not suffice the rigors and complexities of the modern age. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh: "The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment..." (GWB-219) He also exalts the spiritual ramifications of this concept when, speaking with the voice of God, He says "The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice...By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others...Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes." (HWB-3)

Finally, we can say with full conviction that the theory of justice, which traditionally has tended to parallel the prevailing range of ethical and political philosophy, now is embraced by a profound new paradigm of spiritual parameters.